



KEYS TO FREEDOM

LIVE FREE, STAY FREE

An interactive discipleship study to educate, equip, and empower you with biblical keys to live free and stay free.

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This study is dedicated to all
who are hurting, desperate, and looking for an answer.
There is hope for you. There is an answer!

This study is also dedicated to people
who are reaching out to others who are struggling.
Thank you for being willing to stand in the gap
and help those who are hurting.

Our prayer is that you will find direction, guidance,
and answers through the pages of this study.



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Joel Kilpatrick: This book would not have been possible without you first pushing Nancy Alcorn to dig deep and share the principles of freedom in her book, *Ditch the Baggage*. Thank you for your expertise and belief in our mission.

About this Study

In the *Keys to Freedom* study, you will discover the keys to living free and staying free in Jesus Christ. It is perfectly suited for personal study, but this book can also be used in a one-on-one or group setting. A group leader guide is available at www.MercyMultiplied.com/KeysToFreedom.

This study is very interactive as well. You will see a lot of blank space on the following pages because we want this to be a journey in which you are very engaged! You will be asked to look up passages in the Bible and will be challenged to ask God how He wants you to apply the principles to your own life.

At the beginning of each week's study, you will read a testimony from an individual who has personal experience with the specific week's topic. The purpose of these testimonies is to encourage you and give real-life examples of how the principles in this study work. When applied, we believe these principles have the ability to truly change your life, set you free, and become all God is calling you to be. We want to encourage you to take some time before you start each week's study to read these stories and let them infuse you with encouragement and hope as you walk this journey!

You will want to set aside about fifteen to twenty minutes to complete your study each day. There are only five days of study per week, so on the remaining two days, we encourage you to go back and spend time reflecting over the concepts that seem most pertinent to you.

It's important to remember that the journey to freedom and healing is a lifetime process, and the keys outlined in this study will give you practical principles for walking out this process. At the end of each week's study, you will be asked to reflect on all of the keys that you have received up to that point and ask God if there are any keys that you need to revisit. We encourage you to make this a regular practice not just during this study, but in the days, weeks, and years to come as He continues to lead you into greater levels of freedom.

If you are doing this study with a group, please know that the things you write and share on the following pages can be as private as you desire them to be. Although there can be much healing and freedom found in sharing your struggles with other people, do not feel pressured to share anything that you are uncomfortable with sharing.

In the margins, you will find key statements for almost every day of the study. These are major points from the text that you may choose to focus on or even share with others. We encourage our fellow fans of social media to use #KeystoFreedom to share these valuable insights and what God is doing in your life. This will also give us a great way to stay connected!

Introduction

by Nancy Alcorn

A couple of years ago, I was visiting one of the more prominent churches in a certain city and enjoying the privilege of speaking to the congregation about the work we do in our residential program at Mercy Multiplied—helping young women find freedom from all kinds of painful and mixed-up life experiences. After the service, a woman approached me with tears streaming down her cheeks. “I wish I had known about your ministry last year,” she said. “I’ve been living with the choices I made and . . . it’s so hard.” We prayed together that she would freely receive the Father’s mercy for what was in her past.

Next a father came up. “It’s my daughter,” he said, sighing deeply. “She’s on drugs and can’t seem to shake it. It’s wrecking her life. We worry about her night and day. She’s had several abortions already, and she’s scheduled to have her third or fourth one tomorrow. We’re just desperate. Will you pray for her?”

I hear these stories everywhere I go. Be it a church, a mall, a workplace, or a restaurant, men and women all across the world carry untold stories of unresolved pain. “I wish I had heard this message and known about Mercy when I was going through what I went through,” they often say to me. “I would have made a completely different choice and lived in freedom rather than bondage for all these years.”

I can speak boldly into your situation because since 1983, Mercy has worked with women, ages thirteen to thirty-two, who struggle with the worst traumas someone can experience in life: self-harming habits, eating disorders, suicide, addictions, unplanned pregnancies, sexual abuse, violence, death of loved ones, and more. These kinds of behaviors and their causes are more common than you might expect, though for many of us, they can seem extreme. However, by helping women find freedom in these “extreme” situations and troubles, we believe we have discovered the Biblical pathway to freedom for everyone.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:3–5 (MSG) Paul writes, “Not that the troubles should come as any surprise to you. You’ve always known that we’re in for this kind of thing. It’s part of our calling. When we were with you, we made it quite clear that there was trouble ahead.”

The “trouble ahead” is not because God is punishing us. The trouble ahead is part of our living environment, our earth, which is still struggling under the weight of sin and corruption. Trouble can come from us being the victims of other people’s bad choices, from our own ignorance and disobedience, and it can come through no fault of our own, sent by an enemy who comes to “kill, steal, and destroy” us (John 10:10).

But God has not abandoned us. He has provided all we need to navigate it well. This study is an opportunity to learn the principles that God has made available, through a relationship with Jesus Christ, to equip and empower us to navigate our lives in such a way that we can live in freedom!

This study is not a magic wand to wave over your situations, problems, obstacles, and adversities. It's not a formula to follow that guarantees a comfortable, trouble-free life. However, it will empower and inspire you with hope. I encourage you to place your hand in God's hand and take the steps that will lead you to discover that overcoming your personal challenges is not an event but a process. It's a journey that is made up of a series of choices that bring lasting change and breakthrough.

This study is our way of taking the keys to freedom and wholeness, used within the four walls of our Mercy homes, and placing them into the hands of every person who wants to live free and stay free—young, old, male, female, new and established believers alike. We want to see more people able to navigate their lives from a place of freedom, wholeness, and understanding, using the biblical principles of transformation made available by God through His Word.

As you begin, I encourage you to invest yourself fully in each week's principles and see what the Lord does in your life. You may question whether or not these principles will really work for you, but Scripture promises that He is the one who is at work in you, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). I encourage you to simply take the first step, and see what God does in your life. I believe that God will completely blow your mind with His life-transforming power, and once you have experienced it for yourself, you won't be able to contain it!

So, are you ready for change? Are you ready to pick up the keys to freedom? Are you ready to start unlocking doors in your life, moving forward into the future that God has for you? Then let's pray:

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have made it possible for us to live in freedom and wholeness! At the very outset of this study, I pray that your Holy Spirit would infuse each page with anointing, truth, and revelation so that each reader will receive the keys to freedom he or she needs to walk in wholeness. I pray protection over each one as they work through this study. Give them courage, strength, and wisdom to know how to practically apply each key, not just for the duration of this study, but for the rest of their lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Nancy Alcorn

Founder and President



Setting the Stage

Day 1: *Getting to the Root*

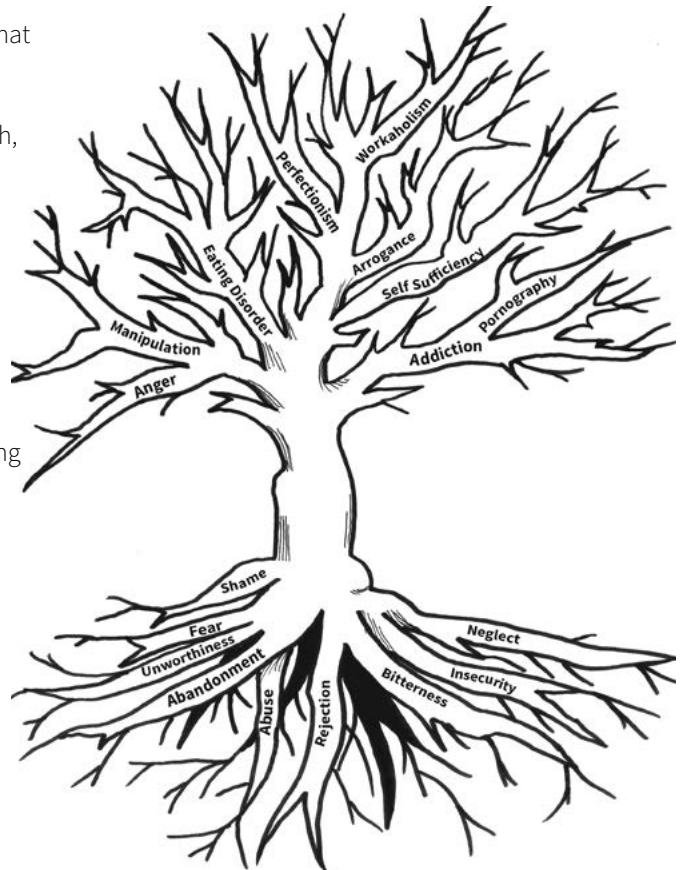
Cutting off the branches won't change the fruit that grows.

One of the easiest ways to explain the approach we are going to take throughout this study is by using the analogy of a tree to describe our lives. Imagine your life as a tree with branches, a thick tree trunk and a root system underground, feeding and sustaining the tree.

The branches of this tree represent our BEHAVIORS—the “above-ground” visible aspects of our being and how we behave. These are the things that become clear when you get to know a person well, or in some cases, the “branches” are so obvious that they can be spotted almost immediately. The branches on our tree can be healthy or unhealthy, depending on the health of our root systems. Today we will focus primarily on the unhealthy factors in our lives, as those are the things that we need to address in order to overcome.

Some very common unhealthy branches (behaviors) that can grow on the tree of our life can include things like:

- Inability to commit to relationships, a church, job, etc.
- Lack of healthy boundaries
- People-pleasing behaviors (struggling with saying “no” and finding self-worth through acceptance of others)
- Workaholism
- Promiscuity
- Putting others down, comparison, and feeling threatened by others’ success
- Bullish / aggressive / intimidating behaviors
- Isolation
- Manipulation (actions that position one to stay in control of others and situations)
- Codependency
- Emotional instability (either disconnected from emotion or ruled by emotion)
- Insecurity



More serious “life-controlling” branches (behaviors) can include:

- Addiction (alcohol, drugs, pornography, social media, work, video games, etc.)
- Self-harm
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders and panic attacks (insomnia, obsessive compulsive disorder)
- Eating disorders

The tree trunk describes the BELIEF SYSTEM a person has developed over the course of their life. Our belief system is what sustains and upholds our behaviors. We act within the context of how we think and what we believe. A healthy belief system will grow healthy behaviors and an unhealthy belief system will grow unhealthy behaviors.


The roots of the tree feed both the tree trunk and the branches. These roots draw their power from the specific circumstances that affect us from childhood, such as divorce, the loss of a loved one, long term sickness, or any other mental, spiritual, sexual, or physical trauma. Those roots then grow into a trunk—a belief system—and it’s our belief system that determines our behaviors.

We act within the context of how we think and what we believe.

Interestingly, while the branches that grow on people’s lives can vary tremendously from person to person, as we all have a variety of healthy and unhealthy branches, the types of roots that feed those branches tend to be fairly universal. The roots listed below are some examples of “the why behind the what”—the true causes of the unhealthy belief systems and branches in our lives. Many of us are affected by their presence, without even realizing their influence.

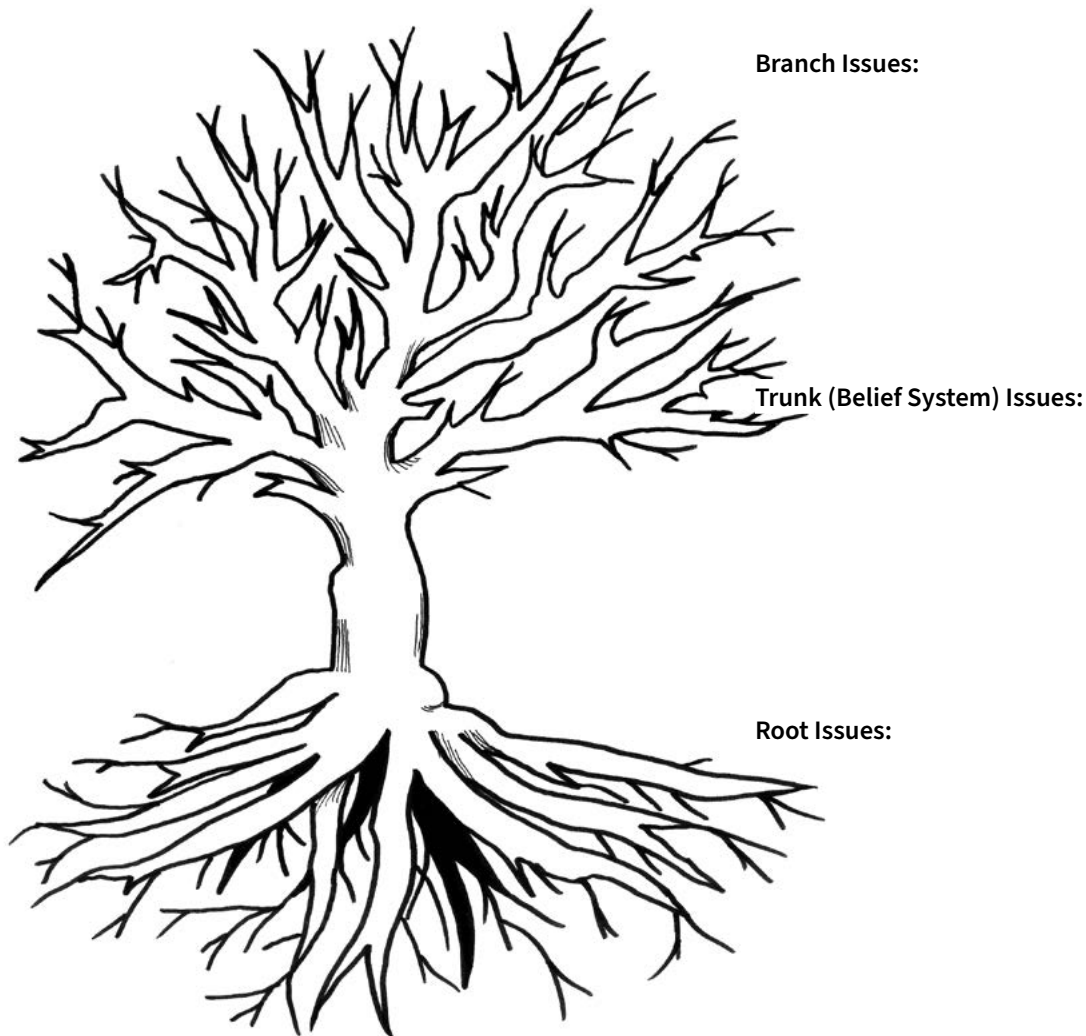
- Abandonment
- Rejection
- Worthlessness
- Shame
- Fear
- Pride
- Bitterness
- Despair

People typically focus their attention only on what they can see, so help is sought (and given) with the “cutting off” of unhealthy branches. In other words, behavior modification is the goal, and negative behaviors are often dealt with by behavior management and/or medication. This approach may appear successful because a branch can indeed be cut off and removed from the tree; however, unless the root structure is addressed, that same branch will grow back, either in the very same place or elsewhere on the same tree. That is true for the tree that stands in a garden as much as it is true for the tree that represents your life.

 **Can you think of a time when you spent time, energy, and/or resources trying to “fix a branch” in your own life only to realize that it was wearing you out and not creating lasting change?**

The challenge is not simply a behavioral one; rather, the challenge we all face is the removal of the roots that have grown because of imperfect people and imperfect circumstances in our lives. Without dealing with the roots, you will never be truly healed and free. The truth is that we need a perfect God to bring the revelation and healing that cannot come merely by focusing on the branches.

● **Consider the branches and roots in your life today. Try to identify one or two branches and one or two roots and write them on the tree below. Please don't overwhelm yourself by trying to identify them all but remember that healing comes in layers. God will often do a deep work in us and then lead us to our next layer of healing. Allow yourself to only write down the branches and roots that immediately come to mind. It may be easier to identify "branch issues" in your life that you want to overcome than it is to identify the roots under those issues. You may want to ask God, "Where did this start? When did I first learn to respond to life in this way?" If it's difficult to identify the roots right now, don't be discouraged. The Lord will begin to shine a light on those areas as you move forward in this study and you will be prompted to come back and fill in this tree accordingly.**



Now that you have identified some areas on your own tree, spend some time in prayer before you close your study time. Use the space below to ask the Lord to help you in the process of overcoming any areas that you have identified today.

Day 2: *The Roots Determine the Fruit*

Yesterday we spent some time discussing the tree analogy that we will use throughout this study and the importance of recognizing the roots in our lives. As we mentioned yesterday, this is not typically the way that people address their issues. The focus is usually on addressing the behaviors themselves—the “branches”—instead of addressing the roots.



Read Matthew 12:33. How does this scripture relate to the tree analogy?

Making a tree healthy—making our lives whole, healed, and free—has to come from our roots.

This scripture says that a tree can be either healthy or unhealthy, and that either way, it is known by its fruit. The fruit that a tree produces cannot be affected by simply cutting off the branches. Making a tree healthy—making our lives whole, healed, and free—has to come from our roots.


If you choose to remain focused on the behaviors that you want to overcome instead of your past hurt, betrayal, trauma, disappointment, or abuse, those roots will continue to shape your belief system, and you will continue to grow the branches of damaging and unhealthy behavior.

What does Jeremiah 17:7–8 say about our roots? What do we need to be fed by?

Our roots need to be fed by God’s Word, His presence, and His power. The roots of abandonment, rejection, fear, shame, pride, bitterness, and unworthiness will never be able to produce healthy fruit. We may be able to trim back the branches by using all our will power and resources, but a tree without branches produces no fruit at all. It is bare, lifeless, and will not fulfill its potential and purpose.

Write out the fruit that is described in Galatians 5:22–23.

Over the coming weeks, you will have the opportunity to examine your behaviors, to rebuild your belief system with what God’s Word says, and to receive healing for the pain that enabled those roots to grow. We are going to teach you how to expose the root causes of your behaviors through a partnership with the Holy Spirit. As you focus on the root system in your life instead of the branches, you will have the opportunity to truly overcome in a whole new way!

 **As you wrap up your study for today, write one “fruit” that you would like to see grow in your life. As that fruit becomes more present in you and through you, how will your life be changed?**

Tomorrow we will begin discussion on a topic that is not only a foundational part of this study but also for any true healing and transformation that you receive.

Day 3: *Hearing from God*

This week, we are focused on setting the stage for the rest of our study with a few foundational pieces. So far, we have discussed the tree analogy and the importance of identifying and understanding the root systems in our lives, which ultimately feed our behaviors. Today we will explore the different ways that God speaks to us as His sons and daughters.

Hearing from God is foundational to this study because we believe that lasting healing and freedom is not possible outside of the presence of God and the Truth of God that He communicates to us. No person or book has the power to change or heal your heart; only God has the ability to change your heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s words have unmatched power to create and transform, so if you want to see true, root-level transformation in your life, it is vital that you know how to hear from Him.

The idea of God speaking may be foreign or unfamiliar to you, but it’s important to know that God is a relational God and desires to connect and communicate with us. In fact, He promises to respond to us when we ask.

Write Psalm 91:15 in the space below.

God's primary means of communication with us today is through His word, the Bible. The Word of God is not simply a history book or book of stories. In fact, Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word is actually "living and active." It has the ability to change our hearts and always has something to say about our lives. The Word is our ultimate standard of truth.

Throughout Scripture, God spoke to His people in various ways. Hebrews 1:1 tells us that "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets." God communicated in many different ways through His prophets. Whether it was through gentle whispers, dreams, burning bushes, visions, handwriting on walls, or even talking donkeys, God has always had a desire to communicate His Word to His people.

This is not the norm for how God speaks to us today. Even though He can speak in those ways does not mean that is the prescription for how He will speak to us today. We must be careful to hear God's voice in the ways He speaks to His people today. This is important because many people are listening for God in ways He isn't speaking and they misinterpret or misrepresent the voice of God. They're "hearing" things God hasn't said because they're trusting in unreliable sources. Here are three common ways that the Lord may speak or communicate with us:

- **Through His Son, Christ.** Yes, it is true that long ago, God spoke “at many times in many ways” through the prophets, but Hebrews goes on to say, “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:2). In the last days we live in, Jesus is a voice who still speaks to us through the Spirit of Jesus (the Holy Spirit) in us. As we read the Scriptures, we can see that God did reveal Himself- His character, glory, righteousness- to us through Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17) and the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). When Jesus speaks, we can have confidence we have heard the voice of God because He was the incarnation of deity in human flesh...The Son of God, speaking to the people of God through the Word of God, by the Spirit of God.
- **Through His creation.** Psalm 19:1-2 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” This is what is called general revelation. God speaks to all mankind through His creation (Romans 1:20). You can look at His created order as a law written on our hearts and seared in our consciences and that His creation is continually testifying His Truth (Romans 2:14-15).
- **Through His Word.** 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Scripture is the trusted reference. Scripture is the reliable source. Scripture is the final word. The Holy Spirit of God uses the truth of God’s Word to speak to us. Not only does He speak to us through His Word, He teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains us in holy living. There is no source of truth more reliable than the Bible.

It’s important that we understand how God often communicates when we begin to listen for His voice. We must tune our ear to listen for His Word. When you learn to hear His voice, it will grow more and more clear to you and you will be able to distinguish the whispered truth of what He is saying to you over the shouting lies of the enemy.

Let’s take some time to unpack how we readily receive from the Lord.

In what ways do you most often recognize God speaking to you (e.g. His Word, Creation, Christ)?

Whose voice do you immediately recognize when you hear it? You don't have to see them or even be in close proximity; when you hear it, you're so familiar with it, you just know who it is. How did their voice become so familiar to you?

Has the Lord ever revealed something to you through His Word? What was the Scripture passage or story that spoke to you? How did you respond to what Scripture was telling you?

The concept of hearing from the Lord may be something you are very comfortable with because you have been a “hearer of the Word” for a long time, or it may be something that is new to you and you’re still growing in as you engage the Scriptures more. You may even have some doubts or fears about what God might be saying to you. It’s okay to acknowledge these!

Can you identify any doubts or fears you may have about hearing from God through His Word?

What are some steps you can take to learn to better discern the voice of God in your life?

Day 4: *Roadblocks to Hearing from God*

When seeking to hear from God, you may find yourself running up against some roadblocks. You may sense that something is standing in your way from being able to hear Him, or you may feel like He is miles away from you.

Before you allow those roadblocks to stop you from trying, let’s first acknowledge that you have a very real enemy who wants to steal from your connection with God and destroy your hope of hearing from Him. He wants to convince you that God doesn’t speak and that even if God does speak, He doesn’t want to speak to *you*. Nothing could be further from the truth!

You have a very real enemy who wants to steal from your connection with God and destroy your hope of hearing from Him.

What is God's promise to us in Jeremiah 33:3?

God makes it clear to us in His Word that He is faithful to respond and to draw near to us when we call to Him. However, sometimes people experience a very real “block” in their ability to hear clearly from the Lord; and it's not the Lord who is silent, it's us who cannot or will not listen.

Have you struggled (or are you currently struggling) with hearing from God? Do you feel like there is a block between you and the Lord? If so, journal your thoughts below.

If you feel like you're not hearing from God, it's important to identify what might be hindering you and what the root of it is. So today, we want to unpack some of the common barriers that you might come up against when seeking to connect and hear from the Lord.

Expectation

Oftentimes people go to God with predetermined expectations of what they'll hear from Him. Instead of asking God what His word is saying, they decide in advance what they want to hear. When you're listening for Him to affirm your desires and He doesn't meet your demands, it leads to unmet expectations that leads to spiritual frustration. You should approach God with a heart like Christ's, who on the night He was crucified, cried out to God to let the cup of suffering pass from Him. But, He continued on in submission to the Father saying, "...nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." Jesus poured out His heart to God, but when His path still led to a cross, He was obedient to His Father—even to the point of death. When we pray to God and listen for Him, it should always be with a heart of submission to Him and His word, not an expectation to get our way. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross..." When you align your expectations to what God is saying, you can move forward with great joy!

Anxiety and Doubt

You may also struggle with being anxious about whether God will speak to you or if you'll be able to hear Him. We encourage you to release that anxiety and trust that God wants to speak to you more than you want to hear from Him! Rest in His promises to speak to us as His sons and daughters. Trust that as you continue to lean in and practice hearing from Him, you will become more and more attuned to His voice.

You may also fear that you won't be able to discern His voice from your own voice or the voice of the world. Many people can get caught in the "Is-That-God-Or-Is-That-Me" cycle, and they eventually quit trying because they are always unsure. The enemy wants to use that cycle of doubt to shut you down and discourage you. As you seek to listen to God's voice, we encourage you to push through the doubt and simply focus on what is true (Philippians 4:7-9). Measure your thoughts with God's word to confirm whether or not what you are hearing is from Him.

Unforgiveness or Bitterness

One of the most significant blocks that people may experience in hearing from the Lord is unforgiveness and bitterness. This might include anger or resentment toward God because of expectations that you have placed on Him that He didn't meet. This can also include unforgiveness that you are holding toward another person. If God reveals to you an area of unforgiveness or bitterness, spend some time processing those areas with Him, asking for His help to forgive those who have hurt you. Invite Him to bring healing to the pain and freedom from any bitterness that has resulted. We will more fully unpack these areas in Key 4 as they can create significant strongholds around your heart and make it very difficult to connect with God.

Unconfessed Sin

If there are pieces of your life that you allow to stay in darkness and hiding, they are in the enemy's territory—the territory of one who wants to steal, kill, and destroy your life. In the first chapter of 1 John, we see some powerful words that speak to the importance of confessing our sin and living "in the light."


Write 1 John 1:6 in your own words below.


If you have sin in your life that you've been keeping in the dark—whether from God or from other people—it's going to create a significant block in your ability to hear from Him. Confess and acknowledge the sin to God, then repent and turn away from the sin and what it has produced in your life.

What do verses 8 and 9 of 1 John tell us?

We are promised that if we confess our sin to God, He will be faithful to forgive us and cleanse us. It's so important to bring our sin into the light so that our connection to God can be restored. We will also unpack more of this idea in Key 4.

While this is not an exhaustive list of potential roadblocks to hearing from God, these are some of the most common ones. However, if you feel like there is something blocking your connection with Him and you're unsure as to what it is, remember that He is fully aware of what is standing in the way, so ask Him! His desire is to walk in close communion with His sons and daughters, so He will be faithful to reveal what is blocking you from hearing Him.

 **If you currently feel like you're struggling to hear from God, do any of the specific roadblocks from today connect with you? If so, which ones? If not, ask the Lord to show you what is blocking you from receiving from Him. Journal your thoughts below.**

 **What do you think God wants to do with the roadblocks in your life? What might God want to replace that roadblock with?**

Learning to address and remove any roadblocks to hearing God's voice allows Him to speak into the areas of our lives where we desire healing and freedom.

Day 5: *How Do I Know it's God?*

As you have spent some time identifying how Jesus communicates with you as an individual, you may wonder how you are supposed to know if what you are receiving is actually from Him! Doubt can often come in and cause us to question the process and whether or not it is God speaking, especially when we are first learning to hear from Him.

Throughout the Word, the Lord promises to speak to us, reveal Himself to us, and show us things that we “do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3). The Word of God tells us that He desires to communicate with us, but the Word also serves as a compass for everything that we receive from Him in prayer. There are a few key ways that can help you to discern more clearly if what you have heard or received is from Him.

It is confirmed in the Word. If what you receive does not line up with truth from the Bible, you will know that it is not from God. His voice and His Word always line up. For example, if you hear a voice telling you that you should start a romantic relationship with a person who is already married, you can know that it's not from God, because it does not line up with Scripture.

It is confirmed by God's character. God is good, holy, just, and pure. If what you receive does not line up with His character, you will know that it is not from Him. When the Lord communicates with us, His voice always brings hope, life, and love. Even when God corrects us, He does it from a place of love and care, not shame or condemnation (see Romans 8:1).

It is confirmed by the fruit it produces. Does the word you received produce the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control)? Or does it produce fear, discouragement, and condemnation? He does not pressure us but always leaves an element of choice. If you feel pressured, it's not likely God's voice. If, on the other hand, you feel a sense of peace, empowerment, and choice, it's likely that you are hearing from God.


It can often be confirmed by other means. When you ask a Christian friend or pastor for wisdom, God often will use that person to affirm what He has told you. The Bible says, “By the testimony of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). It is very helpful to seek out the wisdom and perspective of godly Christian leaders in your life when you are learning the ways you receive from the Lord and growing in your confidence in this area of your personal relationship with Him.

We encourage you to make a habit of asking Him to confirm to you whether or not the things you receive are from Him. God wants to speak to you more than you want Him to. As you make time and create space for Him to speak, He will be faithful to reveal Himself to you.

God wants to speak to you more than you want Him to.

Below are a couple of questions to ask the Lord in prayer and space for you to write out what you receive from Him. (You can find more examples of these types of questions on the *Hearing from God* resource at www.MercyMultiplied.com/Free-Resources). We encourage you to make it a regular practice to sit with the Lord, ask Him a question, and journal what you receive from Him. As you make this a regular rhythm in your life, you will notice that your ear becomes more and more attuned to the Holy Spirit!

“Father, when You look into the future of my life, what is something You are excited about for me?”

 **Look back to the tree that you completed on Day 1. Ask, “Jesus, what are You most excited about for me during this study? Are there any particular areas on my tree that You would like to address?”**

As we wrap up this first week of study, let's set our hearts to overcome the past and soar to places we've only dreamed of. For some of you, it will be a significant departure from the life you live now. For others, it will seem more like a course correction. In every case, it will liberate you to be and do what you haven't been and done before. This path of freedom will impact your thoughts and emotions, your relationships with others, and your heart-to-heart connection with God. We encourage you to continue what you have started and to watch and see what He does in your life!



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 1

Committing and Connecting to Christ

Juan's Story

Growing up in Florida, my upbringing was pretty typical of my generation. Even though my dad died when I was two years old, my mom did the best she could to love and care for me. I never got into any serious trouble, but just spent my free time as most people my age did: playing sports, listening to music, hanging out with friends, and maybe trying to get the attention of the opposite sex. I was a healthy and happy kid, and aside from my father's death I never had anything terrible happen to me or anyone close to me. As many do, after leaving the boundaries of home I found myself experimenting with what college life had to offer. I made my share of questionable and risky decisions but managed to graduate and move into the working world.

Around this time, I started to recognize that something was “off” with the world and in myself. I didn't have language to describe it, but the next chapter of my life would give me more clarity about what I was feeling and more importantly, what to do about it.

Everything changed for me when I went to a New Year's Eve party and met a young lady who shared that she was raised as a Christian, and even though she no longer had an active faith, she'd recently started attending a small church near her apartment. She wondered if I'd be interested in joining her at church sometime. I had no faith life growing up, and never had anybody in my life who took any religion seriously. I might have seen some preachers on TV or might have seen somebody accepting an award and thanking God, but I had no real impressions—good or bad—of Christianity. At the same time, I had always been curious about why it seemed so important to so many people, and certainly I was curious about this beautiful young lady, so eventually I joined her.

God must have known what kind of church I needed for my first experiences with Him, because He didn't bring me to an intimidating sanctuary with stained glass and a large crowd. Instead He brought me to an ordinary suburban office building where a small congregation met every Sunday morning. Despite some initial nervousness, I soon found myself showing up most Sunday mornings to sing hymns, read the Bible, and listen to sermons from a pastor who was not much older than me. As I tried to understand new concepts such as sin, grace, and salvation, it felt like opening a door into a different world. It was thrilling to encounter a more expansive, more real, more true understanding of myself and the world around me.

Often, listening to this young pastor describe ways that people think or act in unhealthy and destructive patterns, I would have the eerie sense that he somehow knew about something I'd been involved in that very week! Time after time I'd shift uncomfortably in my chair and think, “How on earth could he possibly know *that about me?*”

I realized soon enough, of course, that he didn't know the details of my life. He didn't need to. He was talking about what Christians call **sin**. He knew I loved some things that weren't good for me at all, and that I loved some things that *were* good for me more than I should. He knew how easy it was for me to make bad choices.

He knew about my anger, my self-centeredness, my jealousy, my laziness, and my lust. He knew the truth about me because he knew the truth about people.

Thankfully, he always continued past the “bad news” and shared the truth of the Good News that even though I might have done or said things I regretted, not only in the distant past but as recently as that morning, there was a way for me to have my heart completely transformed through Jesus Christ. Not only that, I was being invited to participate in His healing of our broken world. It almost seemed too good to be true, so I did my own reading of the Bible and other Christian writers to discover for myself if the pastor and the people sitting next to me every Sunday were all really telling the truth. Soon I understood that the feeling I always had that things were “off” in the world was an urge to worship the true and loving Creator instead of the only other gods I could see on offer. Money. Power. The approval of others. Control. Sex. Excitement. All of these were counterfeits, and now I knew the Truth.

Within a few months after first sitting down in that fluorescent-lit makeshift sanctuary, I committed my life to Jesus and was baptized as one of His followers. My pastor had been careful to explain that nothing I could do from that point on could get me any additional favor with God, but still I knew I would want and need to do some things differently as a follower of Christ. I knew that many of my habits of mind and behavior just didn’t make sense for someone who knew what I now knew about myself and the world around me. If I wanted to live the free, abundant life that I was created to live, I was going to have to fully surrender every part of my life to Him, holding nothing back. I knew that following Jesus would affect how I would spend my money, what I would do for work, how I would interact with people, which old habits to let go of, and which new habits to start. Walking with Jesus in the years since then has affected all of those things and led to a more fulfilled life than I could have ever imagined. Best of all, I’ve gotten to spend my life married to that young lady from the New Years’ Eve party!

Day 1: *From the Inside Out*

Changing our lives and living in freedom and wholeness is an inside job. Yet we are so often caught up with the external things of life and whether or not we look like we have it all together.


In Jesus’ day the religious leaders were the ones who tried to hold it all together. Their clothes were meticulously cleaned, their hands washed down to a science, and their prayers seemingly pious. But Jesus shocked them by calling them “whitewashed tombs” full of dead men’s bones (Matt. 23:27). That’s a pretty strong rebuke!

Jesus sees reality inside and out. He knew those men were not being transformed from the inside out by God’s living presence. The warnings He gave them are for us as well. The “normal” lives we try to lead often cover up the real issues and hurt on the inside. Jesus may have sounded harsh, but He was not condemning those religious leaders. He was offering them freedom. He does the same with us. Are we full of Him and connected to Him, or are we just keeping up appearances?

Imagine having a kettle that is turned on but isn’t plugged into the power source. It looks like a kettle and has the potential to boil like a kettle, but until it is plugged into the power source, it is of no use and cannot fulfill its potential!

We can look like Christians by going to church and Bible studies, but if our lives are disconnected from the power source, if we are not vitally united to Christ, we risk missing the truth, power, and freedom that Jesus died for us to have.

If you want to be free—really free—you need to come to a place of complete surrender to the Freedom Giver, Jesus Christ. You need to connect (perhaps for the first time) to the power source for living life in freedom and wholeness.

 **If you have committed your life to Christ, reflect for a moment on the journey that brought you to Him. What was your life like before Jesus? Why did you give your life to Christ? What kind of commitment did you make to Him?**

We can look like Christians by going to church and Bible studies, but if our lives are disconnected from the power source, if we are not vitally united to Christ, we risk missing the truth, power, and freedom that Jesus died for us to have.

Before we move on, if you have not committed your life to Christ, now is the perfect opportunity! This entire study was written with the idea that the reader has committed his or her life to Christ. Consider carefully and deeply the total commitment it requires. If you have never given your heart to Him, or you have, but now know that you've held much of it back and relied on your own coping mechanisms, then we invite you to commit or reconnect to the One who holds it all—your past, your present, your future. This study will not set you free; only Jesus can do that.

If you would like to know more about what it truly means to commit your life to Christ, we must start by having a right perspective of who God really is. He is eternal. He is the Creator and Owner of all things. He is the one and only God who is worthy of all the worship of everything that exists.

However, starting in the Garden of Eden, mankind turned and worshipped the things that God made instead of worshipping the One who made them. (Read Genesis 3 if you don't know the story.) Ever since then, mankind has continued to commit this sin. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:12 that "All have turned away . . . there is no one who does good, not even one." We all have fallen short and given our hearts to sin and to the worship of other things. In doing so, we have turned our hearts away from Him. We are all guilty.

How does God respond to our turning away? He is perfectly just and perfectly holy (set apart). As such, God and sin cannot coexist. So, His first response to our sin is eternal separation from Him. It is how we are all destined to spend eternity because we are all guilty of sin. We are desperate to be rescued.

Thankfully, God has a second response to sin. He is not only perfectly just and holy; He is also perfectly loving and merciful. The second response is Jesus. God sent His Son to the world to live a perfect life and, at the appointed time, go to the cross. It was at the cross that God poured out His wrath against mankind on Jesus.

What does 2 Corinthians 5:21 say? Write it in the space below.

God chose to make Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us! Then God raised Jesus from the dead after three days and conquered the enemy on our behalf. Because of Jesus, we have the chance to no longer be enemies of God. We have right standing before Him because of the cross. We no longer have to measure up to receive His acceptance, and our final destination no longer has to be eternal separation from God; it can be life with Him! We are His forever, and He will never withdraw His presence, no matter how short we might fall. What an unfathomable gift we've been offered!

Jesus paid for our sins when He went to the cross. He is our only hope. All that He has asked you to do is confess your sins to Him and receive the gift of salvation.

Write Romans 10:10, 13 below. What is required of us to be saved?

The invitation to give your life to Jesus is coming from Jesus Himself! If you desire to give your life to Him and place your faith in the cross of Christ, tell Him right now. How exciting that you want to become a follower of Jesus! It is the hands-down greatest and most important decision you will ever make!

If that is the desire and decision of your heart, we encourage you to find a Bible-based church in your community (or an older mentor or friend who you know is a Christian and can connect you with a church). Tell that person about your desire to give your life to Jesus and follow Him. We pray that you would find a church that will celebrate with you, guide you, and help you walk out this awesome decision. Congratulations!

Day 2: *All In*

Juan's story at the beginning of this week is the story of a man who, for many years, relied on something other than Jesus to keep his life upright. Juan had relied on things of this world to provide him with a sense of support, comfort, and identity.

We all have the need to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and significance, but if we find those things outside of a fully committed relationship with Jesus, there will come a point when those stabilizers are just too restrictive. Like a small child who has learned how to ride a bike with training wheels, it may feel and look as if you're riding the bike of your life, but there comes a point when those training wheels are the very things that become more of a hindrance than a support. Those artificial stabilizers that once made you feel balanced now hold you back, restrict your speed, and prevent you from being able to explore the fullness of freedom that a total commitment to Jesus has to offer.

God is asking for us to let go of every artificial stabilizer and every self-generated coping or defense mechanism and instead, trust Him to teach us His way of responding to life's challenges. If we let Him, He will teach us the wonder of learning to ride the bike of our lives without the restriction of training wheels. He will teach us to ride in freedom, but it requires us giving Him our total commitment.



Write a summary of the story in Matthew 19:16–26 in the space below.

To relate it to the bike analogy, the young man in this story could have been saying, "How do I ride a big bike? I can see the life you are talking about, Jesus, and I want it. I want to follow you, to ride alongside you, but my bike doesn't seem to be able to." Jesus' response would be something along the lines of, "Okay, let me show you the basics—backside on seat, hands on handlebars, feet on pedals, now go!" And the man says, "I've done all of that, so what's left?" Clearly the man knows he's missing something. He can feel a restriction on him, but he can't work out what it is. Maybe you feel the same way. You want to live free from whatever is holding you back, and you've done all the basics—you've given your life to Him; you're going to church; you're reading your Bible and praying; yet, something's still not quite right.

But then Jesus pinpoints the artificial stabilizer that was keeping the rich man's life upright and moving forward in his own strength. His security, identity, sense of power, worth, and value were all tied up in his riches. Jesus asks him to let go, to sell his stuff, to take off the artificial stabilizers, and learn to ride the bike of his life by trusting Him. Jesus did not have an issue with the man's wealth; He had an issue with the man's reliance on his wealth.

Maybe for you it's not money; maybe it's a relationship, an addiction, or your job, title or position. Whatever it is, if you are trying to follow Jesus and want to know the fullness and the freedom of the open road with nothing holding you back, then you've got to learn to take off the artificial stabilizers! Give Jesus your whole heart and all that is keeping you artificially upright. It is the only way to fully connect with Him and experience true freedom.

Juan was willing to surrender every artificial stabilizer in his life. He knew that following Jesus would result in changes in how he spent his money, what he did for work, how he interacted with others, and the overall daily rhythm of his life. Would you have the same courage to surrender it all if you saw that freedom was possible on the other side of your choice? Would you push it all away in a moment?

God has given you a choice between life and death, captivity and freedom.


When God reveals to you that something is getting in the way of your commitment and reliance on Him, it's time to let it go. Not some of it—all of it. God has given you a choice between life and death, captivity and freedom. He will honor your choice either way. The truth is that the amount of "death" operating in your life right now is potentially linked to your level of connection to Christ. Are you all in for God? Or are you holding back? It takes humility to admit when we're partially committed to God, but if you have an area you want to overcome, you're going to need His grace to do so.

Do you believe God has your complete and total commitment? Do you lean on and trust in the Lord with all your heart and mind, or are you relying on an artificial means of stabilizing your life? Ask the Lord to show you if there are any hindrance(s) in your life that are keeping you from total surrender.

What would it take for you to give your artificial stabilizer(s) to God and walk away from them? What would be the most difficult to surrender to Him? Why?

Now that you have identified some areas that are holding you back, you have the opportunity to choose to hand those to the Lord in an act of surrender. Surrender is one of the most powerful postures that we can take before the Lord; it positions us for the fullness and freedom that He desires to give. Surrender is a posture of the heart, but it can also be a posture of our physical body. If you choose to pray through the prayer included below, and are willing and able, we encourage you to posture your physical body in a position of surrender as well. This may mean getting down on your knees or another physical position that mirrors the surrender in your heart. When you are ready, you can pray this surrender prayer to the Lord:

Father, I desire to be all in when it comes to my relationship with You. I recognize that there are some areas of my life that I have held back from You and have not fully surrendered or trusted You to take care of. I choose right now, in the Name of Jesus, to surrender (list areas here) to You. I don't want anything to hold me back or serve as an artificial stabilizer in my life. I lay each of these things in Your hands and thank You for caring so deeply about the things, people, and relationships that are important to me. In this moment, I fully surrender these areas, my life, and my heart to You in Jesus' Name, Amen.

 **Ask God, “What do You want to give me in exchange for the artificial stabilizers I have surrendered?” Write what He shows you below.**

Day 3: The Traps—Part I

Those who have a difficult time giving their total commitment to Christ and surrendering fully to Him often fall into a few deadly traps, and we're going to take a look at some of those traps over the next couple of days.

Trap #1: "I Tried God, and It Didn't Work for Me."

Sometimes when people commit their life to Christ, they want to see big changes in all areas of their lives immediately. Big changes can and do happen, but many changes take time. Many times, God's blueprint in dealing with His children is a process. We can see an example of God's blueprint by the way He chose to create the heavens and the earth over the course of seven days. Think about it. God is all-powerful. He could have easily spoken creation into immediate existence with one all-encompassing word, but He didn't. He embraced the process, took His time, and allowed the very essence of process to be weaved into the very essence of our existence.

Everywhere we look there is process, but so often, we resent it or try to avoid it by finding shortcuts to our destination. We are increasingly surrounded by quick fix, instant results, and same-day delivery solutions to whatever our problem is. We want the end result but are often not prepared to do what it takes to get there. We want the victory but not the battle, the fitness but not the training. It's not often that we get one without the other.

Maybe you are facing a mountain of debt or have suffered the death of a loved one, and the grief seems insurmountable. Maybe your children are far from God, or you have had your heart broken and desperately want to move forward, but you don't know how. Whatever it may be, the likelihood is that your breakthrough, your miracle, will not be a one-time event; it will be a process.


Even doing this study is not your ultimate breakthrough. This study is not a formula or a magic wand that sets you free. It will teach you the principles of freedom and wholeness, but actually putting them into practice is a process that will extend way beyond these few weeks that we share together.

What is Jesus called in Hebrews 12:2? What does that tell you about His role?

Process is how God builds us up. It's His way of growing us, maturing us, and drawing us closer into relationship with Him.

Process is how God builds us up. It's His way of growing us, maturing us, and drawing us closer into relationship with Him. But thankfully, God does not abandon us to this process. He does not place Himself at the final destination point, impatiently awaiting our arrival and scolding us for our tardiness. Instead, He lovingly and graciously walks alongside us. He enters into the discomfort of the journey and provides the comfort we so desperately need along the way.

He speaks encouragement, direction, and gives us the grace we need to carry on. His presence can combat the fear we feel, the uncertainty we sense, and provide the strength we lack. That is the miracle. The God of heaven and earth extends His hand to each of us and says, "It's time to go, time to change, time to grow, time to face your giants—and I will help you."

 **Read Philippians 1:6 and ask, “Holy Spirit, why is it important for me to understand and believe this scripture in my life?” Write down what He shares with you in the space below.**

Day 4: *The Traps—Part II*

Trap #2: “I Need to Clean Up My Life.”

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we receive the most amazing exchange. Jesus takes our sin and old life and gives us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). You won’t find a better exchange than that. Not only does He give you the opportunity to experience a life of healing and wholeness now, He also gives you eternal life with Him. And we didn’t do a thing to deserve it!

For some people, that’s the obstacle. They find it hard to accept God’s gift as free. It can be so alien to the human system, which gives us only what we earn and deserve.

If any of the following statements describe your viewpoint, you may have a hard time making that total commitment. Put a check mark next to any you relate to.

- I’ll accept God’s gift of salvation, but there are some areas I want to clean up first.
- Since I don’t deserve God’s mercy and love, I could never come to Him.
- I don’t want to fully commit because I know I won’t be able to do it perfectly.

These statements are lies. Jesus’ truth is, “Come as you are” (John 7:37; Luke 18:13).

Many of us have a hard time switching gears from our worldly mentality and accepting that Jesus welcomes us even though we are not good enough. It can be hard to rest on His goodness and not our own. It can be a challenge to understand why He would take all our mistakes and declare us “not guilty” before the Father. Jesus stands next to us with pride and joy before God, and we appear pure and clean—without earning a bit of it.

Ephesians 2:4 says that God is “rich in mercy,” which means that while God may have the power to punish, He instead chooses to show compassion and forgiveness. Mercy ultimately means that we do not get the punishment that we deserve. This means that God’s mercy has nothing to do with my ability to behave correctly and everything to do with His goodness and kindness. I cannot earn His mercy; it is freely given.

Sometimes we can find the idea of the judgment of God a lot easier to accept than His mercy. Judgment makes sense to us; mercy doesn’t. Judgment fits into our human logic. It can take some time to love mercy as much as we love judgment. When we do, we are liberated at a deep level. We find rest in Jesus. God has chosen to show mercy to people; our choice is whether or not we accept this gift. We will never be good enough to deserve it. The only thing we can do is let go of our pride and say, “Yes!”

Trap #3: “I Will Always Have My ‘Issue,’ Even If I Follow Jesus.”

It is common in society for people to believe that anyone with problems will always have those struggles. The phrase, “Once an addict, always an addict” is commonly heard, even in Christian circles. In fact, many treatment programs and psychiatric wards use the terms “recovering addict,” “recovering alcoholic,” and “recovering from depression.” We have seen this terminology to be problematic because it keeps someone tied to their past and continually identifying with the very issue from which they have received freedom!

This study is not about treatment; it is about transformation. It is not about teaching you how to manage your behaviors, but about equipping you with biblical principles so that you can be free to live the life that Christ died for you to have. The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that if anyone receives Christ, that person is “a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (NKJV). The old person we used to be is dead and gone, and we now start a new life with a new beginning, no longer identifying with our past. We are all aware that we have a past, but we do not have to allow our past to destroy our future. We can move forward in our new identity as children of God—forgiven and free!

We do not have to allow our past to destroy our future.

Have you ever been told or believed that you will never overcome a certain issue in your life? What feelings and thoughts did that cause in you?

Does it make a difference for you to know that freedom is actually possible? If so, how?

- Take a look back over the three traps discussed yesterday and today. Do you believe that any of the traps apply to you? If so, which one(s)? If you don't connect with any of the traps discussed but still sense that something is blocking your full commitment to Christ, ask God to show you what is standing in the way and what He wants to do with it.

If you found it difficult to release your “artificial stabilizers” on Day 2 (page 35), now may be a good time to go back to the exercise. Was it a trap trying to hold you back?

Let's end today by making a prayer of total commitment to Jesus. He has a purpose and plan for you that will completely amaze you, and it starts with a total commitment to Him each day. Let's pray:

Lord, I love You. No one has ever done more good for me than You, and no one ever will. You deserve my total trust and commitment, and with a sincere heart, I offer it to You now. Help me to lay that strong foundation and to walk in the freedom and benefits of a total commitment to You. Thank You for totally committing to me when you chose to lay down Your life in the hope of having a relationship with me one day. I fully commit to our relationship now and look forward to all that is ahead. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now that we have fully committed our lives to Jesus, it's important to discuss another area of great blessing that is ours—a heart connection with Him. We will begin this discussion tomorrow.

Day 5: *Connecting to Christ*

It's vital that we start this journey with a fully surrendered life to Jesus, and as we've discussed, a total commitment is required if we want to live healed and whole lives. However, the end goal of our Christian walk isn't to simply commit our lives to Him; it's to actually connect with Him through a deep and personal relationship.

One particularly powerful moment surrounding the death of Jesus revealed the new possibility of this connection. Read Matthew 27:51. What happens in this verse?

We can easily skim past this verse as we read through the story, but the meaning behind the temple veil tearing is significant! In the Old Testament, God dwelled in the Temple, specifically in an inner room known as the "Holy of Holies." It was a physical barrier that separated God and people. The only person who had access to this room—in other words, access to the presence of God—was the High Priest. And even he could only enter once a year!

After the death of Jesus, though, the veil was torn from top to bottom, which is significant because this means that it was *God Himself* who tore the veil. It meant that there was no longer a barrier between God and man. Because we are united to Jesus, whose death accomplished the forgiveness of sins and made us righteous before God, Ephesians 1:18 says, "we both have equal and direct access in the realm of the Holy Spirit to come before the Father." God did not change; He was (and is) still perfectly holy. But when we surrender our lives to Him, we then have right standing before Him, because Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus came and died to restore our right relationship with the Father!

Committing our lives to Christ is vital because it's through this commitment that we actually accept this forgiveness for our sins. However, if we don't seek a personal relationship with Him, we miss out on the ultimate gift. Jesus came and died to restore our right relationship with the Father!

What does John 1:12–13 say that we are when we receive God into our lives?

What does Romans 8:15 say that we can call God?

What does Jesus say that he calls us in John 15:15?

God is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and Ruler of the universe, but He also wants to be our father and our friend. The ultimate goal of finding freedom in Christ is to have an abundant life as a son or daughter of God!


As we journey through this study together, we encourage you to begin each day by simply drawing near to God.

What does James 4:8 say will happen when we draw near to the Father?

As you seek to draw near to God, there is a simple exercise you can do to examine how you currently see Him and to shed light on the current posture of your heart toward Him. Some people may picture God sitting on a throne, and they see themselves close to Him. Others see themselves very far away from Him. Some see Him as a good father and some as a threatening authority figure.



Take a moment to breathe, quiet your mind, and think about God. Where is He and what is He doing? How do you see Him?

 **Where are you and what is your physical posture toward Him? Are you close to Him or far away?**

 **What is your emotional posture toward Him? What feelings are coming up?**

 **Can you approach God as Father and get close to Him?***

*Freedom Prayer Basic Training Manual, freedomprayer.org

● If you feel far from God, be reminded that Scripture promises that if you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. And remember that He is fully aware of what is blocking your connection with Him, so ask Him what is keeping you distant and what He wants to do with it. Record what He shows you below.

Remember that Jesus came so that our relationship with God could be restored. If you feel like it is difficult to draw near to God, tell Jesus that you want to walk in what He paid for on the cross and ask *Him* to bring you to the Father.* You might also consider some of the roadblocks mentioned on pages 24–25 of last week’s study and revisit any of those areas that might be affecting your ability to connect with God.

It’s so important as you journey through this study that you regularly examine the posture of your heart toward God and spend some time drawing near to Him before you process the reflection questions for each of the keys. When you open up the lines of communication with Him and tell Him how you really feel, you will find that He will speak directly to your heart and situation in such a way that brings healing and restoration. It’s only in your close connection with Him that true healing and freedom can be found!

*Freedom Prayer Basic Training Manual, freedomprayer.org

Key 1

Transformation requires a total commitment
and connection to Christ.

I can't simply offer part of my heart and life to God
and expect to walk in freedom.



*During each week of this study, you will be receiving keys for living in freedom.
And just like the physical keys you carry each day in your pocket or purse,
they are not used once, but used over and over again as the need arises.
In the same way, we are going to build a collection of keys over the next few weeks
that we encourage you to use over and over throughout your life.
At the completion of each week's study, you will be prompted to reflect on all the keys
you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit.
We pray that you will continue that process long after you complete this study!*

*Your collection begins this week with the "keyring,"
which is Committing and Connecting to Christ.
This truly is the key that holds all of the other keys together.
As you learned this week, without this key,
the others lose their power and impact in your life.*



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life
or any valuable insights you have received.
And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 2

Renewing Your Mind

Julie's Story

I have spent so many years of my life feeling imprisoned by thoughts that do not agree with God's truth about me. Thoughts like . . . "I don't fit in. People don't like me. I am stupid." These thoughts were based on circumstances in my life where I had failed. I then allowed those experiences to determine my beliefs about myself. Those thoughts did not feel like lies. To me, they were the truth, so I found ways to cover up what I thought were shameful truths about myself.

One of those thoughts, "I am stupid," was a particular battle. Despite being given a very privileged college education at one of the best private schools in the country, I did not thrive under the pressure of exams. The more I tried to do well, the worse I seemed to do! I had no idea what I wanted to major in, so I decided to look into teaching children. This degree required me to take some math courses. I spent four years studying, and I failed eight exams during that time, which only furthered the belief that I was stupid and did not have what it takes to be successful. I spent my final year in college giving every hour I could to study, determined to do well. I graduated with a degree in Math, but with a grade of which I was not proud and saw no reason to celebrate.

I spent years living under a lie that I was not good enough and did not have what it takes to succeed. As a result, I became afraid of failure, of getting it wrong, and of embarrassing myself. I eventually ended up in an accounting position, in part because I knew that my math degree would get me the job, but with little faith that I would perform well. Despite promotions and success, I still felt stupid.

While taking a leadership class, I reached the end of myself during one particular assignment. I didn't want to continue, as I couldn't bear the thought of experiencing failure all over again. As a last resort, I remember choosing to write from a new belief: that I was wise and that I did have something good to say. I wrote the assignment in my own way and with my own style. I submitted it, expecting to fail, but instead received the highest grade you could for a piece of work. I was amazed!

When I came into agreement with the Truth, I flourished! I found myself repenting of the lie that I was stupid, and in that moment, I heard God whisper to me, "You thought I had given you one of the worst brains, but I have given you one of the best." I had lived under the lid of comparison, shame, failure, and rejection for all those years. But when I made the choice to be myself and start believing the things that God said about me, freedom was unlocked in a moment. This was hugely significant, but it was just a start! I had to commit to a process of identifying each lie I believed that didn't line up with what God thought about me and start actively changing my beliefs.

I can now step out into unknown territory with confidence and assurance, rather than crumble under the weight of insecurity, doubt, and failure. I feel free from the fear of failure and the belief that I am stupid, knowing that with Him, I can overcome every challenge.

Day 1: *Higher Thoughts*

The Word of God says that when we renew our minds our lives will be changed: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think” (Rom. 12:2, NLT). Renewing your mind means to do away with unhealthy thought patterns and to replace them with true, godly ones. It is impossible to do without God’s help.

Our belief systems—our thought patterns and the ways in which we view God, ourselves, and the world around us—are formed in our early childhood years. In many ways, our thought patterns act like hiking trails. Constructing a trail requires some short-term effort of removing trees and creating a tread surface. But how are trails maintained? Simply by people regularly walking on them, right? The more a trail is traversed, the more established it becomes. On the other hand, if people cease to walk on the trail, it will eventually disappear.

The only way to re-direct our thoughts is to stop walking down the old thought trails and choose to create new ones that take us in a different direction.

In a similar way, our thoughts follow neurological pathways without a conscious decision from us, and just like a hiking trail, our thoughts will lead us to the same destination each time. These thought trails have been well used over the years and many of them developed from a young age. The only way to re-direct our thoughts is to stop walking down the old thought trails and choose to create new ones that take us in a different direction. Breaking down the old well-worn trails of thought doesn’t happen on its own. A characteristic of our brain called “neuroplasticity” enables us to actually change the way our brains are working. Rather than always replaying the old negative thoughts and beliefs, you can introduce new true thoughts and beliefs into your mind. Over time, these new thoughts will actually become more natural in your mind than the old faulty beliefs. Science has proven that it is possible to completely redirect our neurological pathways. This is the process the Bible calls “renewing the mind.”

In the first full week of study, we discussed the tree analogy. We all have a belief system—the “tree trunk”—that has grown out from the roots and is the connection between the roots and our behaviors. Let’s discuss an example of how our roots, belief systems, and behaviors are all connected.

Let’s say that a behavior you struggle with is people pleasing. Maybe you find it difficult to say “no” to requests from people, especially people who you admire or respect, like a boss, pastor, or spouse. This means you are always serving, always working overtime, always saying “yes” to the detriment of your health or your family or your own needs. Your sense of value and worth becomes driven by a constant need to perform and gain approval from others. Every mistake and perceived criticism takes you a long time to get over, but any compliments given only last a short moment in their “feel good” factor.

The thought patterns (belief system) upholding these behaviors could be:

- “People will love and accept me only if I work hard to please them and do everything right.”
- “No matter how hard I work, I will always fall short. I will never be good enough.”
- “I must earn love and approval.”


The root causes related to this belief system could be:

- Rejection
- Fear (especially of failure)
- Pride

The life experiences where these roots were formed could be:

- Workaholic parents (especially if they are high achievers)
- High-pressured school environment
- History of being bullied
- Over-achieving siblings
- Always being rewarded for performance, not for character

Hopefully, this example gives you a clearer understanding of how the “tree trunk” of our thought life is connected to the roots and our behaviors. Tomorrow we are going to start taking a closer look at the thought patterns and belief system at work in our own lives so that we can begin addressing them head-on!

 **Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify the beliefs that are upholding one or more of the “branches” on your tree. You can write them down here or go back to the tree illustration on page 17 and write them next to the trunk.**

Day 2: *You Have a Choice*

Some people think that they are the victim of their thoughts or that it's God's job to renew their minds. Arianna Walker, Executive Director of Mercy UK, tells of a dream she had during a difficult time in her life. This God-given dream helped her to understand the importance of being responsible for what goes on inside our own minds instead of assuming that God will do it all for us.

Just before she went to bed one night, Arianna was reading Psalm 23:5: “You prepare a banquet before me in the presence of my enemies.” In a dream that night, Arianna saw herself sitting at a large round dining table in a restaurant. Around the table were her guests: Faith, Hope, Love, Joy, Peace, Wisdom, and Strength. They chatted, laughed, and sang together like the good friends they were. The scene was one of joy, fellowship, and friendship.

As Arianna watched the scene in her dream, she became aware of three figures that stood over in the shadows beside the bar. Wondering who they were, she felt God tell her that they were her enemies: Fear, Worry, and Unbelief. These enemies stared at her with such hatred that it sent a cold ripple through her body. She asked God, “Why are they here? They don’t belong in this place.” And He answered, “This restaurant, like your life, is open to the public. Life on earth is an open space that can sometimes be visited by enemies. But who sits at your table is by invitation only.” Even in her dream, the truth of that statement hit her like a ton of bricks.


As she continued to observe the scene, she saw herself become distracted by the figures at the bar. Each time she would steal a glance in their direction or cease the conversation with her companions, she could see them move toward her. Finally, Fear stood directly behind the seat of Faith, and the entire scene stood still. Everyone went quiet.


We cannot always control what thoughts walk through the door of our minds, but we can choose which thoughts we allow to “sit at our table.”


The tension was palpable in the air, as both Fear and Faith looked her directly in the eyes. And then she heard the voice of God, “There are no more seats at your table and Faith will not share her seat with Fear. Choose your companions wisely.”

Arianna woke up and realized the battles she faced would be won or lost in her mind and in her thoughts. Our external world will always be open to the presence of our enemies, but we decide what gets to sit down at the table of our thoughts.

Many people are surprised to find that they do not have to think about whatever pops into their heads. This may be a new concept to you, but it’s an important one. Thoughts will come to us uninvited, and we cannot always control what thoughts walk through the door of our minds, but we can choose which thoughts we allow to “sit at our table.” Once that thought or memory enters our mind, we can either focus on it and agree with it or make the choice to reject it and kick it out.

 **Write 2 Corinthians 10:5 in your own words below. What does this scripture say about your choice regarding your thought life?**

 **How can you begin to take ownership over your thoughts?**


 **Is there anyone “sitting at the table” of your thought life who needs to have their invitation revoked? Who? Who should take their place at the table?**

What does Philippians 4:8 tell us to think about?

As you focus on the things listed in Philippians 4:8 and the truth of the Word, you will find that there is less space and opportunity for the lies, negative thoughts, and difficult memories to pop up in your mind.

Day 3: *Meditating on the Truth*

We discussed yesterday that the primary responsibility for renewing our minds lies with us. Nothing gets to “sit down at the table” of our thought life apart from an invitation from us. We actually have the ability to decide what we will do with our thoughts. And choosing to let God’s truth sit down at our table will bring amazing peace, clarity, and freedom to our lives!

 **What will be the result of knowing God’s Truth according to the following scriptures?**

Psalm 119:105

John 8:31–32

Jesus tells us in John 8:32 that the truth will set you free. This is a commonly quoted scripture but often without context. Jesus actually says: “And you shall *know* the truth and the truth will set you free.”

Therefore, it’s not simply the truth that sets you free; it’s the truth you know that sets you free. And how else will you know the truth than to read the source of truth—the Word of God? His promises, His belief in us, His character, and His plans and purposes for our lives are found within the books of the Bible. Knowing and believing these things are essential to giving us the ability to turn simple words on a page into life-giving freedom.

*It’s not simply the truth
that sets you free;
it’s the truth you know
that sets you free.*

When we meditate on the Word and choose what we think, we are empowered to take a much more active role in renewing our minds. God never promised that no weapon will come against us, but that no weapon that comes against us will succeed (Isa. 54:17). When we latch on to His truth, the weapons—the lies, fears, and hurts—will not prosper. We learn to actively break agreement with the lies we have believed and begin to stand on the power of His truth.


What does Psalm 1:1–3 say about the man that meditates on the Word of God?

What do you think it means to meditate on God's Word?

Imagine if you were to spill liquid on the floor, and you had two options for mopping it up—newspaper or a paper towel. While the newspaper may be similar in composition to the paper towel, it only has a limited ability to absorb the liquid. It won't clean up the spill. The paper towel, on the other hand, absorbs every ounce of liquid and carries it within itself. Learning to absorb the Word of God into the very core of what we believe about ourselves, about Him, and about life is the very essence of what it means to renew our minds. It is how we come to know the truth, and knowing that truth is what sets us free. The lie has no power over you unless you believe it. But the same is true for the truth; it has no power to change you unless you choose to believe it.

By meditating on the Word of God with the One who **is** Truth, we experience freedom, healing, and restoration. Light dispels the darkness. As the light of God's Word goes into your mind, it pushes the darkness out. Then the freedom of Christ begins to connect to your heart in a deeper way. The key is to immerse ourselves in the Word. It says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). We need to hear God Himself speaking His Word over us again and again to remind ourselves of who we are in Christ. We need to speak it to ourselves with our mouths, so our own ears hear our voice speaking the truth.

Living in freedom and renewing your mind means hiding God's Word in your heart with regular, passionate meditation and memorization. As you do, you will begin to forge a new trail in your mind that will continue to be easier and easier to walk and enjoy.

 **Are you currently immersing yourself in Scripture through study, meditation, and memorization? If not, what are some things you could do to make space in your life for more of God's Word?**

We want to encourage you to choose one of the things you just listed and commit to put it into action this week and see what fruit comes from it.

The Word of God is our powerful weapon to defeat the enemy. When Jesus was tempted after fasting forty days, even He, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God, answered the enemy's temptations with, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4). If Jesus had to do that, how much more do we need to do it?

Make "It is written" a regular part of your internal conversation and thought life. It works against all kinds of temptation and lies. Proverbs 3:5-6 is a well-known verse and tells us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." When we don't renew our minds, we naturally lean on our own understanding because that's all there is for us. But if you renew your mind to God's Word and His ways, you will walk in more and more freedom day-by-day, moment-by-moment.

Day 4: *Securing Our Weapons*

Over the next couple of days, we are going to talk about some practical ways to renew your mind with the Word of God. This will be very interactive and will take some work, so set aside a decent amount of time for today and tomorrow's study. It's too important to rush! We pray that this practice will be something you use for the rest of your life.

As the truth of the Word becomes the focus of our thought life, we can begin to address the lies that keep us stuck. Renewing our minds starts with understanding some of the lies we think and believe. Our actions begin with our thought lives, so behind every negative habit or area of bondage is a lie. One way to identify a belief system or thought pathway we have is to pay attention to what plays over and over in our minds and what comes out of our mouths. The Bible tells us that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). So if we want to identify our belief system, sometimes we just need to pay attention to our own words.

- "I'm dumb and worthless."
- "God has abandoned me, so I have to take care of myself."
- "I have to promote myself. Nobody else will do it for me."
- "I cannot trust anyone who is in authority over me."

- “God is not ultimately out for my good.”
- “Depression is just part of who I am. I’m a melancholy person.”
- “With the way I look, nobody could love me.”
- “God doesn’t see me and doesn’t hear me.”
- “I was always told to be seen and not heard, so I prefer to stay silent.”
- “Given what happened to me in the past, I’m damaged goods.”
- “God will always ultimately disappoint me.”

Thoughts like these do not line up with the truth of God’s Word. Renewing our minds is God’s way of helping us to break free from the destructive destination of our old hiking trails and help us to redirect the trails of our thoughts in the direction of His truth.




What are some of the common phrases you say or think about yourself, God, or others? List them in the space below and then add them to the trunk of the tree on page 17.

We play untrue thoughts through our heads so frequently that we effectively memorize them and convince ourselves that they are true. We write the scripts of our own lives based on lies supplied by the enemy and difficult circumstances that we experience.

Based on the thoughts that you listed in the last question, ask the Lord to highlight one specific lie that has power in your life and that He wants you to focus on for today and tomorrow’s lesson. Write what He reveals to you in the space below.

Ask, “God, when did I first come into agreement with this lie?” Write what He shows you below.

 **Ask, “God, how has this lie affected my life?” Write what He shows you below. (You may want to record some of these things in the roots or the branches of the tree on page 17.)**

PRAY: Today I choose to break agreement with the lie that _____, and I declare that Your truth reigns in my life, God.

It’s important to remember that any time we surrender or break something in prayer, we must ask God to replace it with something. So when we break agreement with a lie, we ask God to replace it with His Truth. The residents at Mercy write out scriptures and “truth statements” on index cards and read them out loud on a regular basis. We need to hear ourselves speak the truth out loud to counter the lies that are working to gain access to our minds and, eventually, our hearts.

For example, one of our residents was really struggling with feelings of social anxiety because she believed the lie that people judged her in social settings. When feeling anxious, she would read the card that said, “I have the mind of Christ, and He gives me peace.” It pushed out the lies and anxiety and enabled her to step into the peace Jesus makes available.

It’s important to note that during this process, you may find it easier to believe the truth in your head than in your heart. The lies often *feel* true. However, renewing the mind typically begins with a choice of the will. In fact, it’s common for our emotions to initially work against us in this process.

On our first day of this week’s study, though, we compared our thoughts to hiking trails and discussed how we can actually change the trails of our thought lives. And just as hiking trails don’t disappear overnight but instead disappear over the course of time, it may take some time for us to see our old thought patterns change. If you will make a commitment to the process that you will be learning today and tomorrow, you will notice your feelings and emotions beginning to change and line up with the truth over time.

Today, you are going to start building your own collection of truth cards to renew your mind!

Grab a handful of index cards, and start digging through the Bible to discover truth to replace the lie that the Lord just highlighted to you. When you come across a scripture or truth statement that really resonates with your heart in relation to that specific lie, write it on an index card. (Write one scripture per index card.)

It may feel overwhelming for you to try to find applicable verses, so here are a few tips:

- Search for key words in the concordance section of your Bible (typically in the back) or use a topical Bible to search for scriptures by topic. You can also utilize searches through online Bible study applications like biblegateway.com.
- Refer to Appendices A and B at the back of this book for scriptural truths.
- Read Ephesians 1 and 2 or Psalm 139. Those passages of Scripture are full of truths for renewing the mind.

We would also encourage you to spend some time in prayer as you look through the Word, asking the Holy Spirit to highlight scriptures, as well as His thoughts and His heart toward you.

Once you have identified the lie and you have identified what God's truth is regarding that lie, it's time to actually engage in the process of replacing the lie with that truth. Tomorrow's activity will focus on this process.

Day 5: *Steps to Renewing Your Mind*

We are going to spend today walking through how to summarize, personalize, and vocalize the Word of God, specifically as it relates to the lie you are currently addressing. Here is an explanation of each step:

Summarize It

When the Lord highlights a specific scripture to you, take some time to summarize it in your own words. This will cause you to draw out the meaning in a fuller way, considering every aspect of it. By putting it in your own words, you will process the meaning and digest it more completely.

Go through each of the scripture cards you wrote yesterday. On the back of each card write a summary of the meaning of that scripture in your own words. (Leave some space on each card for the next step.)

Personalize It

Next, ask God what He is saying to you personally through the scripture so you can speak it out loud. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word, illuminating certain truths specifically for us at just the right time. How many times have you read a verse that you have read many times before, only to find that this time it jumps off the page and virtually glows with life and meaning? That is the Holy Spirit personalizing the scripture to your immediate circumstance.

Pay attention to those moments and meditate on those verses of Scripture. Give Him time to speak to you about how they relate to your situation.

Go through each of your scripture cards and ask God what the verses mean for you now. Write what He shows you for each scripture on the back of each index card.

Vocalize It

Finally, vocalize the scripture and your summary by reading them out loud. Don't be content to think it in your head. There is a place for silent contemplation and reading, but this is not that time. Read the scripture out loud, and then read your summary out loud.

We don't fight thoughts effectively with other thoughts; we fight thoughts with words. If you don't believe this, start counting to twenty in your head, but randomly say your name out loud before you get to twenty. You will find that the second you engage your mouth and speak your name out, the counting in your head stops. The same principle works when renewing your mind with the truth of God's Word. You need to interrupt the trail of thought and redirect it by using the power of your own voice. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but over time, it will powerfully align your heart and your mind with what God is telling you in and through His Word.

You need to interrupt the trail of thought and redirect it by using the power of your own voice.

Take the truths from God's Word that you are discovering and vocalize them on a daily basis. When you speak His Word out loud, it has power beyond anything you can see. Speaking Scripture out loud plants it inside of you and brings life, because God is literally "watching over [His] word to perform it" (Jeremiah 1:12). As Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (ESV).

Go ahead—read your truth statements out loud!

Here's a walk-through example of each of the above steps:

You may be struggling with a lie from the enemy that says, "You are not enough" (not successful enough, not smart enough, not a good enough spouse or parent, etc.).

Truth of Scripture: "The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deut. 7:6).

Summarize It: The Israelites were God's chosen people and His treasured possession. Likewise, because of what Christ has done and because I am a part of God's family, I am fully loved, chosen, treasured, and accepted by God. Regardless of how much I feel like I don't measure up or how much I do (or fail to do), I will remain fully loved, chosen, treasured, and accepted by God.

Personalize It: God, thank You for the inheritance and the identity that is mine as Your son/daughter. Thank You that no matter how weak I might be or how often I feel that I don't measure up, my identity is that I am Your beloved. Because of what Jesus has done (and not because of what I have done), I know that I am chosen, treasured, and accepted by You. I have all that I need in You, so I choose to surrender to You and Your ability to complete me and sustain me so that I lack nothing. Thank You, Father.

Vocalize It: (Say it all out loud!)

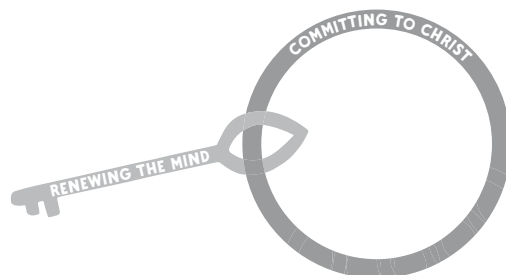
How do you think it will feel to live each day with the mind and thoughts of Christ instead of the lies of the enemy?

Ask the Lord, “Father, what is something that you are most excited about for me as I begin the process of renewing my mind?” Write what He reveals to you below.

Remember that renewing your mind to God's Truth is a lifelong process. If you take these steps consistently, in one year you will hardly recognize yourself. Transformation will continue, and you will wonder how you came so far so fast. That is the power of agreeing with God—it brings life, peace, and countless blessings.

Key 2

Renewing my mind is an active, ongoing process that leads to greater freedom as I commit to replacing untrue thoughts with truth from God's Word.



Reflect on the keys you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 3

Healing Life's Hurts

Jason's story

As a child, I had a learning disability that was made all the more challenging by the fact that I had four siblings who were all honor students. Meanwhile, my father was physically, verbally, and emotionally abusive, which made things even more difficult. He often told me that I was not smart enough to go to college.

After graduating from high school, I chose to take a year off from school and work. As that year was coming to a close, I felt led to go to college and major in English, minoring in writing. I remember one night sitting in my bedroom and telling my dad about my plans. His response to me was, "Do you think you would actually be good at that?" That question and the doubt in his voice stung me to my core.

What I couldn't know then was that the pain of my father's words that night would affect me more than I realized. The enemy used that moment to reinforce all of the lies that I had struggled with since childhood. I felt inadequate. I would never measure up. I felt especially "stupid." Those were lies that I continued to struggle with into adulthood. It was a significant area of insecurity for me, and it had been magnified by the memory of what my father had said to me that night in my bedroom.


As the years went on, I began seeing how this insecurity had been affecting my life and molding much of the way I felt and thought on a daily basis. I began seeking healing and freedom through Christian counseling, and a couple of years ago, I attended a conference where they encouraged us to process a painful memory with the Lord, asking the Holy Spirit to show us His perspective on what happened. As we prayed, I saw myself sitting in my bedroom, telling my father about my plans to go to college and study English and writing. I heard him ask again if I actually thought I would be good at that. And then I saw Jesus sitting on my bed holding out a pen and paper to me. He showed me where He was in that moment of pain. He was encouraging me and showing me that He believed in me.

I had experienced a lot of growth in this specific area of struggle through my walk with Christ and through the counseling I'd sought, but this was the final step to true healing. There was such an amazing release of hurt as God showed me His perspective of that painful experience. Freedom and comfort rushed in and took its place. I was able to reject the lies that I was stupid and inadequate and leave them in the past.

The words that my father spoke to me that night were so painful, but what actually caused me the most long-term harm was the destructive lies that I believed as a result of that pain. I will always be grateful to God for inviting me into a conversation about where He was and what He said about me that night. Now when I encounter moments where I would have typically felt dumb or inadequate, I choose to believe what my Heavenly Father says about me instead of what my earthly father said about me. Those lies just do not carry the weight that they used to carry. God has removed those insecurities, and the memory of what happened that night no longer controls me. I'm not perfect, but I am healed. And it's from a place of healing that I have seen transformation take place in my life.

Day 1: *When Life Hurts*

Every one of us experiences hurt. When those hurts remain unhealed, they can cause us to shrink back from life, to operate out of fear, and to build our lives around avoiding more hurt. We take fewer healthy risks in relationships, jobs, and ministry. Some people have been so hurt in the past that they sabotage relationships because they don't think they deserve them. Some people who have been hurt by abandonment or loss will cling to friends and loved ones too tightly or accuse those around them of not being faithful enough. Any person who has an unhealed hurt will find their decision-making negatively impacted. It's like the tree that we described in the first chapter; every negative root of fear or rejection or abandonment informs our belief system, which in turn sustains the branches of our behaviors.

 **Why do you think suffering deep hurts can have such a strong effect on our decisions and everyday lives?**

You can't run from your hurts because they always catch up. The only safe place to run is into the arms of a loving God.

The enemy's plan is to use your hurts to hold you back. He wants to put boundaries on your life based on your fear of being hurt again. Total freedom means no longer allowing hurts to direct our lives, tarnish our relationships, and shape our personalities. Many people don't want to acknowledge their hurts because of the painful emotions attached to them. Instead of running to God, they run away from Him to hide their shame, much like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:7).


But you can't run from your hurts because they always catch up. The only safe place to run is into the arms of a loving God.

Write Proverbs 18:10 in the space below.

The idea of facing the feelings you carry from the hurts of the past may feel intimidating and overwhelming. Some people conclude that because they have been so hurt, no emotions can be trusted. They won't even allow themselves to feel happiness or joy because it makes them feel out of control. The idea of going back to past hurts means unlocking the box with all the emotions in it—a seemingly dangerous and scary idea.

 **How does the thought of going back to face past hurts cause you to feel? Why?**

While the idea of facing those hurts from the past may stir up a variety of emotions, the truth is that pouring out our emotions to God is where inner healing begins. We encourage you to consider doing this with a Christian counselor, pastor, or mentor if you feel it's appropriate for your situation (i.e. when the memories of the past are particularly traumatic or trigger you). However, for most people, pouring out our hearts to God and allowing Him to speak into the hurtful and painful experiences of our past is a very simple and effective exercise.

 **Read Psalm 142:1–2. How is God the ultimate Counselor and “prayer partner” with whom to process your hurts?**

Being open and honest with the Lord is vital in helping us move forward. God is not afraid or offended by our anger, our disappointment, or our confusion, even if it is directed at Him. He can handle our emotions and, in fact, invites us to come to Him.

 **What does Psalm 62:8 tell us to do?**

We have a choice in whether or not we will express our hurt openly and honestly. The good news is that Jesus has a response to our pain, anger, and disappointment. He has something to say about the situations we have faced and the damage we have sustained.

For example, Ebony struggled with significant hurt in her heart after a 5-year relationship that was both physically and emotionally abusive. Ebony knew that God was inviting her to fully surrender her hurt to Him, but through processing her hurts with God, she felt Him calling her even deeper. He began to bring up memories of abuse from Ebony's childhood—memories that she'd tried to lock away and keep secret. As she began to invite the Lord into these hurts, He began to remove the shame that she felt and showed Ebony His perspective on those situations. God showed her that while there was no excuse for the way that these people had treated her, they were also going through pain in their

lives. As a result, Ebony began to actually feel compassion toward those who had hurt her, which led her to a place of forgiveness. God began a deep healing work in Ebony's heart and today, in place of the hurt, she lives with joy. She no longer approaches life as a victim, but a victor!

God's desire is to bring healing to our hearts and to show us His perspective. He wants to let us know that He was never the source of our pain, but He will be the source for our healing if we allow Him to be.

Day 2: *Emotions Are Not the Enemy*

Yesterday, we discussed how facing hurts from the past can stir up a variety of emotions, but that pouring out our emotions to God is where inner healing begins. Emotions are meant to signal that something is going on inside of us that needs to be addressed or that there is a need to be met. Even God himself has emotions. Jesus experienced the whole range of human emotions during His earthly life.

Read each of the passages below and list the emotion(s) Jesus experienced in each one.

Matthew 14:14

Mark 3:5

Luke 10:21

John 11:35

Mark 10:21

Matthew 26:38–39

The Bible promises, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:15–16). Jesus experienced hurt, pain, and disappointment while He was on the earth. He therefore desires to meet us and heal us from a place of compassion and care because He understands.

Our emotions act as signposts along the road of life. They indicate where we find ourselves in relation to what is happening. For example, if you lose a loved one, the signpost may say “sadness” or “anger.” You are allowed to cry and experience a vast array of emotions in giving voice to what you feel inside.

It is normal to feel hurt, angry, or cheated. When Lazarus died in John 11, Jesus wept. He allowed the signpost called “sadness” to be seen and heard, even though He knew that He would soon resurrect Lazarus and move past that signpost and bring healing. Jesus valued the emotion enough to allow it a moment to be expressed and modeled to us. The damage comes when we hold onto emotions or don't allow them to be expressed. We think shutting them down or ignoring them makes them go away, but instead we stay parked at the signpost and that emotion becomes a desti-

nation. Sadness is not a good place to live, nor is anger or disappointment. Expressing your emotions helps you to acknowledge the truth of what you experienced, or are experiencing, and then you can invite Jesus in to heal you.

Take a couple of moments to ask the Lord what He has to share with you about the emotions connected to any of the unhealed hurts in your life. What is His promise to you regarding your healing process?

Expressing your emotions helps you to acknowledge the truth of what you experienced, or are experiencing, and then you can invite Jesus in to heal you.

Some people bury their hurts deep in a futile attempt to keep those wounds from affecting their present-day life. But hurts just can't be forgotten. Shakespeare famously wrote that the "truth will out." That's true of hurts too. They will express themselves one way or another.


- **How have the hurts you've experienced expressed themselves? For instance, are you easily frustrated or angered around certain people or in certain situations? Are there subjects you just won't think about or places you won't go because the memory is too painful? List anything that comes to mind in the space below and consider recording some of these things in the roots or the branches of the tree on page 17.**


There are many healthy ways to express our emotions and everyone has their own preferences. For you, it might be journaling, taking a walk, poetry, art, or writing a letter to the person that hurt you and tearing it up. Part of this process for you may be discovering ways that help you personally.

If we keep all of our emotions inside, we can't grow close to God, because we are holding back part of our hearts from Him. He is the only one who can bear our hurts and help us to heal. He won't force it. Jesus is very respectful and patient with us. He simply waits for us to invite Him to come and heal our hearts.

What does Jesus tell us to do in Matthew 11:28?

By holding on to your pain, you are denying Him the opportunity to comfort you and take that heavy burden from you. If you don't take the step to come to Him, He can't give you the rest and healing that He has for you.

 **What are God's promises to us in Isaiah 61:1–3? Write them in your own words in the space below.**

 **Do you honestly believe that God can take the hurts of your past and give you beauty, gladness, and praise in their place? Do you feel like you can trust Him with your hurts? Why or why not? Explain.**

What does Psalm 91:4 say that God will do for us?

Vulnerability may seem risky, but with God there is safety. You can relax knowing that God is trustworthy. He will never hurt you. He wants to heal the wounds that have kept you bound. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (NKJV). That healing includes the hurts from our past.

Days 3 and 4: *Facing Our Hurts*

Healing from hurts means going back to where things started. We are going to spend today and tomorrow discussing a process that can be helpful in praying through the hurts of your past. As you pray through hurts, allow God full access to your heart, giving Him the opportunity to bring healing and restoration. As we mentioned on Day 1 of this week, you may also want to consider doing this exercise with a Christian counselor, pastor, or mentor if you feel it is appropriate for your situation.

You will want to have some time and space set aside over these next couple of days that you know won't be interrupted. Have paper and a pen on hand to write down what the Lord reveals to you.

Open with prayer, asking God to be with you and cover your time with Him. Remember that the Holy Spirit should be leading this time. Be sure that you allow Him to bring up the hurt that He desires to address. This will safeguard you from trying to pray through hurts that you may not be ready or equipped to address yet. Process the below statements with the Lord in prayer.

NOTE: This is a very personal journey, so you might feel more comfortable relating to God in a more personal way. Where we have referred to God as “Lord” or “Father,” feel free to change those names to ones that are more personal to you in your relationship with Him.

“Lord, what is one hurt from my past that You desire to heal?” Write what He shows you below. This memory may be something you think of often or that you forgot you had even experienced.

“Lord, some of the things I remember about that memory are . . .”

“I felt . . .”

“Lord, how did this hurt affect me?” (You may want to record some of these things in the roots or the branches of the tree on page 17.)

“Jesus, will You show me where You were or what You thought?”

“Holy Spirit, will You show me if there is a lie (or lies) that I have believed about You or about myself as a result of this hurt?” (You may want to record some of these things in the trunk of the tree on page 17.)

Pray this prayer out loud:

Lord, I choose to break agreement with the lie that .

“Father, will You show me Your truth?”

Lord, I choose to believe the truth that .

(Add this to your index cards from last week!)

**“Holy Spirit, is there anything else You would like me to know or see about this memory?
Anything else You want me to break in prayer or release to You?”**

“Holy Spirit, I release to You any pain and hurt caused by this memory, and I invite You to heal me to the very root of this hurt. What do You have for me in exchange?”

Now that you have been given a process for praying through life's hurts, you can repeat this process for any memory or hurt that the Lord brings to mind in the future.

Day 5: *Moving Forward*

One of the counselors at Mercy has a regular habit that is very healthy. When she feels herself getting uptight, irritable, and easily offended, she takes some time to sit down and pray through her responses. It often starts with a question: “God, I’ve been feeling uptight and easily offended about things recently. Why is that?” Sitting quietly, she often hears the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit pointing out things in her life that are bothering her. She writes them down on a piece of paper, says them out loud, and then forgives people and asks forgiveness of God for her own attitude. She then tears up the paper as a symbol of releasing those hurts and spends time in worship to let God minister to her. That is a simple way you can address your hurts and guard your heart against new wounds.

Healing past hurts is a critical part of maintaining freedom even in difficult circumstances.

Look up 2 Corinthians 5:17, and write it in your own words below. What does it tell us happens when we are in Christ?

*As children of God,
we have a choice in
allowing the newness
of who we are in
Christ to empower us
to address and move
on from the old hurts
of the past.*

As children of God, we have a choice in allowing the newness of who we are in Christ to empower us to address and move on from the old hurts of the past.

- **What could life look like now that you have received healing in this area? For instance, what will you do differently? What will your attitude about the future be like? Will you attempt more and do more? Will you treat people better? List anything that comes to mind.**

Now, ask the Lord to give you a word or a picture that represents what your life will look like on the other side of healing. What did He show you? Write it out below.

You may have been living in emotional survival mode for years, feeling that you had to take care of yourself and deal with your own pain without trusting anyone along the way. God not only listens to your heart and heals your wounds, but He will teach you how to continue to address the hurts that are inevitable this side of Heaven. He is trustworthy. He will relieve you of your burdens as you lay them down at the feet of Jesus. Hold tightly to the Bible's promises.

- **Write Psalm 18:2 in the space below.**

Don't spend one more day letting your past hurts lead the way. Face those hurts, recognize God's faithfulness in your past and present, and move ahead with confidence.

Key 3

When I acknowledge the hurts I have experienced
and invite the Lord to give me His perspective,
I allow God to heal me and bring new levels
of freedom and peace.



Reflect on all the keys you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life
or any valuable insights you have received.
And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 4

Choosing to Forgive

Heather's Story

I remember the day the journey of true forgiveness started. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to start many times before, but I just couldn't get to the place of feeling "ready" enough. It was one of my biggest frustrations—the tension between wanting to forgive in the hope of greater freedom and not feeling ready enough to let go and risk being hurt or disappointed again. My anger and pain over what had happened to me had become a comfort; it reminded me that what happened was real, and those feelings drove me to be strong, to overcome, and to protect myself from harm.

Years later, when I could no longer be satisfied with the stalemate I had found myself in, I applied for the Mercy program. It was within the walls of this beautiful place that I finally came face to face with the truth about forgiveness. As I sat in a group counseling session, I heard the group leader speak these words: "Forgiveness is not a feeling, it's a choice."

"What!?" the word had escaped my lips before I even realized it, and the group leader looked me in the eyes and repeated her statement. It was a simple yet profound truth; so simple I needed to hear it twice! Yet while it was simple, it was not easy. I realized in that moment that I held the key to my own freedom, and in order to unlock my pain, I would need to face it. The truth was that I might never come to the point of feeling ready. Forgiveness was a simple, yet costly choice, and I had to trust that the feelings would follow that choice.

I was beginning to realize that if I was going to choose to forgive, I needed to acknowledge what I was forgiving. My heart was beating in my chest; as memories arose, my fists were clenched, but my mind was made up. I spoke each word out loud as testimony to God and to myself of the decision I was making, and I released forgiveness to my abuser through gritted teeth. I chose to continue to forgive my abuser, and all those who had hurt me, until my life overflowed with forgiveness. The next day, I returned to that same spot, and I released forgiveness again and the next day and the next and the next. After some time, I noticed a difference in my prayers and in my countenance. Where previously I had forced each word from my mouth, now my words flowed easily, and I found myself releasing not only forgiveness to my abuser, but compassion and a prayer for his salvation! This was not an attempt to feel healed; this was an overflow of healing ushered in through my choice to forgive.

Day 1: The Power of Forgiveness

Have you ever considered the oyster? Oysters are the living organisms responsible for producing pearls. Oysters live in harsh terrain—in the ocean or in rivers where all sorts of dangers lurk. Grains of sand, parasites, or sharp pieces of shell can find their way past the oyster’s hard outer shell and into the fleshy, soft tissue of the living organism. When this happens, the oyster has a brilliant way of responding to the intrusion: it produces something called nacre (nā’kər).

Nacre is sometimes known as “mother of pearl” in reference to the fact that the very substance of a pearl is made up of layer upon layer of nacre. So oysters can turn an obstruction, an irritant, and a violation into a precious jewel by secreting this substance and covering the irritant, rounding off its sharp edges, until it can no longer cause damage.

Sadly, only about 50% of oysters that have an irritant or obstruction lodged inside of them produce a pearl. When an oyster fails to produce nacre, it risks everything. The obstruction, whether it’s a grain of sand or a small piece of broken shell, will often have sharp edges, so it will begin to cut away and erode the soft tissue—the living part of the oyster. Or if it’s a parasite that enters, it will gradually gnaw away at the inside of the oyster until there is nothing left. It will slowly erode and eventually become nothing but an empty shell. You may know someone like that: an empty shell.

Much like the oyster, God has created us with the spiritual equivalent of nacre. We have an inner ability to respond to pain, hurt, offense, trauma, and abuse that will cause these violations to halt their destructive path on the inside of us; it’s called forgiveness. The oyster’s strategy of defending itself against something that has lodged within its core is probably one of the clearest metaphors regarding forgiveness.

*We may not be able
to choose what
happens to us,
but we can choose
how we will respond.*

We all live in an environment where the same grains of sand that can kill an oyster can make their way inside of us and begin to cause damage. For us, those grains of sand can be offense, neglect, betrayal, abuse, disappointment, sin, lies . . . the list goes on. The fact is that life can be harsh, and it’s inevitable that we will suffer some degree of hurt and pain along the way. But the level of damage we sustain is not dependent on

the severity of the offense; it’s dependent on our response to it. We may not be able to choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we will respond.

An oyster can be killed by something as small as one piece of sand or as large as a parasite. Either way, the end result is death on the inside. The life-saving response is nacre; and one of the most vital nacre responses we can have is forgiveness. To choose not to forgive is to choose to allow bitterness and resentment to slowly kill you from the inside out. If you choose to forgive, you choose life, freedom, and hope.

Look up the following scriptures. What do they tell us?

Matthew 5:44

Luke 6:37

Romans 12:17

Colossians 3:13

Forgiveness is part of God's heart toward us. It's in His nature to forgive. His desire, in fact, His commandment, is that we also forgive—not because He wants to make our lives difficult, but because He knows that forgiveness is a significant key to our walking in wholeness and freedom. If the idea of forgiving those who have hurt you is overwhelming right now, don't be discouraged! We are going to spend this week unpacking some of the myths of forgiveness and allowing the Lord to speak and minister to our hearts in regards to this powerful, but sometimes challenging, key to freedom.

Day 2: *Processing Your Disappointments*

One of the basic deceptions and most effective traps of the enemy is to cause people to confuse his work with God's will. The enemy deceives people into thinking God is the author of evil things that happen. It is one of the enemy's deadliest lies against the children of God because if you think God is the source of your pain, He cannot be the resource for your healing.

Deep down, many people believe God has treated them or someone they love in a neglectful or unfair way. They may have placed expectations on God and how He would (or should) act or intervene in a situation, and He did not act in the way that they wanted or expected. As a result, one of the biggest hang-ups many people often have as they learn to walk in freedom is their offense toward God.

When people falsely believe that God hurt them, it creates a huge wedge in their relationship with Him. Can you imagine loving, trusting, and worshipping a God who planned and caused your deepest pain? When people who have been hurt hear that God has a plan for their lives, they often say, "If God's plan looks like what I've experienced, I don't want anything to do with Him."

If this is something you're currently struggling with, we want to give you full permission to process your anger and hurt with the Lord. You may have been taught that God is sovereign and should not be questioned. You may simply feel like

it's disrespectful or dishonoring to be angry at God. You may even fear that He will be angry about your anger, or you may simply feel guilty for doubting His goodness or faithfulness in the first place.

It's so important to know that God can handle your questions. You have permission to be angry about what has happened to you. You have permission to ask the hard questions. God already knows what is happening in your heart and mind, but when you are willing to reveal yourself completely to Him, He is

You have permission to ask the hard questions.

faithful to reveal Himself to you. How amazing is it that God has seen all our humanity and our darkest emotions toward Him, but has not distanced Himself from us?

If left unaddressed, our anger can turn into bitterness, hatred, mistrust, doubt, unbelief, and even a loss of faith completely. If you have anger or disappointment in your heart toward Him, it's vital to acknowledge it and process it with Him. Otherwise, there will always be a significant block in your connection with Him.

And once it's all out, in exchange for the hurt, disappointment, or resentment you have felt toward God, you will be positioned to hear what He has to say about those experiences and hurts. Ultimately we must come to Him in reverence, recognizing He is the potter and we are the clay. (Isaiah 64:8) Our disappointment should lead us to a posture of reverence as we recognize we don't understand everything He allows and how He's working it for good.

Do you have a sense of disappointment or anger toward God? If so, take some time to pour out your pain and heartache to Him. Get gut-level honest about your anger, questions, and doubts. He is ready and waiting with open arms to hear what you have to say.

People often get caught up in the why: "Why did this happen to me? Why did God allow it?" While we rarely receive answers to all of our questions, the answer is ultimately one of the following:

1. Someone did evil to you.
2. You made an unwise choice that had painful consequences, or
3. Pain and heartache simply happened because we live in a fallen world.

The good news is that God did not abandon us to this heartache. Through Jesus Christ and the power of forgiveness, we are able to find freedom and healing from the pain we've experienced.

There are ultimately two plans for your life. God has a plan for you, and the enemy has a plan for you. And they couldn't be more opposed to one another.


According to John 10:10, what is God’s plan for you? What is the enemy’s plan?


Let’s take a moment to officially shut this door of deception. Say this out loud:

God never authors evil.

The enemy never authors good.

This means that God is not the author of your pain. He is the author of your deliverance and healing.

 **Ask God to speak back to you about any anger or disappointment that you’ve been holding toward Him. Ask Him to show you His perspective on the pain that you’ve experienced.**

 **Now, ask the Lord to give you a word or a picture that represents what life will look like on the other side of healing and freedom from your anger. Record what He shows you below.**

God's love for you is so great that He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for your sins and take the pain away from you. His heart was broken, so yours could be healed. Now He wants to give back to you everything the enemy has stolen.

Close today by praying and surrendering the hurt and disappointment that you have held against God. Confess how you have placed expectations on Him and judged Him for not meeting them. Give yourself permission to be open to His goodness.

Day 3: *The Strength to Forgive Ourselves*

Before we can even talk about how to forgive others, we must understand the depth to which God has forgiven us! The Bible tells us that God keeps no record of your wrongs. Hebrews 8:12 says, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." All He asks is that you recognize your sin, confess to Him, and commit to turn from that sin. It's so difficult for our minds to comprehend that He keeps no record of sins, but it's true!


What does Psalm 103:12 tell us?

The most amazing thing happened the day Jesus died on the cross: God's judgment toward all of the sins you have ever committed and all of the sins you will ever commit were placed on Jesus. We have to start believing we are who God says we are when we give our lives to Him. He tells us that in Christ, we are forgiven, free, and pure!


What thoughts or emotions come up for you when you think about the fact that God has totally forgiven your sins and rebellion against Him? Is it difficult for you to truly believe? If so, why?

Our ability to fully forgive is fueled and strengthened by our knowledge of the depth to which we have been forgiven ourselves. Some of us may be able to accept and believe the fact that God has forgiven us, but we have a hard time forgiving ourselves for things we've done. We may feel as if we are more in control and even experience a sense of safety by remaining angry with ourselves, but that control is not real and erodes quickly. We must learn to not only receive grace from God but also extend that grace to ourselves.

Our ability to fully forgive is fueled and strengthened by our knowledge of the depth to which we have been forgiven ourselves.

 **Why do you think the enemy wants to keep us from forgiving ourselves?**

We may feel exposed and vulnerable in the process of forgiving ourselves and laying our past before God, but this is the time to rely even more on the Lord's comfort and strength. God sent His only Son to this world to die so that we could be free from sin. When we do not forgive ourselves, we are essentially saying that Jesus' death on the cross is not enough for us. Forgiving yourself is no easy task, but the freedom that follows is immeasurable. Trust Him with those things you feel so ashamed about. The enemy cannot make unclean what God has made clean, so let go of the shame and receive what God has done!

 **Ask, "God, is there an area where I have not fully forgiven myself? If so, what is it?" Write what He shows you below.**

 Ask, “Jesus, what did You see or think about me then? What do You say about me now?”*

Then, make the decision to fully let it go by praying this prayer:

Father, I ask you to forgive me and cleanse me for _____ . Because You have forgiven me, I now also choose to fully forgive myself and surrender this area of my life to You. I release any self-hatred and receive Your forgiveness and cleansing, in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Day 4: Obstacles to Forgiveness

God’s forgiveness toward us is intertwined with our forgiveness of others. This is why without forgiveness, true freedom is impossible to attain. In order for us to receive God’s forgiveness, we must forgive others. It’s the only way to live free of the hurt of the past and the bitterness and resentment that comes in when we do not forgive.

Before we discuss forgiving others, let’s look at some of the obstacles that people often face in relation to forgiveness:

“If I forgive, I am saying that what happened was okay.”

Sometimes, we resist forgiveness because it can feel as if we are saying that what happened to us was okay. But forgiveness does not place a stamp of approval on the offense, and in truth, forgiveness is not about those who have hurt you; it’s about you. As we acknowledge unforgiveness and look at the full impact of our hurt, we can work through the painful memories and reach a place of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the mechanism whereby we say, “What you did is not okay, but the judgment of your behavior belongs to God, not to me.” In making this choice, we hand over the desire for revenge to the Lord, and we trust Him to be the God of Justice in our situation.

 What is your response to God being your vindicator? Do you truly trust God to bring justice?

*Freedom Prayer Basic Training Manual, freedomprayer.org

It's also important to note that while forgiveness is not earned, trust is. We are not expected to blindly trust someone who has hurt us. That is both naïve and irresponsible! You wouldn't hand a key to your house over to a thief. As such, forgiving a wrong does not mean extending the person an invitation to hurt you again.

Forgiveness isn't the same as reconciliation. If you are reconciled with someone, it means that you come back into relationship and are reunited with them. Yes, forgiveness may be the start of reconciliation, but there are times when reconciliation is not possible or wise. It's not necessary to seek reconciliation when the other person is unrepentant, unchanging, and/or unsafe for you. You can still release forgiveness toward those who have hurt you while also putting up healthy boundaries in your life.

“I will never be able to forget what happened, so I can't forgive it.”

God asks us to forgive, not forget. Even if we could, it wouldn't be wise to erase from our memory all the wrongs done to us and by us. If we did, we would never learn from our experiences and would be caught in a perpetual cycle of reliving the same situations, fears, disappointments, and abuse. However, what can be healed—and is, in fact, one of the things that forgiveness releases—is the damaging effect of the raw emotions associated with the events. As we commit to releasing the nacre of forgiveness, the sharp edges of that violation or offense are covered to the point where they can cause no more damage, and the pain caused by those events can be healed.

Write Genesis 50:20 in the space below.

When we walk in obedience, God has a way of bringing good out of the most difficult and hurtful situations. Forgiveness is often a part of that obedience. It takes the sting out of the painful memory and turns into good what the enemy meant for evil.

“I don't feel like forgiving.”

At the beginning of this week, Heather shared that her process of forgiveness started with a choice, not a feeling. Forgiveness rarely comes from feelings. In fact, our feelings will often work against us during the process of forgiveness. If we wait until we feel like forgiving, it may never happen. Forgiveness is a choice that comes from a decision to walk in obedience to what the Word of God requires of us.

One of the best ways to make forgiving easier is to remind ourselves that people are not our enemy. Satan is the enemy. People often act in ignorance or plain, blind selfishness. The people who hurt you were motivated and urged on by the enemy, sometimes against their better judgment and sometimes in blindness to the consequences.

If we wait until we feel like forgiving, it may never happen. Forgiveness is a choice.


However, as you continually make the choice to forgive, the Lord will honor your obedience, and your feelings will start to change over time. Considering the level at which you may have been hurt, forgiveness may sound crazy to you right now, but we have seen time and time again that making the daily choice to forgive eventually leads to a heart shift and the feelings follow the choice. Your heart is no longer stuck in the hurt and is actually healed by your choice to forgive. The Lord doesn't command us to forgive just to make our lives difficult. He knows that walking the hard road of forgiveness is the only way for our hearts to arrive at a place of healing and wholeness.

“Withholding forgiveness is a way to punish those who hurt me.”

As we discussed on Day 1 of this week, forgiveness is a gift that God has given to us that will halt the destructive path of pain, hurt, and offense inside of us. If we choose not to forgive, the bitterness and resentment we hold toward those who hurt us will poison us from the inside out. Ironically, the people who hurt us have probably long since forgotten about the situation or perhaps never knew they caused hurt in the first place. We do not punish those who hurt us by withholding forgiveness; instead, we are the ones who suffer.

“I can't forgive until the person who hurt me apologizes.”

We must remember that forgiving someone is an act of obedience, whether the other person has asked for your forgiveness or not. When the individual that hurt us shows no remorse and seems to have moved on with their life, it can be difficult to let an offense or hurt go. But as you have learned by now, forgiveness is not an emotional decision and may not even “feel” fair. At the end of the day, your healing and freedom cannot depend on someone else doing the right thing. If we wait for an apology to forgive, we may wait forever, and in the meantime, our lives are the ones being affected by unforgiveness, not the people who have hurt us. Whether or not we have received an apology, the Lord is faithful to empower us to do what He has asked of us.

 **Ask, “Holy Spirit, have I been hindered in the area of forgiveness by any of the obstacles that were discussed today? If so, how? If not, are there any other things hindering my choice to forgive those who hurt me? What would You like me to do about that?” Write out what He reveals to you below.**

Day 5: *Forgiving Those Who Hurt You*

By now, you have hopefully recognized that forgiveness is serious stuff. Forgiveness is literally the power to overcome what the enemy meant for harm. He wants the ripple effect of hurt and abuse to go on for generations. You may have heard the saying, “Hurt people hurt people.” That is the enemy’s design. But God has put it within our grasp to stop the enemy’s plan by forgiving. Just as we are saved by faith and not feelings, we are also empowered to forgive by faith and not feelings. We can forgive without even wanting to! In fact, that’s exactly how it works—by choice.


Today we will spend some time with God talking about a specific person who hurt us. As you spend this time in prayer, we encourage you to remember that you can be honest with God. He can carry the weight of it. You may also want to consider doing this exercise with a Christian counselor, pastor, or mentor if you feel it is appropriate for your situation.

Many people wonder what they are supposed to do when they want to forgive someone but are still angry. Yelling can be a form of prayer! God is not afraid of volume. Your words and tone might frighten you, but they will not frighten Him. He knows those things are inside of you already, and it’s a lot better to get them out than to let them continue to fester. If you have a sincere desire to connect with God and are not just indulging your bitterness and making the problem worse, then airing your emotions to Him can move you toward freedom and a stronger relationship with Him.

Ask the Lord to show you someone who has hurt you and the specific offense. What happened? How did it make you feel? It is important to count the debt because the debt *matters*. Write down any thoughts and feelings you might have about that person and the offense.

 **What is the need that you wanted this person to fill that he/she failed to meet?***

*Freedom Tools, Reese and Barnett

 Ask, “Father, will You show me how You can meet this need?” Record what He shows you below.*

“Holy Spirit, will You show me if there is a lie (or lies) that I have believed about You or about myself as a result of this hurt?” (You may want to record some of these things in the trunk of the tree on page 17.)

Pray this prayer out loud:

Lord, I choose to break agreement with the lie that .

“Father, will You show me Your truth?”

Lord, I choose to believe the truth that .

(Add this to your index cards from Key 2!)

*Freedom Tools, Reese and Barnett

Now take a moment to say a prayer of forgiveness for this person. You may choose to use the prayer below, but the choice and the act of forgiveness is more important than the words you use to do it.

PRAYER:

Father, I come before You now, and I ask that You would help me to forgive. Help me to be free from what has happened to me, as well as the pain and thoughts that come with this hurt. Lord, I pray that You would make a way where there seems to be no way. I choose to forgive for _____ and how that made me feel _____. (List the name of the person you need to forgive and what you are forgiving them for.) I release forgiveness in the Name of Jesus. Lord, forgive me for taking Your role and judging them and their motives. I declare that You are the only righteous Judge. I rely on You, Father, to meet the needs that they failed to meet. I release them from their debt to me and place them in Your hands. I declare that this act of my will and obedience will produce in me a heart that is free and wounds that are healed. In the Name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

When you forgive, you do what Jesus did and gain ultimate freedom. As you do so, your feelings may be pulling you in the opposite direction. You have the opportunity to choose obedience over your emotions. Ultimately, the power to forgive is not of ourselves. It is God working in us as we choose to walk in His truth, often in spite of our feelings.

Forgiveness opens the door to restoration and freedom for you and those around you. The way you handle unfairness can be a powerful example for others to follow. It can literally transform the lives of those around you.

Remember that forgiveness is not something you do just to be free from your past; forgiveness is a way of life. People will hurt and upset you, overlook you, and let you down. You will make mistakes and let others down too, but forgiveness is the nacre that flows through your life to keep each of those painful moments from being the start of a deeper root. So while forgiving the “big” things is important, it’s also the day-to-day forgiveness that protects our hearts.

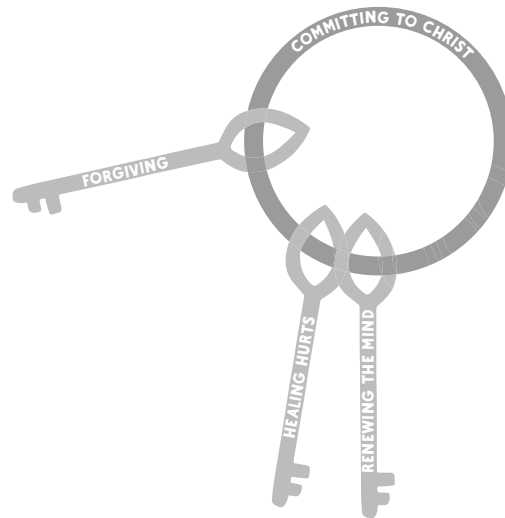
*Ultimately,
the power to forgive
is not of ourselves.
It is God working in us
as we choose to walk
in His truth, often in
spite of our feelings.*

Let’s close this week by reviewing the powerful words of Romans 12:17–21. Read this passage, and then write out verse 21 in the space below.

The only way to overcome evil is with good. The only way to overcome hatred and hurt is with love. Ultimately, it is only after we recognize that we have been forgiven much that we will have what we need to love much (Luke 7:47). And living in love is what living in freedom is all about.

Key 4

Forgiveness is a vital key to living in freedom.
It is a choice of obedience, not a feeling,
but my feelings will follow when I make
the sincere commitment to forgive.



Reflect on all the keys you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 5

Breaking Generational Patterns

Richard's Story

At 21, I married a wonderful woman with whom I could build a life and family. We were young, and as marriage tends to do, it turned the spotlight on our character flaws and issues. I found myself tripping over the same issues again and again in my life. Life was a mini rollercoaster of emotion, and I did not seem to be in charge of the pace. It became obvious that I was angry pretty much all of the time. I did not like the control that this emotion had over my actions and me, but I didn't know what to do with it.

As things got worse, I was determined to find help because I have always been a firm believer that "what you don't deal with, your kids will have to deal with." My wife had suggested that I would benefit from some ministry and some time away to pray through situations that had left me wounded. I didn't want to go. I didn't feel like I was that messed up. But after I thrashed it out with God, I booked myself a weeklong ministry retreat two hundred miles from home. I did not want my children to carry the same weight and burdens that I did, so the answer was simple: swallow my pride and start the journey to become what God had called me to be, a great husband and great father.

During my time at the retreat, the leaders asked questions about my father, his father, and his father before him. They were finding where the wounds in our family were first made, so they could be healed. My grandfather had made some choices in his life that allowed a lot of hurt and trauma into our family. The effects of that trauma were passed on to my father. And that was passed on to me. My father did not intend for this to happen, but a wounded man will wound others. I could see clearly how that pattern had been affecting me for years.

God helped me to identify the patterns that were active in my life, and He showed me the truth of His Word, so I could start to live free. I could see so clearly where my issues had come from, and how I had been influenced by what had been modeled to me. Over the course of the next few days, those specific patterns were prayed through and broken. Healing came, and for the first time, I felt I had an opportunity to rewrite history.

On the way home, I remember my wife saying that I looked visibly different and that my face had changed. I felt healed in so many areas. I no longer felt angry or trapped. But it was still a process. Though I had prayed and specifically broken the relevant generational patterns, I now had to learn a new way of approaching life. What I noticed was that where I used to find myself behaving in a certain way, breaking those patterns created room for me to think and to hear the voice of God before I acted. Now I was able to make a choice for myself, rather than be subject to a pattern of behavior. I never could have guessed how incredibly necessary and powerful breaking generational patterns would be for my family and for me.

Day 1: *Your New Bloodline*

Have you ever heard of the saying: “Monkey see, monkey do?” It’s a way of describing the natural cycle of a generational pattern—the fact that we are predisposed to becoming what has been modeled to us. This is not just a phenomenon in people, but in animals as well.

There’s a story about a dog that worked in the canine unit of the police force. Her job was to chase down perpetrators and assist the police in arrests. She was the fastest dog in the force, until disaster struck one night. She was chasing a criminal when he ran out onto the road, and as she followed, she was hit by a truck and almost killed. They would have put her down out of kindness, but they discovered at the vet’s office that she was carrying a litter of puppies. So they committed to rehabilitating her for the sake of her puppies. She was unable to walk properly due to her injuries—taking two steps with her front paws and dragging her back legs along behind.

When her puppies were born, her caregivers were delighted to discover that each one was fully mobile and healthy despite the trauma their mother had suffered. However, within weeks of their birth, the caregivers found a strange thing happening. The puppies, who were born perfectly able to walk, began to copy their mother. Two steps, drag. Two steps, drag. The influence of their mother’s injury was so strong that it began to override their own healthy bodies and ability. The mother wouldn’t have wanted that for her puppies, but due to her own limitations, she was unable to model anything else. In the end, the puppies had to be shown by other dogs how to walk so that they would not be limited by an injury that wasn’t their own.


This story perfectly illustrates what can happen to us when we are caught in a generational pattern cycle. Let’s say, for example, that you were raised in a household where the pressures of life and stress were dealt with by drinking alcohol. The very first time you experience your own stress and pressure in life, you may be tempted to turn to the same (or similar) coping mechanism that was modeled to you. Without realizing it, we typically adopt our parents’ and grandparents’ approach to life—both the positive and negative traits. We are also influenced by the culture around us, the society in which we live, and the belief system it holds. It’s also important to add that generational patterns apply to everyone—even if you do not know your biological family or have no biological children of your own.

The good news is that Jesus’ perfect human life made possible a “second birth.” Through His blood, a new bloodline was created that we can enter when we choose to accept the salvation that He paid for on the cross.

The power to change is in your spiritual bloodline. In John 3:5–6, Jesus tells a man named Nicodemus, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” When we come to Christ, we are literally born again by the Spirit. This is not just a nice metaphor or word picture. It is an actual reality. It takes place in the spirit, meaning we cannot see it, but it is more powerful than our earthly bloodline.

The power to change is in your spiritual bloodline.

We enter into the family of God through the bloodline of Jesus Christ. His blood is eternal, much stronger than the blood of our earthly families, and has the power to break every negative tendency that comes down to us by genetics or habit. Some of our deepest issues can be rooted in behavioral patterns we didn’t create. However, we can control our choices, and as we choose to commit to Christ and be “born again,” we literally step into a new bloodline!


 **Read Galatians 4:4–7. What does it tell you about your position in God’s family? Write your thoughts in the space below.**

This scripture promises that once we are born again, we become children of God. We enter His bloodline and become coheirs with Christ. This is the transaction in the spirit that positions us to break the generational patterns that come from our family bloodline and then move forward in freedom.

In Christ, the power of generational patterns is broken. Freedom comes through the power of Christ at work in us now because of our inheritance in Him. We are assured in 1 John 4:4 that, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world,” (NKJV) and that goes for our family patterns as well.

It’s amazing to learn that God has given us the power to identify and reject negative patterns in our family’s history and establish new patterns that bring blessing to our future and to the futures of those we influence. We exercise this power when we actively surrender negative generational patterns to God and work to lay a new foundation in Christ.

What thoughts or emotions come to mind as you have learned that you have a new family bloodline in Christ? What does this mean for you and the generations to come after you?

 **Freedom is part of your inheritance from being in the bloodline of Jesus. Can you think of other things that are part of your inheritance as part of the family of God?**

Day 2: Identifying Positive Patterns

Whether we like them or not, all of us are affected by the patterns of living and thinking that are passed down to us. These family patterns can be positive or negative, life-giving or life-destroying. Some family traits give us a great vision for our future. Some threaten to control our lives and even ruin them. Some patterns may be genetic and others behavioral.

Today we are going to discuss the positive generational patterns that are present for each of us. While emphasis is usually placed on the negative areas we need to address in order to overcome, there is power in recognizing the positive and healthy patterns that have been passed to us as well.

Positive generational patterns can include things such as the following:

- Wisdom
- Ability to show affection
- Fidelity
- Generosity
- Unconditional love
- Strong work ethic
- Righteous living
- Serving others
- Strong commitment to the Lord
- Loyalty
- Self-control

Every individual experiences generational patterns in a different way. Some struggle to identify negative patterns within their family, and others may experience the opposite—a struggle to find anything good or healthy within theirs.

For example, Jemma came from a very destructive family line where addiction, abuse, betrayal, and sexual sin were rampant in every generation. Jemma had her own struggles as well, but after meeting and accepting Jesus into her life, she began to experience new levels of freedom from the extensive patterns that were passed down to her from her family. During her healing process, Jemma learned about generational patterns. As you can imagine, she had no difficulty identifying a list of the negative patterns that needed to be addressed. In fact, looking at the list of negative and broken patterns was overwhelming to her. Jemma found herself asking the Lord, “Is there anything *good* from my family line? Anything at all?” At that moment, the Lord reminded Jemma of how as a child, she often saw her grandmother on her knees. The Lord showed Jemma that her grandmother had prayed for her and many of her family members—which eventually led Jemma to accept Jesus and start on a new path of freedom and wholeness. This revelation was significant for Jemma and allowed her to continue moving forward in her healing process, knowing that while her family line held a lot of difficulty and brokenness, it also held blessing as well.

We must intentionally create space to identify the positive.

This story may or may not resonate with you personally, but it’s important to point out that the Lord is able to help us find positive patterns that exist in our family lines, even if it is difficult for us. We must intentionally create space to identify the positive. It positions us to walk in balance in our understanding of the generational patterns in our family and gives us the choice to maintain and nourish the positive for ourselves and those we influence.

- **Ask the Lord to reveal to you the positive patterns that exist in your family. For some of you, it may be a list; for others it may be just one. Be honest and talk with Him through any difficulty you may be experiencing in recognizing the positive patterns in your family.**

- **How can you partner with God to make these generational blessings even more powerful in your life?**

Now spend some time thanking Him for those positive patterns. Write anything else that He shows you in the space below.

Day 3: Identifying Negative Patterns

Having identified and addressed the positive patterns in our family line, our focus today and tomorrow will be on the negative patterns that have been passed down—how to identify and address them.

Each family establishes its own patterns over generations, and there is no exhaustive list. However, negative generational patterns can include things such as the following:


- Arrogance
- Depression
- A hot temper
- Cynicism
- Sense of entitlement
- Poverty mentality
- Unhealthy relationship with food
- Adultery/divorce
- Emotional instability or disconnect from emotions
- Difficulty having close relationships
- Substance abuse
- Independence
- Lack of expression of love or affection
- Different forms of abuse


The first step to breaking negative generational patterns is to actually recognize the patterns that were handed down to us through our family bloodline. Many people we have worked with have been amazed by how these patterns explain their own family history and why they have fallen into the same cycles of sin that previous family members have suffered. The generational patterns in their lives can be a major source of their bondage, but as many have experienced, once they break and replace destructive generational patterns, they find the old negative patterns can turn into some of their greatest generational blessings.


If we don't clearly identify the negative patterns in our families, we will never address them and will miss the opportunity to experience victory over them.

For example, Krissy grew up in a family that was not emotionally connected or affectionate, so Krissy carried this behavioral pattern without fully recognizing its impact until later in life. As Krissy matured and grew, she started to recognize that she was not physically affectionate and that she struggled for words to express her care for others. However, she was not faced with the true detriment of this pattern until she got married and had a family. At that point, Krissy's relationship with her husband and children started to be seriously affected by her inability to show or communicate her true love and care.

If we don't clearly identify the negative patterns in our families, we will never address them and will miss the opportunity to experience victory over them.

-  **With this in mind, ask the Lord to reveal one negative pattern from your family line. Keep in mind that families are made up in many different ways. You may want to consider an extended family member who has had a strong influence in your life. If you have been adopted, you may want to reflect on a pattern in your adoptive family. Write what He reveals to you below.**

-  **How has this pattern affected you? Consider the tree diagram, and, perhaps, look back to your tree on page 17 to see if any of the behaviors/belief system/root causes are connected to the generational pattern you've identified.**

-  **How has this pattern affected others in your family?**

Have you noticed the negative pattern appearing in your own life? If so, what will it be like to break free from that pattern?

All families have negative patterns that are passed down. After you identify a negative generational pattern in your family, the next step is to address it in prayer and then in your choices. We will discuss this more tomorrow.

Day 4: Taking Authority Over Your Family Line

Once you see specific patterns in your family, you can start exercising the authority and power of choice that flows from your spiritual bloodline as a son or daughter of God. You can stand in the authority He has given you and choose to break the patterns that He reveals. In doing so, you position your children, both natural and spiritual, to experience a different level of freedom in the areas that you chose to battle.

In the Bible, King David fought many wars on every border of his nation. He spent his life destroying Israel's enemies and bringing God's rule and reign into the region. At the end of his life, he was able to hand a kingdom at peace to his son, Solomon. As a result of his father's brave and relentless warrior spirit, King Solomon never had to fight a war. He was handed an inheritance of peace. King Solomon had his own issues to deal with, but he never had to go into battle and defend his territory, because his father had fought those battles for him.

We are able to fight specific battles on behalf of those who come after us.

In the same way, we are able to fight specific battles on behalf of those who come after us. We can be the ones who establish a new pattern of behavior and a new approach to life through Christ.

Let's look back to Krissy's story from yesterday. Krissy inherited many patterns from the emotionally disconnected environment in which she grew up. Those patterns began to significantly impact her life and relationships. In order to break these patterns of behavior and establish new ones, Krissy took authority over the patterns by first breaking them in prayer, and followed this up with practical ways to work out her choice to be free from the old patterns.

This included some counseling, learning to label and express her emotions, stepping out and choosing to show more affection, and renewing her mind to the Word. These choices led to the complete breaking of that pattern from Krissy's life, which then created a different environment for her children—one of emotional health and affection. Krissy's children were free from facing that same battle as they grew and matured themselves.

Are you beginning to see how this works? Just like the other keys we have discussed, freedom isn't found in a one-time prayer. Freedom is found in partnering our prayers and our choices to completely overcome.

Write Deuteronomy 30:19 in your own words below. How does this apply to our discussion on breaking negative generational patterns?

- **Have you chosen “death” or “life” in the past? What choices can you make now to change the negative generational patterns in your family and make choices that lead to life? If you’re unsure, ask the Lord to speak to you about this. Write what He shows you below.**

As we wrap up today, let’s stand in our authority and break the negative generational pattern that the Lord revealed to you yesterday. As you may have noticed by now, any time we break something in prayer (a lie, pattern, etc.), we always replace it with something else (truth, a blessing, etc.). Today, we will do the same thing. As you choose to break a negative generational pattern from your family line, you also have the opportunity to ask the Lord to replace it with a generational blessing!

PRAYER:

Lord, thank You for the good things that my family has given to me, but thank You also for revealing to me a negative generational pattern that has existed in my family line. Right now, I confess this pattern as the sin that it is and ask for Your forgiveness over me and on behalf of my family for entering into it. In the Name of Jesus, I choose to break the negative pattern of _____, and I ask You to show me the generational blessing with which You wish to replace it. Thank You for breaking me free and pouring out Your blessings and love into my life. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Write down the generational blessing the Lord showed to you.

- **Ask the Lord, “Father, now that I have broken this pattern in prayer, what are my next steps? How do I practically “step into the battle” in this area in order to see the victory for myself and my children?” Write what He reveals to you below.**

Day 5: *Freedom for Future Generations*


The freedom available to us as sons and daughters of God is amazing! We are able to not only address and break destructive patterns in our own lives, but also then position the next generation for freedom from those same battles. Of all the keys we discuss in this study, Breaking Generational Patterns is the one that most focuses on the legacy we will leave. This key is always about the next generation, as well as our own personal story.

- **What do the following verses say about our responsibility to future generations?**

Deuteronomy 4:9

Psalm 22:30–31

Have you thought recently about the legacy you desire to leave? Whether you have biological children or not, you will leave a legacy for others from the choices you make and the life that you live. It's significant that we have the choice every day to live in light of the long view and make decisions regarding our legacy.

 **What legacy do you want to pass on to the generations after you? How do you hope they describe you and your influence on them?**

We hope and pray that while you have worked through this study, you have made choices that will build a beautiful legacy for others. The process is typically never easy, but it always bears good fruit in our lives. Sometimes in that process, though, we need to flip our perspective on our own pain. Our area of struggle can become our area of greatest power and influence in God. Instead of struggling with the difficult details of our history, what if we chose to thank God that we get the opportunity to stand in the gap and turn those patterns around?

Take a couple of moments to thank God for the struggle and the process in your life. Praise Him for His faithfulness and the many ways that He has provided and cared for you. Honor Him for the goodness that is a part of your life and the legacy that is in His heart for you. Feel free to write down anything that comes to mind in the space below.

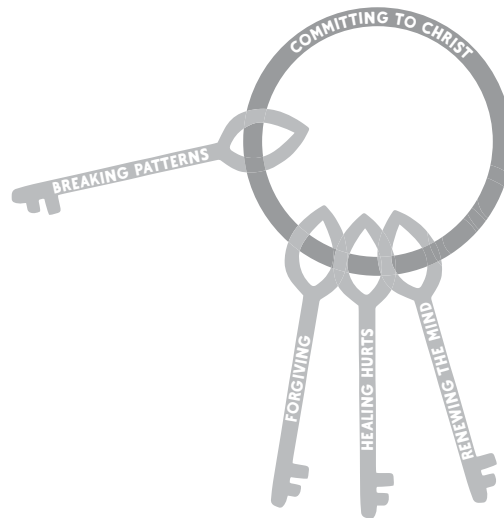
As you hopefully have learned by now, what you plan and purpose in your heart will affect the generations that follow you. It's not all about here and now; it's also about then and them. Your choice to pursue freedom today will affect other people's tomorrows. Your choice to courageously break old patterns and go after that vision of freedom will go far beyond you.

*Your choice to pursue
freedom today
will affect other
people's tomorrows.*

- **As we wrap up our discussion on generational patterns and legacy, ask the Lord to show you what you can begin doing today to build the legacy you desire to leave. Record what He shows you below.**

Key 5

Breaking generational patterns comes by identifying and taking authority over them based on my authority as a follower of Jesus.



Reflect on all the keys you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 6

Using Your Authority in Christ

Nancy's Story

As a new Christian, I loved life. I felt such freedom in the Lord. I had new friends, new hopes, and a new peace. It came as a total shock when I fell into an eating disorder that turned the next five years of my life into a living hell.

It started one night at my pastor's house. He and his wife graciously invited me over to dinner and served rich Southern foods—fried chicken, biscuits and gravy, and sumptuous desserts. Because the food was so good, I ate a lot that night. Also, I had committed to clean the pastor's house while he and his wife were at a meeting. They left after dinner, and I started cleaning, but my stomach grew increasingly nauseated. Then it hit me: the only way to feel better, so I could finish cleaning, was to make myself throw up. I wasn't even thinking about my weight. I was just determined to keep my commitment. At some point after I had induced vomiting, I heard a voice in my head make a practical suggestion. It said, "You can do that all the time, and you will never, ever have to worry about your weight. You can eat whatever you want—no limits. Just do this every day."

I didn't know it was the voice of the enemy. I was a new Christian and didn't know how to recognize his voice. The suggestion stuck in my mind, and I pondered it and finally agreed with it. In that moment of agreement, I walked directly into a mental and emotional prison. For the next five years, I binged and purged several times a week. It was the worst bondage I have ever experienced. I cried out to God, repented, and fell back into it so many times. I knew that if there were any hope of my being set free, it would be in Christ. How He would release me from this prison, I did not know. I just knew that if I didn't master this thing, it would master me and eventually kill me.

Five years into my struggle, on New Year's Eve, after repenting and failing so many times, I got on my knees and stayed there the whole night, begging the Lord, "Tell me what to do to be free from this. I know it's not Your will for me to stay in captivity. Help!" I grabbed onto the promise in Jeremiah 33:3—"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know" (NKJV)—and held on for dear life.

That night God met me and communicated the truth of what I was going through, and it all seemed so clear. I had been fighting my body, and my body had been fighting back. I was ruining my health, devastating my confidence and peace. I asked God for answers and for next steps. His guidance was so basic that it reminded me of Jesus' promise that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I had turned my life into a maze of rules and restrictions that were running me ragged. His way was so much simpler and better.

I took Him at His word, aimed for total obedience, and began to stand in my authority as His daughter. Everything started changing in my body and mind. I started to experience peace and freedom. The fear faded away, and my health was restored. God enabled me to escape the oppression and stop being controlled by fear. I learned that when we stand in our authority as believers and submit to God's path of freedom, He takes care of us, both body and soul.

Day 1: Understanding our Authority

As we begin to approach the end of this study, we want to talk about the power and authority that belongs to followers of Christ. Specifically, we want to talk about **how** to walk in that authority, as it is an essential part of living free and staying free.

We live in a fallen world, and as Christ-followers, we have been tasked with bringing Heaven's rule and reign to earth. In other words, we are called and created to operate within our rights, responsibilities, and authority as sons and daughters of the King.

One definition of authority is "delegated power." The value of our authority rests on the power that is behind it. This is really great news because the God of the universe is the power behind our authority as believers. When we understand this and know how to exercise that authority, we can face the enemy fearlessly!

What does 1 John 3:8 say about why Jesus came to Earth?

The cross is where Satan was defeated. When Jesus died on the cross, it seemed like Satan was victorious over Him. But on the third day, Jesus rose from the grave and, therefore, triumphed over the enemy! In that moment, Satan was stripped of his authority. In fact, before Jesus went back to heaven, He actually said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Write Ephesians 2:5-6 in your own words in the space below.

*Christ's victory
over the enemy is
to be **our** victory
when we are His!*

This scripture makes it clear that Christ's victory over the enemy is to be **our** victory when we are His! When we are born again, we receive authority in Christ, and we inherit the Name of Jesus, which is above every name!

Write 1 John 4:4 in your own words in the space below.

The importance of understanding our authority is foundational to our lives as believers in Christ. Imagine you have a \$20 bill stuck in a pocket in a pair of pants, but you don't know it's there. Because you are unaware of it, you won't use it, and it won't do you any good. This is similar to our authority in Christ. If we don't know that we have it, we won't use it, and therefore unknowingly walk around in bondage!

When we start to operate within the realm of who we are in Christ—royal sons and daughters—we can begin to reign in our domain. God has given us jurisdiction over our own lives. We were not created to live as slaves under the influence of a dictator who rules with fear and shame. We were created for freedom!

Knowing your authority in Christ allows you to stand firm against the enemy, and it will also radically change the way you pray. When you understand your authority, you begin to understand that through prayer, you can make a declaration that whatever the Lord has promised to you in His Word is yours!

When you make a decree over your life, you demand your rights as a son or daughter of God. And to be clear, you're not demanding of God when you demand your rights; you're demanding of the enemy what is yours because God has promised it to you, and you have the authority to claim it! (This is not a "name it and claim it" prosperity gospel authority.)

Job 22:28 says, "You will declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine on your ways" (NKJV). The Word encourages us not to just pray, but to declare and decree the promises of God over our lives.

What promises from Scripture could you begin to decree over your life in order to demand from the enemy what is yours? You can find numerous declarations on the Scriptural Declarations resource at www.MercyMultiplied.com/Free-Resources. We also encourage you to ask the Lord what He would have you declare. Write some of your decrees below. (You might consider writing them on notecards so that you can carry them with you and declare them out loud on a regular basis.)

It's so important for you to know your inheritance as a son or daughter of God. It's FREEDOM. It's HEALING. It's FORGIVENESS. It's LOVE. It's JOY. It's PEACE. And you get to claim those promises. You get to claim your inheritance. The enemy knows that he cannot hold in bondage a believer who knows their authority in Christ!

Day 2: Open Doors

Yesterday we discussed the importance of understanding the authority we have in Christ. Let's start talking practically about how we actually *walk* in this authority!

As a son or daughter of God, you have an enemy, and in an effort to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), the enemy will tempt you and try to apply pressure to your life. We often refer to this pressure as “oppression,” and it’s anything that the enemy is able to bring into our lives in the form of habits, addictions, thought patterns, and even unhealthy relationships. Some examples include frequent outbursts of anger, low mood/depression, hopelessness, fear, lust, or obsessive thoughts. Severe oppression can render you almost nonfunctional. It feels so heavy and smothering that you can hardly think. People were not created to live under this type of pressure and heaviness, but so many do, and they don’t know how to escape it.

When we open a physical door, it allows open access to anyone and anything that desires to come in. The same thing can happen spiritually. Doors to our heart, mind, and soul can be opened to different areas of pressure from the enemy.

Write Galatians 5:1 in the space below.

The NIV translation of this verse says, “Do not **let** yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” The ESV translation says, “Do not **submit** again to a yoke of slavery.” This indicates that carrying a “yoke of slavery” comes by our agreement. We may be tricked or deceived, or we may go into it with eyes wide open, but it always involves us giving permission, either by default or by design. Allowing this kind of slavery is like giving your life away in exchange for nothing.

Some people open doors to oppression through their choices and deliberate sin. Here are a few examples:


- Stan made the choice to regularly watch horror films, but he found he couldn’t sleep at night due to a constant paranoia that someone was breaking into his home. When Stan did sleep, he had persistent horrible nightmares. He struggled with oppressive fear.
- In this week’s story, Nancy made the choice to purge her food one night at her pastor’s house, and it led to a mental and emotional prison of binging and purging for the next five years.
- One night while in college, Bill made the choice to look at a pornographic website. This decision opened the door to a 10-year pornography addiction that created massive oppression in Bill’s life.

At other times, oppression can come in through circumstances and situations we experience that are not within our control. Here are a few examples:

- One night while Mike was walking through his neighborhood, a man attacked him and demanded his wallet while holding Mike at gunpoint. For years after the attack, Mike struggled with persistent nightmares and a great amount of fear when walking alone.
- When Katie was young, her older sister died from a terminal illness. As a result, Katie struggled with oppressive grief for many years and eventually turned to restricting food and other eating disorder behaviors to try and give herself a semblance of control over at least one aspect of her life.
- As a child, his babysitter exposed Craig to inappropriate media and images. Then in his teen years and throughout his adulthood, Craig found himself regularly struggling with lustful thoughts and a desire to view pornography.

Regardless of how the door was opened, the good news is that we now have the choice to repent and close the door! If you have experienced the consequences of someone else’s choices opening that door in your life, our hearts break for your situation. But you now have the choice to get the help needed so that those experiences do not result in your living under oppression. We encourage you to seek professional help if you need to work through the effects of traumatic events from your life.

Regardless of how the door was opened, the good news is that we now have the choice to repent and close the door!

 **Take a moment to ask the Lord if there are areas in your life where you have not taken authority and have been living under a “yoke of slavery.” Write what He shows you below.**

The doors of oppression may remain open by our permission, but as followers of Christ, we also have the power and authority to shut those doors. If you were sitting on your couch and somebody walked into your house and loaded up your TV and valuables, you wouldn’t just sit there and let the intruder steal from you. You would say, “Wait a minute! What are you doing? Get back here with my stuff.” You would call the police because you have a legal right to your possessions. Yet we so often let the enemy walk in and take whatever he wants. He steals our peace, torments us, cancels our joy, harms our relationships, and ruins our bodies.

You may be thinking right now that the enemy has stolen so much from you that you don’t know how you’ll ever get it all back. We are here to tell you that it is **not** too late for you to step into your place of authority, to close those doors of oppression, and to demand back from the enemy everything that he has stolen.

There is a story in the book of Joel where the prophet talks about a plague of locusts that have completely devoured the land and consumed the crops because the people had turned away from God. Joel calls on the people to repent.

What does God say in response to their repentance in Joel 2:25?

God promised to not only deliver the people from the plague, but to give back to them all that they *would have had*—all because they chose to come back to Him. No matter how much has been lost in our lives—whether because of our own choices or things outside of our control—if we will repent and come to Him, He will fully restore all that was stolen by the enemy.

Don't worry if you have identified a number of areas in your life that need attention. Over the coming days, you will have the opportunity to learn how to take authority in these areas. Choosing to rise up in your authority as a believer is a choice to take charge of that which God has put you in charge of—your domain, your life.

Day 3: Closing the Doors

Yesterday we discussed how the doors of oppression can be opened in our lives, but we ended the day by pointing out that as followers of Christ, we have the power and the choice to close those doors! Today we want to give you some practical steps to get free and stay free from any pressure of the enemy that you might be experiencing.

The first step to gaining freedom in areas of bondage is to confess and repent. To confess means to acknowledge your sin, and to repent means to actually turn around and go the other way. It's important to note that confession and repentance are not onetime events; they happen over and over again for different areas of sin and struggle as we grow and mature. Through this process of confession and repentance, we may also need to address any lack of forgiveness toward ourselves or others who played a role in the oppression we are experiencing.

You may be wondering why you need to repent if the door to oppression was opened as a result of circumstances that you couldn't control. Even if you didn't open that door by your own choice, at some point, there was an element of choice on your part to allow that door to stay open and to allow the enemy to steal, kill, and destroy.

To help you understand, let's go back to the example from yesterday's study about Mike. Mike was attacked in his neighborhood and, as a result, struggled with oppressive fear. Mike didn't open the door, but his area of repentance may sound like: "God, I allowed this experience to tell me that You are not trustworthy. I have believed the lie that I have to take care of myself because no one else will. I confess that I have not stood in my authority as Your child and I have not been living in Your perfect love." This is just an example but shows where your own personal responsibility and area of repentance comes into this process.

- **Refer back to the area(s) in your life where you've been living under a "yoke of slavery" that the Lord revealed to you yesterday (page 103). For what areas of sin are you personally responsible? Are there any areas of unforgiveness that need to be addressed? Use the space below to confess and repent of those areas to the Lord.**

After we genuinely confess the sin and walk away from it, we also set boundaries around whatever is within us that stirs up that temptation to sin. For example, if the area you repented of was lust, then you might cancel your cable TV and have an Internet accountability partner. You won't drive through sections of town where sexual sin is advertised and available. Or if your area of struggle is comparison, you might limit your social media consumption, where you're tempted to compare your life with the perception of others.

- **Are there any changes and/or boundaries that you need to add to your life to avoid temptation? If so, what are they? If you are unsure, pray and ask the Lord to highlight these things for you. Write out His response and your thoughts below.**

There is a well-known scripture that says we are to resist the enemy. However, many people only quote the second half of the verse and fail to recognize the first half. James 4:7 says, "Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you".

According to this scripture, what must we do before we resist the devil?

The order is critical: submit to God first, then stand firm, then resist the devil, and he has to flee. Submission isn't typically a popular concept, but when it comes to freedom, it's necessary! Whether or not you are aware, you live every day of your life under *some* kind of authority. If you choose to set yourself up as your own authority, you will experience bondage. God is the ultimate source of truth and wisdom; we are not. When we submit to His authority, we are opening the door to truth and wisdom in our lives. Freedom is only found through fully submitting our hearts and lives to the authority of our good and perfect Heavenly Father.

Freedom is only found through fully submitting our hearts and lives to the authority of our good and perfect Heavenly Father.

What does submitting to God mean? It means fully surrendering to Him and aligning our lives with the way He has intended for us to live. If our decision to be free from the yoke of slavery is halfhearted and we leave room inside ourselves to pick those old ways back up again, then we risk sliding back to where we started. To walk with God in freedom, we must set our minds on things above,

not on things of this earth. It starts with confessing and repenting of our sin, setting boundaries around our weak spots, and then submitting fully to the Lord. To submit to God means to wholeheartedly bow to His authority and shut the door on habitual sin and disobedience. Only then will resisting the enemy in the way the Bible describes actually work.

In the first week of this study, we compared our lives to a tree with every part of our life attached to another part. Every part of our lives affects the others. If we decide to chop off the branch of a destructive habit or thought pattern, but hold on to known sin in other areas of our life, then we are simply deferring the damage from one branch to another and will keep growing poisonous fruit. For example, if you submit to God in the area of lust but do not address your fiery temper, unkind tongue, or unresolved hurts, the consequences are still destructive. This isn't because God is angry or because He is strict; it is simply because our choices have consequences.

Ask the Lord: "Jesus, are there any areas of my life where I have not fully submitted to Your ways? Are there any open doors in my life right now? If so, what are they? How would You like me to address them?" Write down what the Lord speaks to you and follow His leading in repentance, forgiveness, or any other direction He gives. Be honest and be specific.

The bottom line is that submitting to God means surrendering all areas of your life to Him and His Truth. When we do this as best we can, with a sincere commitment, the Holy Spirit empowers our choice and enables us to walk in ever-increasing freedom!

Day 4: Using Your Authority

Over the past couple of days, we have discussed the importance of confessing, repenting, and setting necessary boundaries in your life. Once you have taken these steps, you have the right to declare your authority over the enemy. This authority does not come from the power of our personality or will, our cleverness, or resolve. It comes through the power of Christ! Jesus purchased our freedom and defeated Satan when He was resurrected and triumphed over sin and death after hanging on the cross and shedding His blood.

What does Colossians 2:15 say that Jesus did to the enemy’s “principalities and powers?”

Because of the finished work of Jesus at the cross, Satan no longer has legal authority in the lives of God’s children. However, he does have as much power and influence in our lives as we allow him to have. As a son or daughter of God, you choose how much bondage you are willing to allow into your life. Our victory has been won, but we must use our God-given authority as believers to enforce the enemy’s defeat. Stand firm knowing that Satan has nothing in comparison to the authority you have through Jesus. Pray out loud, command the enemy to get out of your life in the Name of Jesus; then get ready for freedom!

*As a son or daughter of God,
you choose how much
bondage you are willing
to allow into your life.*

Below is an example of a prayer to take authority over any areas of your life where you have felt oppressed by the enemy. As we said before, you are not praying and asking the Lord to take authority for you. You are standing in the authority that Jesus already purchased on the cross and gave to you when you committed your life to Him. Look back to any areas that the Lord revealed to you this week and address those now.

Jesus, thank you that Satan has already been defeated. I repent of allowing a stronghold to build in my life. I choose to use the authority You have given me, submit myself to You, and command (area of bondage) to leave me now. I close the door to (area of bondage) now in Jesus’ Name and ask you, Holy Spirit, to fill me. I choose to walk in freedom from this sin and will not give in to its temptations. Satan has no authority over my life, and I surrender all my thoughts, attitudes, and actions to You alone. I will be ready when the enemy tries to lead me away from Your will. I choose to stand firm in the promises You give me in Your Word. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Is it possible that we will make the choice to close a door of bondage in our lives and then reopen that door at some point down the road? Of course. We are not talking about perfection, rather, a wholehearted commitment to obey. Remember that God will always be there to meet you where you are. He is not there to condemn you or shame you. You simply use these same principles of confession, repentance, and submission to close those doors again.

Remember the truths of God’s Word and press on toward the freedom Jesus died to give you. Philippians 3:12–14 says, “I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back” (MSG).

Remember that Satan has been defeated. Revelation 20:10 says that Satan will be thrown into a lake of burning sulfur, where he “will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” So when he comes to remind you of your past, remind him of his future!

God loves you and does not want you to live in the nightmare and heartache of slavery any longer! He hears the cry of your heart and will set you free from bondage. If there are any other areas of your life not submitted to God that you identify in the future, you can always go back to the principles we’ve discussed over the past couple of days and apply them again!

Close today’s study by writing Psalm 9:9–10 in your own words in the space below. Then take a few moments to meditate on the truth of this scripture and thank God for being your refuge.

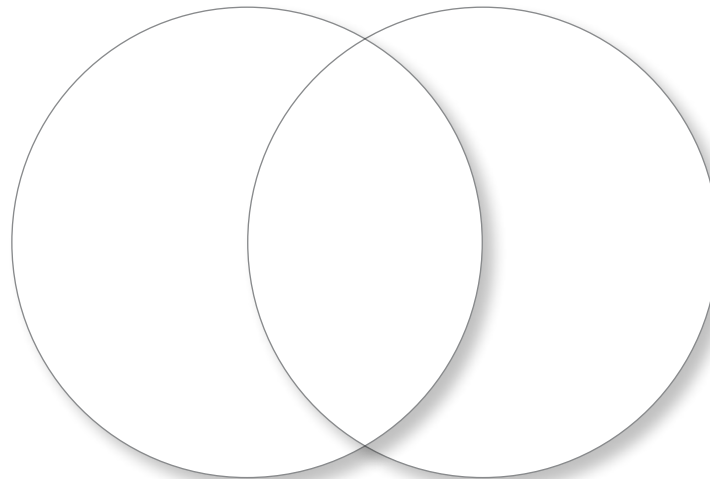
Day 5: Emotional Attachments

This week we have discussed that we have the right and responsibility to “reign in our domain,” and to do so, we need to continue to live lives submitted to Jesus. One area where we have a responsibility to bring rule and dominion is on the inside of ourselves, our souls. Our souls are the realm of our mind, will, and emotions, which are all ultimately under our control. However, our souls are not disconnected from everyone else’s.

Like the Olympic rings symbol, our lives overlap with others emotionally, sexually, and mentally. God designed us to be in healthy relationships and tied to others in ways that are life-giving. Safe, two-way, honest and committed marriages, friendships, parent-child relationships, and business/ministry partnerships are examples of healthy emotional attachments that bring tremendous blessing to our lives. Relationships that position us to become more of who God created us to be and allow us to reciprocate this for others are the relationships we want to cultivate in our lives. The easiest way to identify whether our attachment with another person is a healthy one or not is by examining the fruit of it. If the overlaps of our lives with others are healthy, they will always reflect God’s heart and purposes for connection between people.

Relationships that position us to become more of who God created us to be and allow us to reciprocate this for others are the relationships we want to cultivate in our lives.

In the space below, put your name in one circle and another name in the other—someone to whom you think you have a healthy emotional attachment. In the overlap area, identify the positive fruit that comes from the connection.



On the other hand, sometimes people have the wrong influences in our lives (with or without our consent), and we can become connected in unhealthy ways through various means. Influences such as manipulation, intimidation, dysfunctional emotional dependency, control, and violation develop unhealthy attachments.

Another means in which unhealthy ties can be formed is through sexual interactions outside the boundaries of marriage (including sexual violations). While this is just one type of unhealthy emotional attachment, these ties are important to assess and address if you have not done so before, because they can have a lifelong negative influence on your life and your relationships.


Often when unhealthy ties are present, an individual can find it hard to separate from the relationship, even when they want to and know that it's the right thing to do. There seems to be an invisible pull that makes it difficult to cut free. Terms such as co-dependency, enmeshment and lack of boundaries are some ways to label some of the unhealthy emotional ties to which we are referring. Ultimately, unhealthy emotional attachments keep us bound in relationships in a way that is not healthy or life-giving for either person. Some specific signs of unhealthy emotional ties may include:


- Unhealthy caretaking
- Lack of boundaries within the relationship
- Low self-esteem that affects decision making, and boundary-setting
- People pleasing
- Dysfunctional communication
- Obsessions
- Overly dependent on one another
- Lack of additional outside relationships, isolation
- Constant sacrifice for the relationship
- Unequal give-and-take
- Lack of trust
- Guilt and manipulation used within the relationship for control

Unhealthy emotional ties, particularly within family, are sometimes the hardest to identify because the ties and dynamics of the relationships have been in place for many years—perhaps generations.

Ellie used to talk with her mother every day but began to realize, after a friend pointed it out, that her mother was a negative influence on her with her guilt trips and emotional manipulation. Ellie struggled with knowing how to respond, as she did not want to hurt her mom's feelings by challenging these behaviors. Ellie prayed to break the unhealthy emotional attachment that she recognized in this relationship and asked the Lord what her next steps needed to be. She prayerfully decided to stop talking to her mom so frequently. Ellie knew that her mom needed to cultivate stronger friendships with other people and stop depending on her so much. Ellie also recruited some friends to hold her accountable to not talk with her mom more than she should. After a while, Ellie's mom did reach out to other people and sought some counseling. Over time, she and Ellie were talking consistently again, but in a much healthier way. Change took place as a result of Ellie making the choice to address the unhealthy attachment through prayer and then work on setting and keeping boundaries. The result was worth it!

If you recognize any of the signs that we have identified regarding unhealthy emotional ties, we encourage you to start by addressing the emotional attachments that the Lord reveals to you in prayer and then setting boundaries as He leads. In some relationships, it may mean cutting it off entirely if it has been sinful and destructive. In others, it may mean redefining it, as Ellie did, by setting new boundaries and leaving room for the Lord to work in their life and in yours.

 **Ask the Lord, “Jesus, is there anyone in my life with whom I have an unhealthy emotional attachment? If so, who?” Write what He shows you below.**

 **With unhealthy emotional attachments, there is often a healthy, God-designed need seeking to be filled, but in an unhealthy manner. Ask, “God, what have I been looking for this person to fill in my life that You are meant to fill? How do you want to fill this need in my life?”***

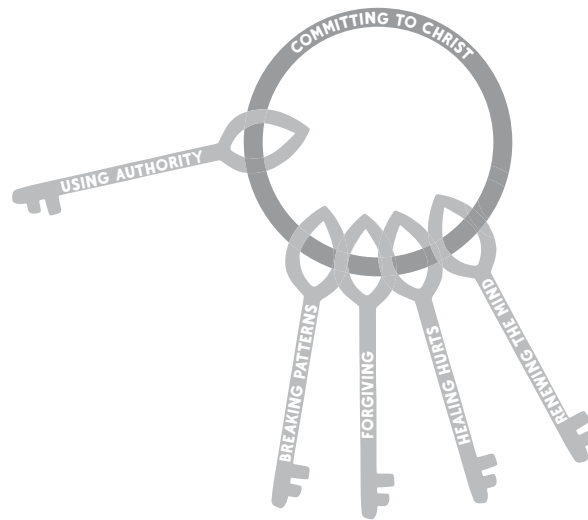
Breaking unhealthy emotional attachments is a simple, but powerful stance in the spirit that allows you to be free of unhealthy connections that are not God’s best for you. You have the authority and ability to choose who and what you are connected to. As you may have noticed in Ellie’s story, she prayed, and then she acted. Breaking these unhealthy attachments is typically not just a prayer; it usually calls for conscious choices regarding the unhealthy parts of relationships in your life. If the Lord reveals people to you from your past who are no longer in your life (including people who may have abused you), pray to forgive them, break the ties, and then ask for His direction in any further steps that He would have you take. A prayer to break emotional attachments is below:

Jesus, thank you for the freedom that is available to me through the power of Your Name and Your death on the cross. Thank You that You desire good, healthy relationships for me and empower me to make healthy choices. In the Name of Jesus, I choose to break the unhealthy emotional attachment with _____ . I break all ungodly ties that have been established between myself and _____ , and I release them from me and myself from them in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

*Freedom Prayer Basic Training Manual, freedomprayer.org

Key 6

God has given me the right and responsibility
to rise up in my authority as a believer
as I submit to Him and close the door on choices
that result in a loss of freedom.



Reflect on all the keys you have received thus far and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Key 7

Maintaining Lifelong Freedom

Day 1: *The Four Stay-Ins: Prayer and the Word*

We have stated from the outset of this study that this material would not be your ultimate breakthrough. This study has simply described and taught you the keys to freedom that God has made available to us all through a relationship with Jesus Christ. For over three decades, we have seen these keys bring transformation in the lives of thousands. However, the power of a key is in its actual use. We have learned that living a life of freedom has always come to those who did not just use these keys to be free from their past but those who continued to use the keys to take hold of their future. Over the next two days, we will look at some of the key lifestyle choices that have helped people maintain freedom for life. We refer to these lifestyle choices as “The Four Stay-ins”.

These four areas may or may not be spiritual disciplines that are already a significant part of your walk with God. Regardless, we encourage you to read through these principles with a heart’s desire to more consistently implement the Four Stay-Ins into your life. You won’t regret it!

Living a life of freedom has always come to those who did not just use these keys to be free from their past but those who continued to use the keys to take hold of their future.

Stay in Prayer


At this point in the study, you may have experienced some new ways of praying in your personal relationship with God. We hope you have learned that prayer is more than simply bowing your head and reciting your needs to God; prayer is the essence of your relationship with God. It is to your spiritual life what breathing is to your physical life. It is turning your attention to your ultimate Source and talking with Him throughout the day, acknowledging Him in all your ways, and giving Him space to have a voice into your life as a son or daughter.

What do the following scriptures tell you about staying in prayer?

Ephesians 6:18

Philippians 4:6–7

God loves to hear from you! Remember that prayer is intimate friendship with God, and intimacy can take on a variety of forms. Sometimes it is laughter, sometimes tears. Sometimes it's listening to His wisdom or just being in His presence. Sometimes it's praise or boldly placing our petitions before Him and asking for intervention. Sometimes it's venting our grievances and emotions to Him about daily life.

 **What is one practical thing you could do to grow in your prayer life?**

Stay in the Word

One of the most powerful ways for us to interact with God is through the Bible. How does God use His Word in our lives?

- God instructs us through His Word.
- God speaks to our life situations through His Word.
- God gives the wisdom we need every day through His Word.
- God speaks to our identity as His sons and daughters through His Word.

In Key 2: Renewing the Mind, we talked about the importance of meditating on the Word. For review, what does Jesus say the truth (the Word) will do for us in John 8:31–32?

Jesus connected abiding in His Word to being free. Remember, though, it's not simply the truth that sets you free; it's the truth you know that sets you free. There is no freedom apart from abiding in the Word of God. Why? Because God's Word "is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). In other words, the Word of God powerfully works in us to sustain our freedom in Christ; it discerns and exposes lies so that we can make decisions for our lives that are in line with His Word.

- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your time in God's Word? Is there anything you could do to incorporate more of His Word into your daily life?**

If you spend the next six months consistently praying and reading the Word, it will transform your life. If you already consistently pray and read the Word, set a new goal and go deeper and further in the Lord than you've ever been!

Day 2: *The Four Stay-Ins: Fellowship and Accountability*

Stay in Fellowship

Throughout this study, we have consistently referred to our lives as being like a tree. And Psalm 92:13 tells us that our lives will flourish when we choose to be planted in the house of the Lord, which is His church, His people, and His body. God's global church has many different expressions, but God's heart is that each of us finds a place to call home and bloom where we are planted. Whether it is in a gathering of thousands or a small group of people meeting in someone's home, the Church is your spiritual family.

What does Hebrews 10:24–25 tell us to do?

- **Are you part of a local church right now? If not, list two potential places that you could research and visit. If you are currently part of a local church, describe your experience there. Are there any steps you can take to start experiencing a more meaningful connection there?**

If your experience of the local church has been difficult or painful, make sure you go back to Key 3: Healing Life's Hurts on page 59, and walk through your experiences using the keys you now have. God is with you, and His desire is that you find connection within the family that He has given to you. Ask Him to help you find the place where He is planting you. Keep in mind that while no church is perfect, and no group of people is without fault, having a home and a family of believers around you is an important part of walking out your freedom.

Your goal is to find people who push you toward God and whose lives you want to emulate.

It's also important for you to enjoy close fellowship with other believers, and that does not happen automatically. It's possible to go to church every week and even participate in ministry without having real, life-changing relationships with the people around you. Your goal is to find people who push you toward God and whose lives you want to emulate. Some people bring an atmosphere of negativity, fear, insecurity, criticism, and sarcasm into a room. Others bring the presence of God and His joy, peace, patience, kindness, and love. It pays to check the atmosphere around your closest circle of friends.

Think about your closest circle of friends and check the atmosphere around them. Ask the Lord if there is anything you need to change in those relationships. If so, what? Do you recognize any boundaries that need to be set in place?

Stay in Accountability


Now that we've discussed the importance of being in close, healthy fellowship with other believers, let's expand the conversation to the importance of having accountability with those in your close community.

Read Proverbs 27:17. What does this scripture say? Do you have relationships in your life that "sharpen" you? If so, who?

We are meant to be in relationship with people who we sharpen and who sharpen us. Accountability is a healthy part of those relationships. However, people can't sharpen us if they don't know what is happening in our lives. It is wise to have a couple of people with whom you fellowship to be aware of potential areas of struggle and difficulty you may be currently working to overcome.

Many believe that accountability is about being in relationship with someone to keep a record of all the things that you aren't getting right. However, accountability is actually about being in relationship with someone to keep an account of your ability, not your inability. It's about allowing you to share the choices you want to make to walk forward into the future God has made available for you, and it positions you to have additional prayer covering as you walk out different seasons of growth, healing, and freedom.

If you don't already have accountability or mentor relationships in your life, you may be able to establish them with people who are already in your life or possibly in your small group. Look for mature Christians who have a heart for people and are willing to be honest, to pray, and to ask you the hard questions when necessary.

 **Do you currently have accountability partners or mentors in your life? If so, describe how they encourage you in your freedom and your walk with God. If not, can you think of two or three people who might be a good fit for that kind of relationship with you?**

Once you have identified someone to be an accountability person in your life, it is wise to establish an expectation for communication and interaction. How often will you connect with them? Do you have permission to call or text them when you are struggling? Will you meet regularly and talk about how things are going? The time you spend with your accountability partner should be strategic and intentional. Remember not to place too great a burden on the accountability partner. His or her role is to be a supportive cheerleader, not a counselor or caretaker. They are not "Holy Spirit Junior," but an addition to the relationship that you are already cultivating with the Lord.

Are you willing to make some intentional changes in your daily life to sustain your freedom? If so, God will help you all the way. Does this mean you should expect perfection from yourself? Of course not! When a baby learns to walk, he is not scolded when he falls. His parents are excited to see him learning and growing. God looks at you with great joy as you do your best to walk in Him. When you fall, He's not disappointed in you. He simply picks you up and sends you on your way to try again. The key is to be faithful and relentlessly come back to the path of freedom.

- **Review each of The Four Stay-ins that we discussed. Remember that the heart behind the Stay-ins is not simply to change your behaviors, but to keep you connected to Jesus on the path to freedom. As such, what are three practical changes you want to make in your life to help you walk in ongoing freedom through these principles? Write them below and make a heart commitment to implement them into your daily life.**

Day 3: *It's All in the Seed*

Before you create something, you first determine its purpose. So before God designed you, He already knew the calling and purpose that He was creating you to fulfill.

Darcy, a friend of Mercy, shares a powerful analogy of our true identity and purpose in the example of a seed. Each seed holds within it everything that is needed for the seed to fully grow into the purpose and plan that was originally intended for it. For example, everything needed for an apple tree is in the seed for that tree, such as the bark, branches, root system, and apples (including the color and particular taste). The seed does not lack anything it needs to become what it was originally designed to become.

Fish don't have to go to swim school. Birds don't have to go to flight school. They already have inside of them what they need. Likewise, God already put inside of us what we need to fulfill the purposes that He has planned for us. We each carry seeds of purpose, calling, and identity that have been within us since creation.

Read Ephesians 2:10. When does it say God planned the good works for us to do?


If you have ever gardened, you know that there are certain external factors, such as sunlight, water, healthy soil, and tending hands that need to be in place in order for a seed to germinate and eventually grow into the final product it holds within. It is a process, and sometimes those necessary factors may or may not be in place. If the right external factors are in place, the seed is positioned to grow and flourish as it was intended. If the seed is neglected or comes into contact with harmful factors, such as harsh weather or toxins in the environment, the seed will struggle to become all that it was intended to be. However, this does not change the fact that the seed still holds everything it needs to flourish.

There are purposes for our lives that are in seed form within each of us. The seeds were planted there by the Creator of our lives who has a vision for each of us as His children. However, much like the seed that hit harsh weather and toxins in the environment, our lives can often experience similar things through hurt, abuse, and disappointments. When that happens, the seeds of identity and purpose within us may begin to lie dormant. We may begin moving away from the original design for our lives as we attempt to survive the difficulties we face. The poison that might go into a tree was never part of God's purpose for that tree. Likewise, the hurtful experiences of your life and the lies that the world has thrown at you have nothing to do with your original God-design.

There is a story about a basket of wheat seeds that has been sitting in one of the pyramids in Egypt for 4,000 years. A tourist asked their guide if anyone had ever tried to plant one of the seeds. The tour guide affirmed that someone had once taken a few of the seeds and planted them. Even though the seeds had been lying dormant for 4,000 years in the desert of Egypt, they grew into healthy stalks of wheat once they were planted and cared for!

What does this show us about the seeds that are within us? If a seed is placed in the wrong environment, it won't grow. But it is never too late! You may have faced a lot of darkness, isolation, and difficulty in your life, but the seeds of purpose within you are still there. They simply need to be planted in the right environment. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." He wants to restore and nourish the seeds that He has placed in our lives. We simply have to make the choice to stay connected to Him so that we are positioned to be fruitful as He originally purposed us to be.

Is this concept of seeds new to you? What are your initial thoughts about the seeds of calling and purpose that you carry?

 **How have the seeds in your life been cultivated? List some of the positive and negative factors that have affected them.**


As you wrap up today, take a moment to tell the Lord how it makes you feel that He has placed seeds of identity and purpose into your life. Ask Him to start stirring up vision and passion for any seeds that may have been lying dormant or unidentified.

Day 4: *Know, Sow, and then Grow*


In order to know what you're growing, you must first identify the kind of seed with which you are working. As mentioned yesterday, all of us have seeds of identity and purpose that the Lord placed inside of us. Some of those seeds may have started to sprout up in our lives while others may be lying dormant and unidentified. As simple as it may sound, if you want to grow an apple tree, you need to be sure you are working with apple seeds. You must take the time to read the package and identify the seeds. It is the same with the seeds that have been planted in our lives. We need to take the time to identify what they hold in order to pursue the fullness they carry in our lives.

The seeds of destiny and purpose that God places inside of us are unique, individual, and special. Just as there are no two snowflakes that are the same, the seeds within each of our lives are all unique as well. When identifying what the seeds in our lives hold, it is important to pay attention to a few things:

Passion—The things that stir passion in you are often a clue to some of the things that your unique seeds carry. You may find that your heart seems to beat quickly when you do certain things like serving other people or painting a picture or teaching little children. Or you might notice that same stirring in your heart when you witness a youth pastor ministering to students, a craftsman creating things with their hands, or a parent showing love to their children. Pay attention to those moments when your heart stirs!


 **What are some things you are most passionate about doing? What makes your heart stir? Write your thoughts in the “Passion” seed below.**

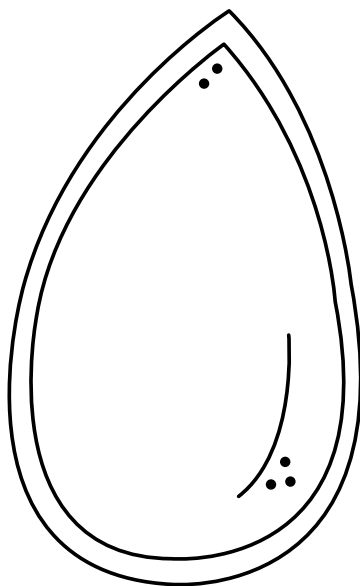
Anger—The things that stir up a righteous anger inside of you may be a clue to some of the areas of impact that the Lord has placed in your seeds. This impact may come through giving of your time, resources, or talents to the areas where you desire to see change.

 **What injustices, difficulties, or problems make you angry or lay heavy on your heart? Child abuse, poverty, illiteracy, homelessness? Write your thoughts in the “Anger” seed below.**

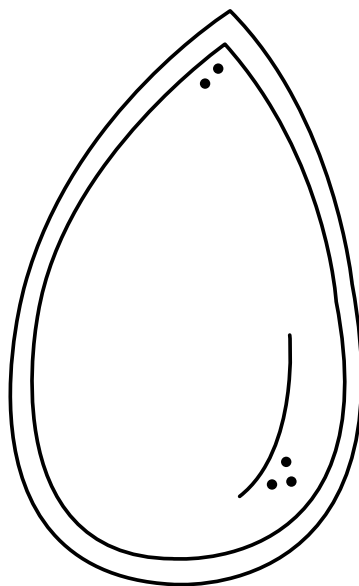
Dreams—Whether you are aware of them or not, there are God-sized dreams attached to the seeds of purpose that He has placed in your life. Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us. That scripture can be both exhilarating and scary! His dreams for us are always immeasurably more amazing and wonderful than what we can even dare to dream.

His dreams for us are always immeasurably more amazing and wonderful than what we can even dare to dream.

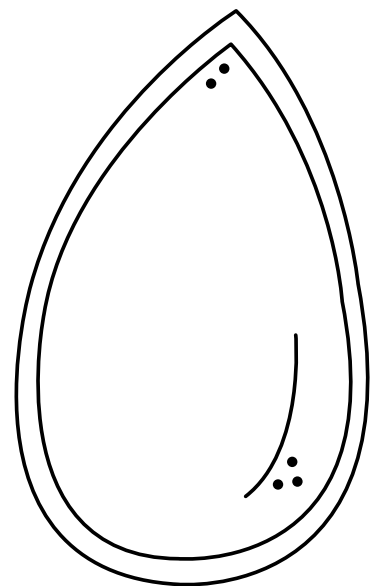
 **What are the dreams that God has placed in your heart? Are there any dreams you had as a child before life and responsibility and hurts came on the scene? Write your thoughts in the “Dreams” seed below.**



Passion



Anger



Dreams

Ask the Lord, “Is there anything specific in the areas of passion, anger, or dreams that you want to highlight for me today? Are there any other things that my seeds hold that You would like to reveal? If so, what?” Write what He shows you below.

We hope you have received some new revelation about what God has placed inside of you. Let’s ask the Lord to restore life and purpose to any of those seeds in your life that need to be cultivated through the simple prayer below. Tomorrow we will discuss your next steps for walking in purpose and calling! Pray this prayer as you wrap up your time today:

Jesus, thank You for placing individual and unique seeds of identity and purpose in my life. I am excited to begin to see what these seeds hold. I choose to believe that no matter what I have experienced or walked through, it is never too late for You to restore life and health to those seeds. I ask You to breathe Your living breath onto the seeds in my life and to begin to show me how to partner with You in moving forward in all that You have for me. I thank You that the past is behind me and that a beautiful and full life awaits ahead, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Whatever you have identified as potential seed will require a lot of cultivating to become planted and bear fruit. Our suggestion is to become deliberate and very practical about growing your seed.

- Ask the Lord, “What specific steps would You have me take in growing the seeds of purpose You have placed in my life? Are there areas of experience, qualification, or further study that I can pursue? Perhaps read a book, take a class, volunteer, connect with a certain person/mentor, or begin giving to an organization?”**

Day 5: *What Now?*

If you've ever taken a trip overseas, you know that it often includes multiple flights, layovers, and car rides to get from one destination to the next. The journey can be long and exhausting. Wouldn't it be great if we could just reach our final destination without having to go through the process to get there?

In the introduction of this book, Nancy Alcorn shared that this study is not a magic wand to wave over your struggles and adversities. Our God is a God of process. As much as we desire for God to simply heal us and set us free in an instant, we are not called to be passive recipients of His power. Instead, we are called and invited to partner with Him in a powerful process that continues throughout our lifetime.


The good news is that God has promised to empower you through the process. All Christians have access to the same power that raised Christ from the dead, but so many never put it to use. It does you no good to have the power and authority of the Holy Spirit but never use it. We must learn how to apply the freedom that Jesus died for us to have! It is an ongoing choice that God continually empowers.


It's important to know that God doesn't choose process as some sort of punishment. He's not trying to figure out a way to make things difficult for us. God knows that one of the most important purposes of process is that persistent obedience is grown through it. Don't be discouraged if you are wrapping up this study but still don't feel like you have experienced your breakthrough. If you make the choice to be persistent in your obedience to the biblical principles that you have learned, your breakthrough will come!

Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory..." (NASB). The journey to freedom is a process of moving from strength to strength and glory to glory. We believe that the steps and principles outlined in this study are the process for freedom and wholeness that God has given to us through His Word, and they must be put into regular practice in the days, weeks, and years to come. We hope you have seen some great changes in your life and in your heart from where you were when you started this study. But just imagine how different you will be in another month, or six months, or a year, as you choose to continue to put the principles you've learned to work!

*The journey to freedom
is a process of moving
from strength to strength
and glory to glory.*

Today we want to bring everything together and focus on how you will continue to put to work the principles you have learned throughout the course of this study. Pray through the questions below.

 **“Lord, what are some of the highlights from this *Keys to Freedom* study experience for which You are most proud of me and excited about as I move forward?”**

 **“What are some specific things You would have me do on a consistent basis to continue to grow and maintain the freedom I have received during this study?”**

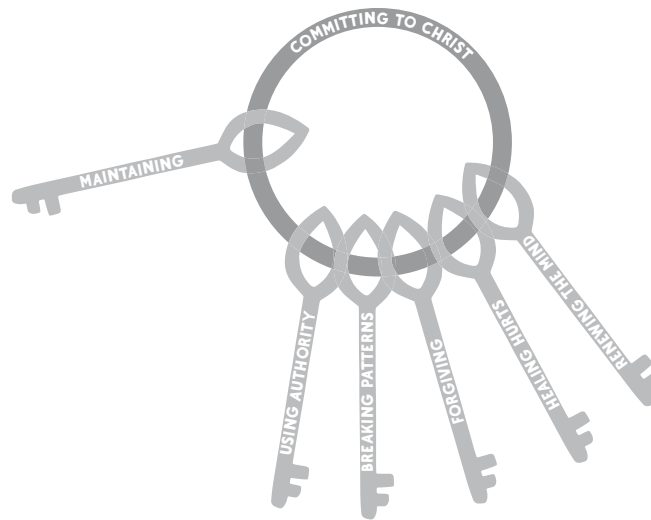
On Day 3 of this week, we discussed how everything needed for an apple tree is in the seed for that tree, such as the bark, branches, root system, and apples. However, there is another important thing inside the seeds of an apple tree that we did not mention: more trees! When God creates something, He puts a seed inside for that thing to multiply. The seed will reproduce after its own kind. God has placed something inside of you to multiply, and the greatest calling of your life is to join Him in multiplying His peace, love, joy, and freedom to a lost and hurting world!

The first commandment that God gave to mankind in Genesis 1 was, “Be fruitful and multiply.” The thing about fruit on trees is that it’s not there to benefit the tree, but to benefit other people. You will pass on to others whatever it is that you carry. So, you see, this journey to freedom was never solely about you. It finds its completion when it not only transforms your life, but when the lives of others are impacted by the hope and joy and freedom in which you are now living. There are people on the other side of this journey whose lives will be forever impacted by your obedience to pursue freedom and wholeness. So the question we leave you with is: “Who’s on the other side of your obedience?”

We pray that you will make the choice to continue walking this journey so that you will not only walk in the fullness you were created to experience, but so that many others will experience it as freedom multiplies in and through you!

Key 7

Walking in freedom for a lifetime is a process, and I commit to staying in prayer, staying in the Word, and staying in fellowship and accountability with other strong believers. I commit to pursuing the destiny and calling that God has on my life.



Reflect on all the keys you have received and ask the Lord if there are any that you need to revisit right now. Write what you receive from Him below and take the time to process as needed.



Don't forget to share what God is doing in your life or any valuable insights you have received. And be sure to use the #KeystoFreedom hashtag!

Conclusion

Jesus has won the victory and given you the power to walk in joy and peace! We hope that the keys to freedom you have learned and experienced have powerfully connected you to God's heart, your true identity in Him, and the vision and plan that He has for you! Our prayer is that you are now equipped to continue your own personal journey of freedom and to share the keys that you learned during this time with others as well.

Revelation 12:11 states that we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. We encourage you to recognize that you have started the process of overcoming during this study, and as you continue to put your keys to work and tell the story of what God has done, you will continue to overcome at new levels in the days ahead!

There is a life of victory that is ahead of you, and not just for you but for your children, your grandchildren, and anyone else you influence. Your victory is designed to grow and impact everyone around you. You are becoming a shining example of God's grace in the midst of whatever situation you are in. If you stumble, remember that the key to success is to trust in the grace of God and return to the road of freedom.

The last thing for you to do in this study is to make a formal commitment to living in freedom. On the next page, you will find a list of the important principles and life-transforming truths we have talked about in this study. Commit to living out these keys to freedom for the rest of your life. Also, share your commitment with at least one other person who can encourage you and cheer you on as you continue to walk this journey.

We would love to hear your testimonies of how God used this study to help you in this season of your life. Feel free to e-mail us at Outreach@MercyMultiplied.com so we can rejoice with you and partner with you in prayer.

We firmly believe in the keys and principles outlined in this study because we have seen them work time and time again. At Mercy, we are continuing to grow and expand our reach so more people have an opportunity to experience lasting freedom. We are going to multiply our efforts and watch God multiply His freedom. Visit [**www.Mercy Multiplied.com**](http://www.MercyMultiplied.com) for more resources and to see how you can get involved in helping others find healing and freedom and change their lives!



COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM

As a FREE son or daughter of God, I receive the truth that . . .

- Transformation requires a total commitment and connection to Christ. I can't simply offer part of my heart and life to God and expect to walk in freedom.
- Renewing my mind is an active, ongoing process that leads to greater freedom as I commit to replacing untrue thoughts with truth from God's Word.
- When I acknowledge the hurts I have experienced and invite the Lord to give me His perspective, I allow God to heal me and bring new levels of freedom and peace.
- Forgiveness is a vital key to living in freedom. It is a choice of obedience, not a feeling, but my feelings will follow when I make the sincere commitment to forgive.
- Breaking generational patterns comes by identifying and taking authority over them based on my authority as a follower of Jesus.
- God has given me the right and responsibility to rise up in my authority as a believer as I submit to Him and close the door on choices that result in a loss of freedom.
- Walking in freedom for a lifetime is a process, and I commit to staying in prayer, staying in the Word, and staying in fellowship and accountability with other strong believers. I commit to pursuing the destiny and calling that God has on my life.

I am a new creation in Christ. The old is gone, and I am made new. I commit to these keys to freedom for the rest of my life and know that freedom is mine!

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix A

Truth Statements

Practice saying these verses out loud to help renew your mind with God's Word:

- **I am a child of God:** “To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12, NLT).
- **God is good and does not withhold any good thing from me:** “The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right” (Psalm 84:11, NLT).
- **I am a joint heir with Christ:** “Since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory” (Rom. 8:17, NLT).
- **I am a temple, a dwelling place of God:** “Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?” (1 Cor. 6:19, NLT).
- **I am a new creation:** “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NLT).
- **God’s wisdom and understanding has no limit:** “Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit” (Psalm 147:5, NIV).
- **I am righteous and holy:** “Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy” (Eph. 4:24, NLT).
- **I am a threat to the enemy:** “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19, NIV).
- **I am free from condemnation:** “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, NLT).
- **I may approach God with confidence:** “Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence” (Eph. 3:12, NLT).
- **God is my protector and defender:** “The Lord is my protector; he is my strong fortress. My God is my protection, and with him I am safe. He protects me like a shield; he defends me and keeps me safe” (Psalm 18:2, GNT).
- **I am complete in Christ:** “You also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority” (Col. 2:10, NLT).
- **I have been redeemed and forgiven from all of my sins:** “He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins” (Col. 1:13–14, NLT).
- **I am of the light and no longer belong to the darkness:** “You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5, NIV).

- **I am chosen and treasured:** “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deut. 7:6).
- **God hears my voice and is attentive to my cries:** “The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do what is right; his ears are open to their cry for help” (Psalm 34:15, NLT).
- **I cannot be snatched from God’s hand:** “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me” (John 10:28, NLT).
- **I have peace:** “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace” (Ps. 29:11).
- **I am accepted:** “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7).
- **I am more than a conqueror:** “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).
- **God is faithful to all that He promises:** “The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does” (Psalm 145:13).
- **I am confident and fearless:** “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7, NLT).
- **I am worthy of His love:** “They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4).
- **I am a delight to God:** “For the Lord takes delight in his people” (Ps. 149:4).
- **God’s ways are right and perfect:** “God’s way is perfect. All the Lord’s promises prove true” (Psalm 18:30 NLT).
- **I am secure:** “Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders” (Deut. 33:12).
- **I am loved unconditionally:** “Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).
- **I am gifted:** “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us” (Rom. 12:6).
- **God is with me, will watch over me, and will not abandon me:** “So be strong and courageous . . . for the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will never fail you nor abandon you” (Deut. 31:6, NLT).
- **I am created in the image of God:** “God created human beings in his own image” (Gen. 1:27, NLT).
- **I am a citizen of heaven:** “But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior” (Phil. 3:20, NLT).
- **God rejoices over me:** “[The Lord] will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph 3:17, NIV).
- **God is strong and fights on my behalf:** “For the Lord your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you victory!” (Deut. 20:4, NLT)
- **I am seen and known:** “See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:16, NLT).

Appendix B

Faulty Beliefs and Freedom Facts

If you find yourself wrestling with any of the following faulty beliefs, look at the corresponding truth of Scripture and apply the principles from Key 2: Renewing the Mind to vocalize the “Freedom Facts.”

Faulty Belief: I am alone, and no one really cares how I feel or what I do.

Truth of Scripture: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deut. 31:8).

Freedom Fact: God is always with me. He sees how I feel, and He comforts me.

Faulty Belief: I’m not worth much. I don’t deserve anything good.

Truth of Scripture: “Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Pet. 1:3–4, NLT). “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ” (Eph. 1:3, NLT).

Freedom Fact: I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Because I am a child of God, I have an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Faulty Belief: My looks don’t measure up to what the world says is attractive. I am ugly.

Truth of Scripture: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Ps. 139:13–14). “He has made everything beautiful in its time” (Eccles. 3:11). “God created human beings in his own image” (Gen. 1:27, NLT).

Freedom Fact: All of God’s works are great and wonderful, and that includes me! I am created in the image of God Himself, and He has created me beautifully.

Faulty Belief: Because I have lived a lie, I am unable to speak truth.

Truth of Scripture: “When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13). “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Freedom Fact: I can speak truth because the Spirit of God leads me. There is freedom in living an honest life.

Faulty Belief: God is going to have a hard time forgiving me for the things I have done and wrong choices I have made that hurt people.

Truth of Scripture: “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy” (Mic. 7:18). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Freedom Fact: God delights to show grace. His forgiveness is endless, and His mercies are new every morning.

Faulty Belief: I will only be satisfied and happy in life if I succeed in my career. My worth is in my achievements.

Truth of Scripture: “What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31, NLT). “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deut. 7:6).

Freedom Fact: My value and my worth do not come from temporary worldly success or achievement, but from the fact that I am a child of the King and am fully loved and treasured by Him.

Faulty Belief: Not even God could love me after what I have been through.

Truth of Scripture: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jer. 31:3). “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

Freedom Fact: God loves me unconditionally, and nothing can separate me from His unfailing love.

Faulty Belief: I will never amount to anything because I was used and abused.

Truth of Scripture: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). “But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4, NLT). “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

Freedom Fact: I am more than a conqueror through Christ and have overcome the shame of my past. God has an amazing plan and purpose for my life, and He will give me the strength I need as I press toward it.

Faulty Belief: I will always be sad and depressed.

Truth of Scripture: “Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering.” (Isaiah 49:13, NLT). “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit . . .” (Romans 14:17, NIV). “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Is. 61:1–3).

Freedom Fact: My inheritance as a child of God is joy and hope. He can heal my pain, lift my burdens, and replace my mourning with joy.

Faulty Belief: I am afraid that

(fill in your own blank).

Truth of Scripture: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7, NLT). “For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears” (Zeph. 3:17, NLT). “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4). “Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear” (1 John 4:18, NLT).

Freedom Fact: God is with me wherever I go. I choose to accept His perfect love, which casts out any fear.

Faulty Belief: There is no hope for me to experience God’s purpose and plan for my life because of what has happened to me and because of the choices I have made.

Truth of Scripture: “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11, NLT). “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns” (Phil. 1:6, NLT). “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13).

Freedom Fact: I am a child of God, and nothing can change that! He has great plans for my life and is faithful to continue the good work He started in me.

Faulty Belief: These emotions are so overwhelming I will never get over them.

Truth of Scripture: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 Pet. 5:7, NLT). “Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice” (Isa. 30:18). “For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones” (Isa. 49:13).

Freedom Fact: God cares about how I feel, and He has great compassion toward me. I can rest in knowing that He will carry my burdens.

Faulty Belief: People cannot be trusted, and I can expect to be betrayed.

Truth of Scripture: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5, NLT). “To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). “If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Eccles. 4:10).

Freedom Fact: God loves me, and I will trust Him no matter what. God will bring safe people into my life to love and encourage me in healthy ways.

Faulty Belief: My coping methods are not that big of a deal and they don’t really control me. Most people have little habits to help them get through the day anyway.

Truth of Scripture: “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12). “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then, you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

Freedom Fact: God has called me to a life of holiness that is no longer conformed to the patterns of the world and our culture. He has called me to focus my life and my mind on that which is good and pure.

Faulty Belief: No one will ever want me. I am damaged goods.

Truth of Scripture: “He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (Isa. 61:1–3, NIV). “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful” (Jer. 31:3–4). “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone” (Song of Sol. 2:10–11).

Freedom Fact: God has taken my shame and restored me to wholeness. I have confessed my sin to Him, and He has forgiven me and cleansed me. I have been set free to enjoy my future!

Faulty Belief: I must hold myself together and not share how I feel.

Truth of Scripture: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:3–4).

Freedom Fact: God wants me to be real about how I feel so He can provide comfort and healing. It is when I am healed and whole that I can comfort others who have been through the same things I have.

Faulty Belief: Since I was hurt by someone who was supposed to take care of me, someone who I relied on and trusted in, I'll take care of myself and trust only myself.

Truth of Scripture: "Trust in and rely confidently on the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know and acknowledge and recognize Him, and He will make your paths straight and smooth [removing obstacles that block your way]" (Proverbs 3:5–6, AMP).

Freedom Fact: I will choose to trust God with my whole heart and rely on Him and His Word. I will choose to ask for help when I need it and trust that God will bring safe and trustworthy people into my life.

Faulty Belief: If I act like nothing ever happened, the memories and emotions will eventually go away.

Truth of Scripture: "I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security" (Jer. 33:6). "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11). "My inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right" (Prov. 23:16). "The one whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but the one whose ways are perverse will fall into the pit" (Prov. 28:18).

Freedom Fact: I will speak out what is right, and I know God will be my refuge. I receive healing, so that I no longer live in fear but can experience true peace.

Faulty Belief: I will get hurt and rejected if I open myself up. No one would really want to be my friend if they knew the real me.

Truth of Scripture: "What's the price of two or three pet canaries? Some loose change, right? But, God never overlooks a single one. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So, don't be intimidated by all this bully talk. You're worth more than a million canaries" (Luke 12:6–7, MSG). "God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating" (Col. 1:13–14, MSG).

Freedom Fact: With God's help, I can learn to be myself and trust Him to bring people into my life who will appreciate me and respect me for who I am. My worth is in who God says I am.

Faulty Belief: If I am not perfect or "the best," I have failed.

Truth of Scripture: "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NLT). "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matt. 6:33, NLT).

Freedom Fact: I am fully loved, completely accepted, and totally pleasing to God. Regardless of how much I do or fail to do, I will remain fully loved, completely accepted, and totally pleasing to God. I will seek to be a God-pleaser, not a people-pleaser.

Faulty Belief: My life has always been full of turmoil. Some of my best years have already been wasted.

Truth of Scripture: “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust” (Joel 2:25, NKJV). “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27, NKJV).

Freedom Fact: God will restore all the time I have wasted or lost by my choices or the choices of others. God gives me peace.
