

A Note to Small Group Leaders

The following pages provide an outline for a small group discussion on the “*Seven Steps of Growth and Healing*” materials.

My prayer is that you will find these *seven steps* not only a helpful resource for those in your group, but also for you personally. Each time I review these I find areas where I need to grow deeper in my understanding of God and His purposes.

A few notes on logistics...

When I have led small groups through this material, I have found it helpful to meet over seven consecutive weeks.

I have also found it helpful to wait to distribute the entire *Seven Steps* manual until the final week - as people are likely to skip topics if they have the manual with them in their small group. Instead, I provide copies of the following pages for participants to use – but I only distribute one week at a time.

As noted, at the end of the seven weeks I distribute the entire manual for participants to read on their own for further spiritual growth. The entire manual is available at no cost, and can be found at: http://www.cincyanglican.org/Seven_Steps.pdf

Many Blessings,
-Dave

Step 1: Look for God's presence in your life

You may have heard others say,

- “God is not interested in me because I'm not perfect.
- “God is not interested in me because of the way I look.
- “God is not interested in me because of what I've done.
- “God is not interested in me because I'm not like another person.

Have you ever had those thoughts?

Lie #1
“God's not interested in me.”

How would you complete the sentence,

“God is not interested in me because _____.”

Why do we think this?

- Difficult circumstances
- Guilt
- Rejection from others

The Truth

The truth, however, is that God is very much interested in each one of us. Let's take a look at how the Bible describes this interest....

Week 1

God our Creator

In the Old Testament, God is described as the *creator* of the universe:

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1)
- “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6)
- “For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.” (Ps. 33:9)
- “Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.” (Ps. 148:5)

In the New Testament, we learn that:

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:1-3)
- “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” (Col. 1:15-16)
- “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (Heb. 1:2)
- “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” (Heb. 11:3)

As the theologian John Calvin once wrote,

- “You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness.”

Here are two questions to consider about God's creation:

- What about God's creation do you find inspiring?
- Why do you find it inspiring?

Week 1

Not only did God make rocks and trees, He made each of us.

John Calvin gives this perspective,

- “How can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him?”

God Our Sustainer

The Old Testament describes God as the *sustainer* of all of life.

- “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.” (Psalm 3:5)
- “The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and widow...” (Ps. 146:9)
- The Lord said, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you.” (Is. 46:3-5)
- “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.” (Is. 40: 28-29)

A God of Compassion

In the Old Testament the Lord is described as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” (Psalm 103:8)

In the New Testament accounts of Jesus, we learn that Jesus had *compassion* on everyone who came to Him:

- “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:14)
- Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.’ (Matthew 15:32)
- “Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.” (Matthew 20:34)
- When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” (Luke 7:13)

Later in the New Testament we learn that,

- “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

Week 1

So, in both the Old Testament and New Testament we can read about a loving and caring God who is the creator and sustainer of all of life.

Step One

The first step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Look for God’s presence in your life.”

Step #1:
Look for God’s presence in your life.

Remember

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to look to see His work. People are told to *remember* the things that He has done.

Even God’s name helped the people of Old Testament remember what He had done in the lives of their ancestors. In Exodus 3:5 and many other places throughout Scripture, God is called the,

- “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

What else does the Bible say about remembering our past?

- “Fathers tell their children about (God’s) faithfulness...”(Isaiah 38:19)
- “Remember the former things, those of long ago.” (Isaiah 46:9)
- “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.” (I Chronicles 16:12)
- “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7)

Just as the people of the Old and New Testament were called to examine their lives and remember God’s presence and work, so should we stop to remember what God has done.

Week 1

If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, you might consider praying the following prayer as you seek to discover God's presence and work in your life.

Prayer

Lord, help me look back upon my life and see how You have been at work. I ask that you would help me to remember the times when you have blessed me and comforted me. Thank you for your incredible love and concern even when I did not recognize it. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "God's not interested in me." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?
 Not what I'm thinking
 Somewhat what I'm thinking
 Very much what I'm thinking
2. One author has said, "The question today is not 'Is there a God' but 'What kind of God is there'." What words come to mind as you think about God?
3. What things can you remember that God has done in your life?
4. What in your life has been miraculous?

Week 2 – Respond to God with Faith

The Bible tells us that God is not only interested in us (as we learned last week), He is interested in *helping us*. He wants to help us by offering what the Bible calls “salvation” and hope for the future. The myth, or lie that many people believe is that “I can do it on my own.”

Lie #2

“I can do it on my own.”

You may have heard someone say,

- “God helps those that help themselves.”
- “I’ve got it all under control.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence, “I feel like I can do things without God because _____.”

Why do we have these thoughts?

- our culture
- our pride
- fear
- our nature

So, here are two more questions for you,

- When have you had difficulty trusting God and asking Him for help?
- Why was it difficult?

Week 2

Apprehension

Many people are apprehensive and fearful to trust God. This can be especially true if someone has experienced *rejection* in life.

According to Jesus, though, we should not fear God because He is *trustworthy*.

One of the most common phrases Jesus used when he was teaching 2,000 years ago was *do not be afraid*. Such as:

- “Don’t be afraid, just believe.” (Mark 5:36)
- “Take courage, it is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Mark 6:51)
- “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7)
- “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”(Luke 12:32)
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

In addition, the Apostle Paul wrote about God’s faithfulness:

- “God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (I Corinthians 1:9)
- “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us...” (II Corinthians 1:10)

So, according to Scripture, we can trust God to help us because He cares for His people.

Here are several more questions for you to consider:

- What about God’s faithfulness do you find encouraging? Why?
- What about trusting God is challenging?

The Need for Forgiveness

According to the Bible, our natural inclination is to do things apart from God. In this regard, we “miss the mark” or sin, as the Bible calls it, because of our natural inclination to do things that are selfish and rebellious to God.

Week 2

In Genesis 3, we read about an event called “The Fall” where we see for the first time human sinfulness and rebellion against God. Because of that rebellion and humankind’s desire to do things “our way”, we became separated from life in Him.

In Genesis after the account of The Fall, we can see the results of human sinfulness in even greater detail, as people showed that they were:

- deceptive
- in denial of reality
- selfish
- hurtful to others
- unresponsive to God

Later in the Bible, this rebellion was even more pronounced as humans turned to idolatry and worshipped gods other than the Lord.

Paul wrote that:

- “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away.” (Romans 3:10-12)

Today, through our conscience and reading of the Bible, we know what is right and what is wrong, yet because of our human nature we naturally do things that are separate from God.

Many times we desire to be our own gods, following our own ideas and not God’s.

This separation from God is only one of many consequences of our sinful human nature.

Some other questions to consider then, are...

- How have you seen this natural inclination to do things on your own, without God?
- What negative consequences of sin have you seen in your own life and in others?

Because we have been disobedient to God and in rebellion to His laws, we deserve His punishment, judgment and wrath:

- “whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36)
- “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.” (I Cor. 16:22)
- “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18)
- “God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 5:6)

Week 2

Seeking a Way Out

Looking at human history, we can see time and again people trying to find a way back to the Garden (of Eden) to a time before the Fall, before the curse of the Law.

Many answer this question by:

- Looking for others to change
- Hoping the government would change
- Seeking to control nature
- Looking to technology
- Working hard to be a better religious person
- Changing relationships
- Looking to material possessions

Here's a question for you...what reasons have you thought of to fill in the blank?

- "If only _____ happened (or didn't happen), my life would be perfect.

The reason that those things don't work is because they don't fundamentally change our human nature. All of those systems, techniques or things, depend on our own works; on our doing or getting something. The problem with this approach, then, is that this is simply another way of stating Lie #2 that we discussed earlier, "I can do it on my own." It is clear in the Bible that we *can't* change on our own effort. We cannot remove the curse of the Law nor can we reverse the consequences of sin on our own.

So, if we can't change on our own, who can help us?

The Son

We learn in Scripture that even in the midst of our separation, God the Father, in His mercy and grace offered His son, Jesus Christ, to the world.

- "For God so loved the world that He gave his Son that whoever believes in him will not perish." (John 3:16)
- "And we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14)

How could Christ offer us His salvation?

The Apostle Paul gave us much insight about what type of person could save us from sin and

Week 2

the curse of the Law. He said that it must be someone who kept the Law to *perfection* and would *willingly pay the penalty for our sins*.

...that someone was Jesus.

Because Jesus was *God* He could live a *perfect* life, fulfilling all of God's requirements and be a perfect *sacrifice* for our sins. And because He was *human* He could be our *representative*.

Jesus we learn in the Bible was "The Messiah" a word meaning "the anointed one". In Greek, this word was translated as "christos", which is where we get the name Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). As the writer R.C. Sproul has written, "Christ is the sin-bearer for his people, the *Angus Dei* (Lamb of God) who takes away our sin and satisfies God's demand for justice."

Christ paid the penalty for our sins. He took for us the penalty that our sins deserved by dying on the cross.

- In Hebrews we read, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..." (Heb. 1:3)
- In the Gospels, we learn that Jesus "shed his blood for the remission of sin" (Matthew 26:28)
- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)
- Paul explains that, "...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3)
- "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Cor. 5:21)
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13)

Death is Not the End

The story, however, doesn't end with Jesus' death. In an amazing and miraculous set of events, Jesus, after taking our punishment and dying for our sins, was raised from the dead.

Paul described it this way,

- "...he was buried and raised on the third day...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred..." (I Cor. 15:3-6)
- because of His death, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every

Week 2

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Phil. 2:9-11).

Thus we learn that not only is Jesus the "Messiah" (the anointed one of God) who died a humble death, but He is also the *exalted Lord*...the one whom every knee will bow down to worship.

Step Two

This takes us to the second step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, which is simply called, "Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith."

Step #2:

Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith.

The Bible explains,

- "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)
- Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31)

A Prayer

If you haven't taken this step in faith, here's a common prayer that expresses a desire to receive God's gift of salvation.

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

The Results

We are told in Scripture that if we believe and trust, God will forgive us. Theologians describe this as "Christ's righteousness imputed to those who believe." That means that His righteousness is *transferred* to His people. A term that the Bible uses to explain this is *justified*. We are justified by Christ. That means, as Billy Graham has said, God sees us *just as if* we were Christ...sinless. Therefore, there is now no condemnation under God's Law.

Week 2

Earning God's Favor

In approaching Jesus, many still bring the myth of "I can do it on my own" as we think, "I've got to earn God's favor."

If these ideas were mathematical formulas they might look like this...

- Faith + Works = Salvation
- Faith – Bad Living = Salvation
- Faith + Good Living = Salvation
- Faith + Church Membership = Salvation

In the Bible, however, the equation is simply,

- Faith in Christ = Salvation.

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to trust Him *alone*.

- "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)
- "Salvation is found through no one else." (Acts 4:12)
- Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Here are several more questions for you to consider:

- What about this message of Jesus' forgiveness is interesting, compelling or exciting?
- Has there been a time in your life when you embraced this forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers? When? What were the circumstances?
- If you've put your faith in Christ, what results have you seen?

Week 3 – Respond to God with Faith

The Mystery

For Christians there is a *mystery* that is disclosed in the Bible. As Paul says, it is “the *mystery* that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.” (Col. 1:26)

And here’s the mystery that was disclosed, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col.1:27). Or as Peter says, “You have been born anew” (I Peter 1:23). Christians, then, can experience a transformed life because they have the spirit of God within them.

The Lie

The myth, or lie that many people believe is that “I’ll never change.”

<p style="text-align: center;">Lie #3 “I’ll never change.”</p>

You may have heard others say, as the musician Bruce Hornsby does in his song *The Way It Is*:

- “That’s just the way it is, some things will never change.”

Or,

- “I’ll change when my circumstances do.”

How would you complete the sentence,

“I won’t change because _____.”

The Truth

The truth, however, is that if we have trusted Christ to forgive our sins and have asked Him to be the Lord of our lives, we can be transformed by Him.

Week 3

Paul says that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 6:17).

According to Scripture, with God’s help we can:

- know God as a friend
- have “the fruit” of being connected with Him
- be free from the bonds of sin
- be incorporated into the Body of Christ
- be filled with the Holy Spirit who will give us insight and wisdom

Let’s look at each of these in detail:

Knowing God

Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, famously, “Our Father who art in Heaven...”.

Jesus taught us that God is our father. We can come to him in prayer with our needs and concerns. He said,

- “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11)

Paul encouraged Christians to “grow in their knowledge of God.” (Col. 1:10) and said that we “did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received a Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Father”. (Romans 8:15)

Question for Discussion:

- How would you like to grow in your knowledge of God?

Friendship with God

As God’s new creations, Christians not only can know about God, but can know Him closely, as a friend. J.I. Packer calls it “truly staggering” that “God’s purpose in revelation is to make friends with us.” Packer continues, “That God made man to be His friend appears from the third chapter of Genesis, where we find God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, looking for Adam to join Him and share His company (Gen. 3:8). That, despite sin, God still wants human friends appears from Christ’s statement that God seeks true worshippers (John 4:23); for worship, the acknowledging of worth, is an activity of friendship at its highest.”

Week 3

Question for Discussion:

- How would you like to grow in your friendship with God?

The Fruit

Because Christians are connected to Christ, our lives will begin to demonstrate this fact. Paul (in Galatians 5:22) describes this as the “Fruit of the Spirit” which he says is:

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

Later, Paul tells Christians to, “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Col. 3:12-14)

The Christian life then, is a life that has been and is being transformed; one that is no longer self-focused but one that is marked by love.

Jesus told his followers to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” (Luke 6:27)

Question for Discussion:

- Look at the list of the “fruit of the spirit”. Which area would you like to grow in? Why?

Freedom in Christ

As new creations, Christians will also experience freedom; freedom to live for Christ, freedom to be who God made us to be, and freedom from life-controlling issues as we are being “changed into his likeness”. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Paul said that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17) and as G.K. Chesterton has written, “Christianity is a sword which separates and sets free.”

Richard Lovelace explains, “You are delivered from the bondages of sin through the power of the indwelling Christ...The power of sin to rule our lives has been *destroyed* in the cross of Christ; we have died with Christ, and have been raised up together with him in newness of him.”

Week 3

Questions for Discussion:

- How have you experienced freedom in Christ?
- How would you like to grow in the freedom that Christ offers?

Step Three

That takes us to the third step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, which is simply called, "Discover new life in Christ".

<p style="text-align: center;">Step #3: Discover new life in Christ.</p>

We see from Scripture the thought, "I'll never change" is a lie.

Part of the Body of Christ

As God's new creation, Christians are *not* called to this spiritual journey on their own. Rather, they are called to be part of "the body of Christ" (the church) here on earth. In the Bible, Paul used the Greek word *koinonia* (fellowship) to describe the close relationship that exists between Christians and Christ as well as the type of relationship that can exist among Christians.

For Paul, the life of a Christian, then, is one of interdependence.

- "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (I Cor. 12:27)

Paul encouraged Christians to care for one another:

- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honor one another among yourselves."
(Romans 12:10)
- "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
(Ephesians 4:2)

Week 3

- "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (I Corinthians 1:10)
- "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

Questions for Discussion:

- How could you help others "in Christ"?

Filled with the Holy Spirit

You may wonder, "How can I do this? How can I live an unselfish life and live for God?"

The answer, we learn in Scripture is that it is not by our own efforts, but through the Holy Spirit.

In John 16, we read that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit because He was physically leaving the earth. The word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit is *paraclete* which can be translated as our "Counselor", "Advocate" and "Comforter" to help Christians and to reveal God's truth.

In the Book of Acts, we can see that the first Christians were filled and "baptized" by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, however, was not just for the early Church. All Christians, we learn, are filled with the Holy Spirit and are to be "controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit."
(Romans 8:9)

The Holy Spirit "bears witness" to the Scriptures, helping us see the truthfulness of God's written word. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can also focus on the presence of Christ today and see His work in our lives.

The Spirit will help us grow as God's "new creation" and enable us to know God more through worship, prayer, reading and studying Scripture.

If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, the following prayer might reflect your thoughts and hopes.

Week 3

Prayer

Lord, because I have trusted you to be my Lord and Savior, I know from Scripture that I am now a new creation. I ask that You would help me discover new life in You. Help me as I grow to know You as a friend. Help work in me the outward “fruit of the Spirit”, and help me to grow in my relationship with others in Your church. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What about new life in Christ is encouraging to you?

2. Read the following words that describe who and what God is:
 - love
 - good
 - generous
 - kind
 - forgiving
 - trustworthy
 - compassionate
 - just
 - holy
 - all knowing
 - faithful
 - our creator
 - our sustainer
 - in control
 - unchanging
 - Jesus
 - the Holy Spirit

In what ways would you like to grow in your understanding of God?

Week 3

3. Read these Christian character traits. Which one or two would you like to grow in? Why?

Accountable	Hospitable	Persevering
Authentic	Humble	Prayerful
Caring	Identifies with Jesus	Pursues Excellence
Compassionate	In fellowship	Puts God first
Consistent	Integrity	Reliable
Content	Impartial	Repentant
Courageous	Joyful	Respectful
Dependable	Keeps Commitments	Sacrificial
Depends on God	Kind	Studies Scripture
Does not love money or possessions	Lacks bitterness	Self-controlled
Fair	Lacks envy	Selfless
Faithful	Lacks self-righteousness	Straightforward
Follower of God	Listens to God's word	Supportive
Full of Faith	Loving	Teachable
Generous	Loyal	Thankful
Gentle	Mature	Transparent
Helpful	Obedient	Trustworthy
Holy	Open to being changed by God's Word	Willing to Serve
Honest	Patient	Wise
Hopeful	Peaceful	Work ethic

Week 4 – Identify the Broken Places

We may realize that after becoming a Christian, we still have *problems* and are not living an abundant, joy-filled, Christ-centered life (as we discussed last week).

It is important, therefore, for us to *identify* those areas in our lives that are broken and in need of healing.

The Holy Spirit will help us through this process. He will bring what is called *conviction* to help us see these broken places. This is part of a process known as *sanctification* as we grow to become more like Christ.

As we seek to grow spiritually, however, there is a myth, or lie, that many people struggle with as they refuse to explore these broken places and say instead, “I’m fine.”

Lie #4

“I’m fine.”

You may have heard others say,

- “I’m fine, no worries here.”
- “I better keep that to myself.”

How have you heard others complete the sentence,

“I don’t want to look at the broken places in my life because _____.”

Why do we avoid looking at the broken places?

There are a number of reasons why we avoid looking at the broken places in our lives. The main reason seems to be around the area of *fear*.

One area of fear might be regarding *God’s judgment*. In the Bible, in the book of Genesis, we can read about Cain who denied that he had murdered his brother named Abel.

Week 4

- Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9)

Clearly Cain knew where his brother Abel was, because he had just killed him. Yet, he denied any knowledge out of fear of God's judgment. However, we should ask ourselves, "If God is all-knowing, however, how can we hide things from Him?"

Another reason that we may avoid looking at broken places is the *fear of what others might think*.

Still another reason that we avoid looking at the broken places is the *fear of change*. Most people find comfort in familiar patterns and actions. The fear, then, is that, "If I identify broken places, I might have to do something different, I might have to change, and I'm not sure I can do that."

Finally, we may fear identifying broken places because the *pain* feels too great. It can be difficult facing issues of rejection, abuse, abandonment and other painful memories.

If you feel like things are too painful, you might prayerfully ask God for wisdom and strength as you proceed slowly in identifying broken places and revisiting painful events.

So, here is another question for you,

- Why is it difficult for you to look at the broken places in your life?

The Truth

The truth is that we are broken people, sinners, with broken places in our lives. We have all sinned and have been sinned against by others.

The truth also is that Jesus is interested in us and the Holy Spirit will work with us, in us and through us on areas to positively affect our spiritual growth.

There are many positive Biblical examples of people identifying their brokenness and seeking Jesus:

- As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (Matthew 9:27)
- A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." (Matthew 15:22)
- "Lord, have mercy on my son," a man said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water." (Matthew 17:15)

Week 4

- But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' (Luke 18:13)

In each of the examples listed above, we can see a common thread...people identifying their brokenness and then asking God to help and heal them.

What If I Don't Think I Have any Broken Places?

Some people may feel as if they have no broken places in their lives.

Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend have pointed out, however, that our conscience, our inner compass for knowing what is right and wrong, "fell with the Fall".

So, it is possible that someone might *think* that they have no broken places in their lives. According to the Apostle John, though, those who do not recognize their needs are mistaken,

- "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:17)
- "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

As C.S. Lewis has noted,

- "The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of others lives, to exploit the whole universe."

As we have seen, all people have broken places that need God's healing touch to help with their relationship with God and with others.

What If I Feel Like I Do Everything Wrong?

Some, on the opposite side of the continuum may feel like they do *everything* wrong.

It is true that our lives are marked by sin. However, it is possible that some might think that they are constantly doing *everything* wrong, perhaps even wondering how God could love them because they are so bad, and experiencing feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and depression.

As J.B. Phillips has written,

"There are many...who are made miserable by a morbidly developed (or overactive) conscience, which they quite wrongly consider to be the voice of God"

Week 4

As you identify the broken places and bring light to past mistakes, it is important to identify if you are thinking of a specific thought or action, or something more general.

For example,

Specific Event

-“I lost my temper with my son this afternoon.”

-“I shouldn’t have lied yesterday.”

-“I’m fearful that I’m going to lose my job, so I’ve been working a lot lately. I need to spend more time with my family.”

-“I drank too much last night.”

General Accusation

-“I’m a bad person.”

- “God could never love me for my mistakes.”

- “Everyone thinks I’m a failure.”

- “God doesn’t care about me.”

A general accusation that demoralizes and brings discouragement is not from God.

Week 4

Identify

The fourth step then in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, "Identify the Broken Places".

Step #4:
Identify the broken places.

To begin, simply ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an area of brokenness in your life.

It will be the Holy Spirit's job to show us the broken areas that need God's healing touch.

The goal of this process then, is not to make you feel like "a worm", "worthless" or "bad". The goal is to bring into the light areas of brokenness for God's healing touch.

Our Feelings

As you ask God for insight and wisdom, perhaps you identify brokenness in a feeling, such as when you feel:

- angry
- anxious
- bored
- cynical
- depressed
- "empty inside"
- guilty
- insecure
- pressured
- like saying things that you don't really mean
- shameful
- that you need to rescue others
- that you never measure up
- that you're different
- unappreciated
- worthless

Or you may *not feel*:

- accepted
- loved

Week 4

Our fears

Perhaps as you pray for insight in this step, you are reminded of your fears, perhaps you are fearful of:

- looking at your past
- rejection
- the unknown
- trusting God

Our history

Perhaps as you pray, you identify some broken places in your personal or family history:

- family patterns
- disappointment

Our actions

Perhaps you have identified the brokenness in your actions when you:

- had a bad attitude
- blamed others
- blamed yourself for everything
- controlled others
- denied reality
- didn't trust God
- didn't trust others
- were greedy
- hurt ourselves
- hurt others
- were jealous
- lashed out in anger
- lied to help others
- lied to help ourselves
- manipulated others
- were people pleasing
- were prideful
- sought a replacement for God in:
 - o alcohol
 - o drugs
 - o escape
 - o money
 - o power
 - o relationships
 - o sex
 - o work
 - o other (really any noun or verb): _____

Week 4

- were selfish
- unforgiving
- filled with vanity
- filled with worry

If you're stuck on this step:

Reflect upon, or ask someone these questions,

- “How has my behavior hurt others?”
- “What negative results have occurred because of my feelings, thoughts or actions?”

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in this area:

Prayer

Lord, trusting that You are merciful and kind, I ask that You would reveal areas in my life that are broken and in need of Your touch. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What feelings, fears, beliefs or actions have kept you from God?
2. After spending some time in prayer, what area of brokenness in your life do you feel that God is “bringing to light”?
3. What have been the consequences of that brokenness? How has it affected you, your relationship with God, and your relationship with others?

Week 5 – Turn It Over to God

I Can't Tell God

Even after identifying the brokenness in our lives (as we discussed last week), however, we sometimes fail to seek the One who can help us with our problems and say instead, “God won’t help me.”

Lie #5

“God won’t help me.”

You may have heard others say,

- “I’ve dealt with this for so long, I’ll take care of it on my own.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I find it hard to trust God to help me because _____.”

The Truth

The truth, according to Scripture, is that we are *dependent* upon God and that God desires to help us.

According to the Bible, the Lord is good, unchanging, our protector and our provider who *wants to help us*:

- “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).
- “For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” (Isaiah 41:13)

Week 5

- “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)

So, we see in Scripture that God wants to help us.

Specific Needs

God wants to help us, not just in a general sense, but with each of our specific needs.

In our need for knowledge and wisdom we are encouraged to “call out for insight” and “cry aloud for understanding” (Prov. 2:3) and the Lord will let us “know the word that sustains the weary.” (Isaiah 50:4)

In our need for spiritual sustenance, Jesus said that, “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.” (Matthew 4:4)

In our brokenness, Jesus said that he did not come for those who had it all together, saying:

- “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32)

Scripture teaches that when we seek God we will find him. Jeremiah writes:

- “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

As Jerry Bridges has written, “...we must learn that however difficult and frustrating our circumstances might be, God’s divine assistance through the Holy Spirit is available to help us....”

Question for Discussion

- What do you find encouraging about God’s faithfulness and offers to help?

Week 5

Step Five

The fifth step in our journey of spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Turn it over to God”.

Step #5:
Turn it over to God.

What is *it* you might ask?

“It” is whatever your area of brokenness is that:

- the Holy Spirit is revealing to you and that He wants to address
- others are telling you is causing them pain
- an area of failure or difficulty that you are experiencing
- an area of your life that needs healing and forgiveness

The “it” for you may be:

- anger
- bitterness
- pain
- resentment
- shame
- unforgiveness

“Turning it over to God” is in many ways a combination of the first three steps in the Twelve Step Alcoholics Anonymous process:

- “We admit we are powerless over _____ .”
- “We believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.”
- “We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.”

Week 5

Surrender

An important part of “turning it over to God” is *surrender*.

As we identify these broken areas and give them to God, we might use terms such like “surrender”, “trust” and “follow”.

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Surrender, therefore, is an important component of this step. We must “deny” ourselves and trust Christ with our brokenness and healing.

Many have written about the need to *surrender* to God.

Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen, wrote about St. Anthony, saying that he was able to endure terrible trials, “not because of his own willpower or ascetic exploits, but because of his unconditional *surrender* to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

E. Stanley Jones, a Methodist missionary to India, answered someone who “wanted to know about the secret of victorious living” by telling them that “it was in *self-surrender*. The difference was in giving up the innermost self to Jesus.”

Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Catholic nun, wrote about an experience she had by saying, “Oh, how sweet the first kiss of Jesus was! It was a kiss of love. I knew that I was loved and declared: ‘I love You and *I give myself to You* for ever!’”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor in Germany during World War II wrote,

- “When Christ calls a man, he bids him *come and die*. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time – death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.”

And,

“Who is pure in heart? Only those who have *surrendered* their hearts completely to Jesus that he may reign in them alone.”

In his writing on the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer wrote that many could claim different ways of interpreting the text, but “Jesus knows only one possibility: simple *surrender* and obedience, not interpreting and applying it, but doing and obeying it.”

Week 5

James Houston, Chancellor of Regent College in Vancouver has written,

- “Jesus cannot simply become an occasional guest in the human heart. To allow him into our hearts means to *surrender* to his rule over our lives.”

We Can't Manipulate

As we give God ourselves and our brokenness, it is important to remember that God is *sovereign*. He will do what He wants, when He wants. What do we mean by the sovereignty of God?

Sovereignty, as writer A.W. Pink describes it, means, “the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God.”

Pink continues,

- “The Sovereignty of the God is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is Sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the Potter over the clay, i. e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a law* unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.”

That means that God is God and we are not.

That also means that we cannot:

- Manipulate God
- Cajole
- Control
- Barter with Him
- Bargain to get our way

We can simply surrender and trust.

As we surrender and “Turn it over to God” we are acknowledging two things:

- our needs
- God's faithfulness

Week 5

John Calvin wrote about this very thing in 1559,

- “True prayer is born first from our own sense of need, then from faith in God’s promises.”

As you think about God’s faithfulness in the past it should help you “turn things over to God” in the present.

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in this Step:

Prayer

Lord, thank You for wanting to change me and help me. Lord, please give me faith to turn my brokenness over to you. Help me learn to surrender my life to You. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, “God won’t help me.” How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?
 Not what I’m thinking
 Somewhat what I’m thinking
 Very much what I’m thinking
2. What is difficult about turning things over to God? Why?
3. What steps might you take in light of this week’s discussion?

Week 6 – Responding Again

God Wants Us to Follow

We discussed last week the importance of turning our brokenness and our lives over to God. We called it, “turning it over to God”.

After this step, then, it is important to check the connection; to hear what God wants us to do and then respond to Him. In Scripture we can see that God wants to give us direction on what to do to help us grow spiritually and receive healing.

The myth, or lie, that many of us believe is that “I can’t do that.”

Big Lie #6

“I can’t do that.”

You may have heard others say,

- “Not that Lord.”
- “I just got discouraged and stopped trying.”

Have you ever had those thoughts? How would you complete the sentence, “I can’t do that because _____.”

The Truth

So the truth, then, is that God wants us to understand His ways and then respond accordingly. James, says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22)

The Bible has a number of passages describing the Lord’s desire for *followers*. The writer Jerry Bridges encourages us to “take whatever specific steps are necessary in order to obey God’s direction.” The truth also, according to Scripture, is that God will not give us tasks to do that He is unwilling to help us with.

Week 6

Step Six

The sixth step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Respond to God’s direction.”

Step #6:
Respond to God’s direction.

No Formulas

The difficulty with this step is that there are no easy formulas. The specific steps that you must take to respond to God’s direction will vary based on the issues that you are facing.

Therefore, it will be important to pray for wisdom and direction and rely on God for help.

Some common responses that God may be calling you to do in response to His direction might be:

- Confession/Repentance
- Waiting
- Letting Go
- Taking Authority
- Forgiveness
- Trusting
- Renewing Your Mind
- Taking Specific Steps toward Health

Confession and Repentance

We all sin and “miss the mark.” Some of our mistakes are willful, self-centered decisions while others are unintentional. The response that God expects when we sin is to simply confess and repent. Confession simply means to tell the truth, admit, or take ownership for something that you did. Confession, therefore, means to simply say, “I did it.” Linked with confession, in Scripture, is repentance. As James Dunn, points out, there are really three definitions of the word “repent”. To repent means:

- to change one’s mind
- to regret, to feel remorse
- to turn around and head in a new direction

So, if the simple definition of confession is, “I did it.” The simple definition of repentance is, “I’m sorry, Lord. Help me do something different.” As we sin, and “miss the mark”, we should confess and repent as the Holy Spirit convicts us.

Week 6

In the Bible, James encourages Christians to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

After prayer and reflection, you might consider praying this prayer of confession and repentance from the Book of Common Prayer:

“Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you In thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the act of forgiving (or canceling the debt of) someone who you believe has hurt or wronged you.

Without forgiveness life can be filled with resentment, bitterness and retaliation. Forgiveness is an important element in the process of spiritual growth and healing. As we learned earlier, as Christians, Christ has forgiven us of all our sins.

Paul described it this way,

- “...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3)
- “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Cor. 5:21)
- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (Gal. 3:13)

Jesus taught that just as He has forgiven us, so we should forgive others. In Matthew 18, we can read a parable that Jesus told about this need to forgive others. Jesus started the parable saying, “the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”

A servant was brought to the king who owed him millions of dollars (10,000 talents in the language of the New Testament). Jesus explained, “Since the servant was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”

But the servant began pleading with the king, saying “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.” Jesus then explained that “The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”

Week 6

So, like our status before God as Christians, the servant had no debts, his debts were completely forgiven by the king. Interestingly, however, the parable does not end there. Jesus explained that after the servant left the king, he found a second servant who owed him a few dollars (a hundred denarii in the language of the New Testament).

The first servant from the parable, then grabbed the second servant who owed him money and began to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe me!" So, instead of forgiving the debts that were owed to him, the first servant, even though he had no debts to pay to the king, wanted to extract everything he could out of this second servant who owed him money.

Jesus then said that the second servant who owed the few dollars "fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'"

But the first servant refused and instead had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the King heard about this he called the first servant to him.

"You wicked servant," the King said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"
(Matthew 18:23-32)

So, through the use of the parable, Jesus taught his disciples the need to forgive others, because they had been forgiven.

On another occasion, Jesus said:

- "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mark 11:25)

Even the famous "Lord's Prayer" contains the phrase, "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) A number of churches use the more modern language version of this prayer: "forgive us our *sins* as we have forgiven those who have *sinned* against us."

What is not being said here is that if we have some unknown or unconfessed unforgiveness in our hearts that God's hands would be tied and He would be unable to forgive us. We learned earlier that once we become Christians, we are new creations, free from condemnation.

Rather, we will be unable to experientially understand the complete forgiveness and depth of God in our lives if we are unwilling to forgive others.

Another way to look at it is that others will still have some level of control over us, until we forgive them. And, as we learned previously, we can be free from the bonds of sin that control us.

Week 6

Paul encouraged Christians to:

- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32)

Paul later wrote,

- “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Col. 3:12-14)

The results of forgiveness can be powerful.

- In the Old Testament we can read the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers. After enduring much difficulty, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers which ultimately led to saving his entire family from starvation.
- In the New Testament we can read about an early Christian named Stephen who asked God to forgive those who were killing him because he was a Christian. “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” He prayed. (Acts 7:60)
- In modern times, we have the example of Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned by South Africa’s apartheid government for 27 years. The moment he was released from jail, however, he spoke about the importance of forgiveness. Later, when he was elected as South Africa’s first black President, he chose Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, focusing on restoration and forgiveness instead of retribution.

Jesus, we need to remember, is our ultimate model. As he was being crucified by his persecutors, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

So, here’s an exercise for you (it may be difficult, but God can help)...

Make a list of those past hurts and the people that you’ve been unable to forgive. Ask God to help you in extending forgiveness.

Week 6

Waiting

Christians are also frequently called to wait.

Jesus had his disciples wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) and Paul waited in Tarsus before starting his public ministry.

Numerous passages in the Bible encourage waiting:

- "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)
- I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)
- "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)
- "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope" (Psalm 130:5)
- "...we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:25)

We can have confidence in the Lord that He will be with us as we wait. You may need to wait to receive an:

- answer to prayer
- insight
- wisdom

What is it that you need to wait on God for?

Trusting

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to *trust* Him.

- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."
(Prov. 3:5)
- "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2)
- Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me."
(John 14:1)

Trusting God means having *faith* that God will provide help for your needs.

Week 6

Jesus said,

- "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:22-24)

In a similar passage, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not heal a boy, and Jesus replied,

- "Because you have so little faith. I tell the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20-21)

Question for Discussion:

- What seems like a "mountain" in your life that is in need of moving with God's help?

Letting Go

As we trust God, we will find the need to "let go" of anything in a situation that we are trying to control, fix or manipulate.

Controlling situations in our own lives or the lives of others falls short of what God intends for us. God desires that we let go in order to trust Him.

Perhaps you have seen the limits to controlling ourselves and others. As Henri Nowen has written, "Even when we are trying to be in control and to determine our own course in life, we have to admit that life remains a great unknown to us."

For counselors and psychologists, this process of "letting go" is known as "detachment."

When should we detach? According to Melodie Beattie, we should detach, "When we can't stop thinking, talking about, or worrying about someone or something; when our emotions are churning and boiling; when we feel like we have to do something about someone."

So, as we trust God, we will need to "let go" and ask God to control the situation.

Renewing the Mind

Another response to God's direction is called "renewing your mind."

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

Our minds can be filled with many misconceptions, but by reading and meditating on Scripture we can bring truth to the lies that we believe.

If we are prone to trust in our possessions, or anxious about not having enough, we may need reminding that, according to Jesus,

- "Watch out! Be on your guard for all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

And the writer of Hebrews explains,

- "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 12:5)

If we are anxious about our circumstances, we might be reminded in Scripture to,

- "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you." (I Peter 5:7)

If we are mourning or sad and in need of comfort, we might read from the Apostle John,

- "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)

God's Word will give us the truth that we need for living and for combating our negative and misconceived thoughts.

Question for Discussion:

- What areas of your thinking would you like to be changed by more of God's truth?

Taking Authority

Another response to God's direction may be to take spiritual authority over a situation, or a broken area of your life. You may not be aware of it, but if you are a Christian, you are involved at some level in spiritual warfare.

Week 6

According to the Bible, as Christians, we have an enemy that seeks to accuse and destroy.

Paul wrote that, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Peter said that, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The enemy, also referred to as Satan in the Bible, then, is one who will try to accuse and torment us. Because of God, however, we should not fear Satan.

- Jesus said, “...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (that is, Hell) will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18)
- According to Paul, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your foot.” (Romans 16:20)

What do we need to do to use our “spiritual authority”? According to Scripture, we need to simply rely on God and be dependent on Him.

- “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

In the book of Acts, we can learn how the early Christians encountered spirits sent by Satan. When Paul encountered an evil spirit in a fortuneteller, he simply used his spiritual authority and said to the spirit,

- “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her.” (Acts 16:18)

Question for Discussion:

- What areas of your life do you feel that the enemy is harassing, bringing temptation, doubt or pain?

Perhaps you could pray simply as the Apostle Paul did, saying, “Stop that, in the name of Jesus.”

Taking Specific Steps toward Health

In addition to the responses that we have identified, there may be additional specific steps towards spiritual growth and health that God may be asking you to take.

So, after you have surrendered, turned your brokenness over to God and admitted your own ownership in a situation, God may provide you with specific steps to start, stop or continue.

Actions to Start

Perhaps as a response to God's leading, you may identify healthy actions to *start*:

- attending church
- attending a small group for growth
- helping/serving others
- making amends with others - if you have hurt them
- praying for others
- reading God's Word
- saying "No" – if you feel pressured by others
- setting limits - if others are hurting you
- spending time with God in worship
- telling others about your feelings
- thanking God for what He has provided

Actions to Stop

Perhaps you may identify actions to *stop*:

- being a victim
- blaming others
- controlling others
- destructive habits
- doubting
- nagging
- saying hurtful things

Actions to continue

Perhaps you may identify actions to *continue* doing that lead to greater spiritual growth and health.

Week 6

The Result

The result of responding to God's direction can be powerful.

As Smith Wigglesworth has written, "Christ takes us where we are and transforms us by His power."

As God's new creations, we should expect that God will pour out his Spirit upon us and transform our lives, giving us even more than what we have even requested.

If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, think and reflect for a moment upon the pain of not changing or not responding to God.

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in the Step:

Prayer

Lord, as Your new creation I know that You are calling me to some difficult things. Please give me the strength to respond to your loving direction and care. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Think for a moment about some of the responses mentioned in this week's discussion as a response to God's direction:
 - Confession/Repentance
 - Forgiveness
 - Waiting
 - Trusting
 - Letting Go
 - Renewing Your Mind
 - Taking Authority
 - Taking Specific Steps toward Health

Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "I can't do that." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

- Not what I'm thinking
- Somewhat what I'm thinking
- Very much what I'm thinking

2. What is difficult about responding to God's direction in these ways? Why?
3. What action steps might you take in light of this week's topic?

Week 7 – Giving Away What You’ve Learned

God will help us

As we are with our Heavenly Father, in prayer and worship, we will gain incredible things, such as insight, wisdom, and skills.

We will find that God desires to help us because He loves us. But as we receive spiritual healing and help, however, He does not want us to just keep what we’ve learned to ourselves, He wants us to give it away to help others.

The myth, or lie, that many of us believe, however, is that “nobody’s interested.”

Lie #7

“Nobody’s interested.”

You may have heard others say,

- “I’m the only one who experienced that.
- Nobody’s interested in what I have to offer.

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I don’t want to tell others about this because _____.”

The Truth

The truth is that God will use us to help others.

Think about Jesus’ disciples for a moment. They were certainly a motley crew, among them were: uneducated fishermen, a tax collector, a member of a violent separatist group and a betrayer. However, God used them to help others.

Week 7

In Matthew 14:13-21, we learn that after a long day of teaching, the disciples came to Jesus concerned that the crowds had no food, and recommended that Jesus stop his teaching and send the people home.

“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” Jesus told his disciples.

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.” They answered him.

So Jesus told his disciples to bring him the food. And (we learn in Luke’s account) then He had the disciples organize the crowd in “groups of about fifty each.”

After taking the five loaves and two fish he gave thanks for it and then gave it to the disciples to give to the people.

So, the disciples gave away what they had. As they were distributing the small amounts of food to the crowds God multiplied it so that everyone had enough.

The Bible says, that “they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over”.

The passage concludes with this astounding piece of information, “The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.” In this passage, we see that even though the disciples had only a little to offer, God used that little amount to help others in need.

On another occasion, Jesus said it this way, “Freely you have received, freely give”.
(Matthew 10:8)

Step Seven

The seventh step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Give Away What You’ve Learned”.

Step #7:

Give away what you’ve learned.

Let’s consider Jesus’ disciples again. You would think that after the amazing miracle of multiplying the fish and the loaves among “five thousand men, besides the women and children”, it would have been ingrained into their thinking of what Jesus could do.

Week 7

However, in just the next chapter in the Bible (Matthew 15:29-38), we see the same type of situation occurring again.

We learn that a great crowd had gathered as Jesus was healing and Jesus called his disciples to him and said,

- "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

So, here again we see the disciples asking Jesus how the crowd could be fed, even though they had been part of an earlier miracle that fed thousands.

Instead of condemning his disciples, or shaming them for their forgetfulness or their doubt with their question, we learn that Jesus simply said, "How many loaves do you have?"

"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."

Once again Jesus had the crowds sit down, then He took the seven loaves and "when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples" and again the disciples distributed the food to the people.

Again, as they distributed the food, God multiplied it so that everyone had enough.

We learn that, "They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." And that "the number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children."

So, an amazing miracle was performed by God, to help people.

There are many, many encouraging things about this passage. Again, we should note that Jesus did not condemn or shame the disciples for their doubt, their forgetfulness of the earlier miracle or for their unwillingness to immediately help.

Instead, Jesus simply asked a question, "How many loaves do you have?"

We might not have loaves in our hands, but the question that Jesus is likely asking us is similar,

- "What do you have?"

Once we answer that, Jesus will likely ask us to help others by giving away what we have...as Jesus did told His disciples:

Week 7

- “You give them something to eat.” (as Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 14)
- “Feed my sheep.” (as He told Peter in John 21:18)

Writer Thomas Merton compared this process of giving away to others what we have received to a flame going from one candle to another into a darkened world.

I can't do that

You may think (as you might have with the six other steps in the booklet),

- “I can't do that. There's no way I can try that and help others.”

And, if you have said that, there is some validity to that statement.

On your own, you cannot help others grow spiritually. However, with God's help you can.

The Apostle Paul said that we need to acknowledge our weakness, quoting Jesus as saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Paul then continued by saying, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me.” (2 Cor. 12:5)

Even though we are weak, God will still use us. Jesus said, “With God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26)

Transforming and Redeeming

Helping others, we learn in Scripture, is one reason why God is interested in our brokenness.

God is a God of redemption.

God will take (or redeem) what has been lost and broken, things that the enemy intended for evil and destruction, and use it, somehow, to help others.

- “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him...” (Romans 8:28)

Week 7

As Joseph in the Old Testament told his brothers after seeing how God transformed their betrayal into the salvation of his family,

- “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:20)

So, we see in Scripture that God will transform our brokenness. And even though others may have intended to harm us, God will use our brokenness for the benefit of others.

Indispensable Parts of Christ’s Body

We learned earlier that all Christians are part of the Body of Christ. The author Jerry Bridges has written, “...each part of the body is indispensable.” And according to pastor Greg Ogden, “Everyone has a part in this play.” He explains that, “The church is to be a therapeutic community. It is a place where broken, struggling people can become well and whole.”

And according to pastor Greg Ogden, “Everyone has a part in this play.” Rev. Ogden explains that, “The church is to be a therapeutic community. It is a place where broken, struggling people can become well and whole.”

Priesthood of all believers

Some reading this may think,

- “I am not a qualified therapist to help others.”
- Or, “I am not a pastor.”

While it is true that helping others overcome certain issues may require the help of trained pastoral counselors or therapists, every Christian can still share what they have learned with others.

In the sixteenth century, Christian scholars used the phrase “*priesthood of all believers*” to explain our status with Christ and with others.

They said that we are all qualified to have a relationship with God and to help others as Greg Ogden explains,

- “People are put back together again so that they can be useful channels of God’s service. We are not trying simply to create *happy* people who feel better about themselves, but whole people who build up the body of Christ and bring the message of salvation and the witness of compassion to a broken world.”

Week 7

Serving Others

Serving others is at the heart of Christianity.

In Scripture we can read,

- That the Apostle John wrote, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

- Paul wrote, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

- Similarly, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained it like this,

- "The bearers of Jesus' word receive a final word of promise for their work. They are now Christ's fellow workers, and will be like him in all things. Thus they are to meet those to whom they are sent as if they were Christ himself. They are bearers of his presence. They bring with them the most precious gift in the world, the gift of Jesus Christ."

So what's your story?

- So the question now is, "What do you have to share?"
 - o How would you like God to use you to help others?

If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, the following prayer might reflect your thoughts and hopes.

Prayer

Lord, help me see You as You are in the process of transforming my life. Lord, help me to share with others the things that I have learned. Amen.

Week 7

Questions for Reflection:

1. What about helping others do you find inspiring?
2. Who would you like to share your story with?
3. When will you talk to them?
4. What things stop you from sharing what you've learned spiritually with others?
5. How could God help you overcome those obstacles?

Conclusion

As we conclude, let me first thank you for joining with others on this journey. I trust you have found some helpful concepts to bring spiritual growth and healing in your life.

To review here are the seven steps that we have discussed:

The Seven Steps for Growth and Healing

1. Look for God's presence in your life.
2. Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith.
3. Discover new life in Christ.
4. Identify the broken places.
5. Turn it over to God.
6. Respond to God's direction.
7. Give away what you've learned.

As we have learned, after we have acknowledged that God is working in our lives and wants to help us (Step #1) and we have placed our faith in Christ (Step #2) we become God's new creations.

These first two steps need only occur once (but they can be very helpful to review many times - to remember the work that God has done in your life).

The remaining steps, Steps #3 through #7, can be worked and re-worked for the rest of our lives.

Our lives as Christians will be marked by discovering more and more the new life we are called to in Christ (Step #3).

Our Christian lives will also be marked by God helping us identify areas that are broken and need healing (Steps #4-6) and sharing what we have learned with others (Step #7).

Over time, God will continue to show us deeper areas of new life with Christ (Step #3) and identify other broken places for us to work on and we will start the process (Steps #4-6) all over again.

This may seem like an overwhelming task, but God will help us. As the Apostle Paul said,

Week 7

- “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

Enjoy the Journey...

Finally, it will be important for us to try to enjoy this journey of spiritual growth. We cannot control it, though, because God is in control.

Sometimes it will be difficult. However, James explained that we need to “consider it joy when we face trials” (James 1:2). Similarly, the Apostle Paul wrote that we should “rejoice in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3) and “be content in all circumstances” (Phil. 4:11)

“We must endure patiently,” As John Calvin encouraged us, “because God will not have us come to his kingdom, so to speak, in one leap.”

Our spiritual growth is a journey, as G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “To the Christian, existence is a story...”

The story, or journey, for each of us will look different. However, the destination that God desires for all of us is the same...

- that our lives be transformed by God’s love and mercy
- that we grow spiritually
- that we receive spiritual healing
- that we have an attitude of thanksgiving and gratitude for all of the things that He has done.