



FREEDOM IN CHRIST

SET THE CAPTIVES FREE

(9 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION
BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation – Topical Studies

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading the group discussions but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials firstly provide you with a series of passages so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Secondly, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought and help you think through what the passages meant both at the time it was written and also what it means for us now. Because these studies are topical there is a much stronger progression of thought (than there would be in a passage based study). The dangers of such studies are that discussion can move quite far from the Bible. Yet this it is still the best way of covering broad subjects like this.

I would really encourage you to make use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are however only “tools”, they are there to help you and not to restrict you or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages and if the questions or notes do not help you, then don't use them!

I have included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

INTRODUCING “FREEDOM IN CHRIST”

What comes to mind when you think of the word freedom? Every November 11th we remember those who died in the two world wars and gave their lives so that we could be free from enemy rule and occupation. Many films take up this idea of liberty and freedom such as 'Braveheart', 'the Shawshank Redemption', 'the Great Escape', 'The Matrix' or the 'Truman Show'. Perhaps if we lived in a different country freedom would be a much bigger deal for us as we often tend to take our freedom for granted. Freedom is a deep desire and cry of many across our world whose liberty is restricted.

Often our world thinks about the idea of freedom as the ability to do what we like but the Bible has a very different approach to this concept. Paul says that 'it is for freedom that Christ has set us free' (**Galatians 5:1**). For many of us though, it can often seem as if we are not free. Peter Baker (currently the pastor at Lansdowne Baptist Church, Bournemouth) said "this verse *appears to be contradicted in the experience of so many. We do not feel free.*" In these studies we want to consider whether we really are free and if so why our experiences don't always appear to support this truth.

Jesus says that true freedom comes when we know the truth (**John 8:31-32**). Jesus also said 'I am the truth' (**John 14:6**); it is Him who sets captives free and He is the one who can give us freedom. It is only because of what Jesus achieved on the cross that we can be set free. Power for the Christian comes in knowing, believing and choosing the truth – truth we need to *actively pursue*. We are in a spiritual battle and we must stand firm. Nobody can believe the truth for us, nobody can put on the 'full armour of God' for us – it is something that we must do for ourselves. Do we truly know the truth?

In the Galatian church, a pressure group had started saying that in order to be a Christian you needed to be circumcised (**Gal 5:1-15**). They were saying that grace was not sufficient for salvation. Paul told the Galatians; "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" (**v7**). Paul uses the analogy of a race to represent our Christian lives. He was saying that someone had cut in on them, causing them to change direction. In the context of Galatians 5 they had moved out of the 'lane marked grace' into the 'lane marked law!' All of these studies are designed to think through issues that distract and hinder us from running the race marked out for us (**Heb 12:1-2**).

There are four applications that we need to keep in mind as we work through these studies;

(1) We need to know the truth – Satan deceives us into believing his lies; lies that impede our effectiveness as Christians. We cannot expose his deception by human reasoning, but only by God's Word. True freedom comes from knowing the truth (**John 8:31-32**). That knowledge is not simply academic, but a knowledge that impacts our thoughts and actions. It leads us to hold on to Jesus' teaching. We must know the truth, believe the truth and choose the truth in our daily lives. Bruce Milne says "Remaining in the truth, is the true mark of a disciple." Sometimes we have to believe the truth even when our feelings tell us otherwise – the feelings and emotions will come in time!

(2) We need to help one another - As Peter testifies in **1 Peter 5:8-9**, we are not the only ones who are being attacked by the devil; others are facing the same sufferings. Prayer groups are a great opportunity to encourage and be accountable to one another.

(3) We need to renew our minds – The world around us and our flesh have trained our minds to think in a certain way, but we need to retrain our minds. When we become a Christian there is no delete

button for the way we used to think and it is hard to forget the way we have been trained by everything around us. To renew our minds we need to think Biblically teaching our minds to think in a Christian way about the world around us. We need to constantly fill our minds with Scripture and let our minds be renewed and transformed by it.

(4) We need to pray – Jesus, our High Priest has been tempted in every way but was without sin. He promises to forgive us if we confess our sins to Him (**1 John 1:9**). We cannot overcome the devil's lies, live holy lives or renew our minds in our own strength. He too can help us through His Holy Spirit to be transformed into His likeness.

We trust that these studies will be helpful to us all as we seek to walk with Jesus, run the race marked out for us and be increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ our Saviour.

Steve McClure

First written December 2008 and edited January 2014

Sources / further reading on Knowing God

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- Knowing God, JI Packer, © 1973 Hodder & Stoughton
- Reaching for the Invisible God, Phillip Yancey, © 2000 Zondervan
- God is closer than you think, John Ortberg, © 2005 Zondervan
- The Sacred Romance – Drawing closer to the heart of God, Brent Curtis & John Eldredge, © 1997 Thomas Nelson
- Crazy love – overwhelmed by a relentless God, Frances Chan, © 2008 D.C. Cook Distribution
- Desiring God, John Piper, © 1986 IVP
- Counterfeit gods, Tim Keller, © 2009 Hodder & Stoughton

Sources / further reading on Understanding our Identity

- The me I want to be – becoming God's best version of you, John Ortberg, © 2010 Zondervan
- Victory over darkness, Dr Neil T. Anderson, © 1994 Monarch Books
- Mirror, mirror – Discover your true identity in Christ, Graham Beynon © 2008 IVP
- Inside Out, Larry Crabb, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1988
- Facing Your Giants, Max Lucado © 2006 Thomas Nelson
- Grace, Max Lucado © 2012, Thomas Nelson
- Captivating, John & Stasi Eldredge, © 2005 Thomas Nelson
- Wild at heart, John Eldredge, © 2001 Thomas Nelson

Sources / further reading on Freedom from captivity

- What is so amazing about Grace?, Philip Yancey, © 1997, Zondervan
- In the Grip of Grace, Max Lucado, © 1996, W. Publishing Group
- The Discipline of grace, Jerry Bridges, © 1994 NavPress
- The Bondage Breaker, Dr Neil T. Anderson, © 2000 Monarch Books
- The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, © 1942 Harper Collins
- You can change, Tim Chester, © 2008 IVP

STUDY 1 – INTRODUCING FREEDOM – THE NATURE OF FREEDOM

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will consider what true freedom is and how we can be free in Christ. To do this we will look back to how we were created and forward to our glorious transformation at the new creation before considering what it means to be free today over the rest of the series.

SETTING THE SCENE: The Oxford dictionary defines it as “is *“the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants” or “the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved”*: what are the problems with this definition of freedom? Thomas Huxley wrote: “*A man’s worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes*”; to what extent do you agree or disagree?

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SET FREE FROM SLAVERY (GALATIANS 5:1); How do these ideas of freedom contrast with the concept of freedom we find in the Bible? What is this freedom Paul writes about for which Christ has set us free (v1)? (Paul is writing to warn the Galatians of the dangers of going back to live under the law and in particular the issue of circumcision).

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FREEDOM TO LOVE (GALATIANS 5:13-26); What is the purpose of the freedom we have in Christ? In what sense is true freedom actually the freedom to love (which Paul says is the fulfilment of the intention of the law) *rather* than freedom to do whatever we like?

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In v16-26 Paul contrasts being led by ‘the flesh’ with being led by ‘the Spirit’. What are the things produced (i.e. the fruit) of each master? To what extent do you feel free to love and be the person God intended you to be? (NB. we will pick up this tension of being free but not feeling free in studies 7&8)

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CREATED IN GOD’S LIKENESS (GEN 1:26-28); How do you understand what it says about humans being created in God’s image and in His likeness (Additional Quotes 1)? How is this seen in our

relationships (intimacy with God/others), our responsibility (moral choices/roles), our rationality (thinking/talking) and our real-ness (experiences emotions)?

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CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES (GEN 2-3); What was the freedom like which God gave to Adam and Eve (note God’s command in 2:16-17 and consider how much God was present in the garden)? Was their decision to disobey God an act of ‘freedom’ or ‘slavery’ (3:6-11)?

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What were the consequences of their choice (consider the impact on the areas of relationships, responsibility, rationality and real-ness)? To what extent do you agree that Gen 1-3 demonstrates that true freedom was found only within boundaries (see Additional Quotes 2)?

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AWAITING THE NEW CREATION (GAL 5:13-26): What is your experience of living with this ‘tension’ Paul writes about in these verses? How does the new creation promise to resolve this tension (Rev 21:1-5, 2 Cor 3:18 & 1 John 3:1-3)? How should the New Creation reality affect the way we live now?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What lessons about the nature of true freedom have most stood out to you from this study? How could (or indeed should) these insights transform your thinking and/or behaviour?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another your reflections on the nature of true freedom. Encourage and pray for one another as live the tension waiting for the renewal of all things when Jesus returns and ‘we are all changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye’ (1 Cor 15:51-52).

MEMORY VERSE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

STUDY 2 – FREEDOM TO KNOW GOD – THE SACRED ROMANCE

INTRODUCTION: Our relationship to God is a key aspect of being made in His image. In this study we will try to differentiate what it means to merely know about God from what it means to genuinely know and experience Him. We will then consider how we can invest wholeheartedly in that relationship.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is the difference between merely *knowing about God* and *knowing of God*? What does it mean to know / have a relationship with someone? What are the differences and similarities between knowing God and knowing one another (Additional Quotes 3)?

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TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE (PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11): How do we see Paul's understanding of what it meant to 'know God' change after his experience on the Damascus road? What kinds of things do we fall into the trap of equating with true 'knowledge of God' (see Paul's list in 3:3-6)?

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What do you think Paul means when he says that he wants to 'know Christ' and when he says he considers 'everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ'? Do you think you yourself could say such things about your own relationship with God?

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KNOWING GOD'S VOICE (JOHN 10:24-30): In what ways are we like sheep and Jesus like our shepherd? What are the ways that you 'hear Jesus' voice'? How do you distinguish 'His voice' from other voices that might occupy your attention?

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GOD'S INITIATIVE NOT OURS (GAL 4:8-9, JOHN 15:15-16): In what sense is our ability to know God dependent upon Him and His initiative to know us (see also Jeremiah 1:5-10)? To what extent are we aware of the privilege we have in being able to know and relate to God?

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THE FRUIT OF KNOWING GOD (TITUS 1:16, 1 JOHN 2:3-6): What assures you that you know and experience God? What can we learn from how people in the Bible knew God and allowed this knowledge to impact their lives; e.g. Daniel (Dan 3:16-18, 9:2-3), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5-10), David (Acts 13:22), Apostles (Acts 5:27-32), Moses (Ex 33:17-23)?

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Packer lays down a bold suggestion that how much we know God is evidenced in our prayer lives (Additional Quotes 4); how do you respond to this assertion? How might we grow our love for Him and faith in Him so that we might be 'filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy' (1 Peter 1:8-9)?

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KNOWING GOD FOR ETERNITY (JOHN 17:1-3): How do you respond (intellectually and emotionally) to Jesus' claim that eternity is about knowing God? What excites you about this? With that in mind, what has helped you (or could help you) to know and experience God better?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: The Bible often uses the language of sexuality to describe the intimate relationship we have with God (e.g. Ezekiel 16, Eph 5:25-33, Hosea 2:14-20): How do you respond to this picture of our relationship with God, and what are its implications (Additional Quotes 5)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share some of the things that hold you back from genuinely knowing God. Pray for one another that we would know Christ and the power of His resurrection, that He *"may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."* Ephesians 1:17

MEMORY VERSES: JEREMIAH 9:23-24

STUDY 3 – FREEDOM TO KNOW GOD – IDOLATRY AND THE TRUE GOD

INTRODUCTION: The aim of this study is to help us to think through our ideas of God and where they originate. Idolatry is anything that take God's rightful place in our lives, but it could also be seen as entertaining unworthy thoughts of Him. We will think about consequences such distorted views of God.

SETTING THE SCENE: How would you contrast the ways that Christians and non-Christians think about God? What are the origins of our ideas about God? How important is our experience of God in forming our ideas about Him? How do we know when we genuinely experience Him?

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DEFINING IDOLATRY (ISAIAH 29:13-16, 44:6-17 OR EXODUS 32:1-4): Tozer writes: "the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him": to what extent would you agree (see also Additional Quotes 6)? Looking at 1-2 of these passages how would you describe Old Testament idolatry? How do these thoughts and actions compare with idolatry today?

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What are the consequences of having a distorted view of God (Additional Quotes 7&8)? How can we develop an undistorted view of God? How do we develop a balanced perspective of God's attributes; e.g. wrath vs. love, personal relationship vs. awe/reverence?

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THE CHARACTER OF GOD: How do you respond to the following ideas about God; God is limitless (Psalm 139), God is incomparable (Isaiah 40:18-29) and God's thoughts/plans are above ours (Isaiah 55:8-9)? How different are these ideas from our own ideas and those of the world?

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The Bible claims that God is the very definition and sources of attributes such as 'love' (1 John 4:7-16), 'truth' (John 14:6) and 'holiness' (Lev 11:45). How do you get your head around this and what implications does this have for your view of God and how your subsequently live your lives?

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THE NAME OF GOD (EXODUS 3:13-15): God tells Moses that His name is “I AM WHO I AM” and tells him to tell the Israelites that “I AM has sent me to you”. What does this description of God teach us about Him and what He is like?

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THE GLORY OF GOD (JOHN 11:1-6): Jesus does not heal Lazarus immediately, but instead allows him to die. Jesus says that his sickness would not end in death however and that ‘it’s for God’s glory’. How do you wrestle with this concept; do you think God is vain, or worthy of praise? Why should our response to an encounter with the true God be worship and praise (See also Rev 4:8-11)?

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GLORIFYING GOD: The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1646-47) says “*The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*” To what extent do you believe that to be true both generally and for you personally? (NB: Piper suggests revising this to be “to glorify God by enjoying Him forever”)

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: John Piper famously said “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him”: what would help us to be more satisfied in Him and more passionate about seeing God glorified in our lives (Additional Quotes 9)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share your experiences of God and the lessons you have been learning about Him. Discuss the struggles you face with appreciating God for who He is rather than the God you would like Him to be. Praise and worship Him together.

MEMORY VERSES: ISAIAH 55:8-9

STUDY 4 – UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – GOD’S DELIGHT IN ME

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will think through what influences how we think about and view ourselves, and how that in turn affects our behaviour. We will contrast this with how God made us (intrinsic value derived from how he made us) and who we now are in Christ (new creations in Christ).

SETTING THE SCENE: What would you say has most influenced the way you think about yourself? What does it mean to place our identity in something? Would you say that who you are is determined by what you do, or that what you do determined is by who you are?

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How do you observe yourself (or indeed others) to have been impacted by ‘other people’, past experiences (esp. hardships or scars), media & culture and close relationships? What is the danger of building our identity around these things (Additional Quotes 10)?

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MADE TO BEAR GOD’S IMAGE (GEN 1-2, PSALM 139:15-16): How does the Genesis account contrast the creation of animals (1:24-25) with the creation of mankind (1:26-31)? To what extent would you agree that the creation of mankind was the climax of God’s creation?

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What does the creation account say about our ‘intrinsic value’ as human beings? What can we imply about their sense of *value, significance, acceptance and security*? How aware are we of the intrinsic uniqueness of how God made us; the fact that all of us are special in God’s eyes?

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NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST (EPH 1:3-14): What does Paul say about who we are *in Christ*? How do you understand the blessings that Paul says are ours if we know Jesus? How does this passage speak to our need for *value, significance, acceptance and security*?

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What stops us from believing that these things are true which in turn affects our freedom? How should our identity in Christ affect the way in which we live? What would our lives look like if we really believed that we were significant, accepted, secure and valued by Him?

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IMPLICATIONS OF OUR NEW IDENTITY (EPH 2:8-10): What are the implications of being God's workmanship, created in Christ (v10)? How do you respond to the idea that God has prepared good works in advance for us to do? As God's workmanship, how should this new sense of 'purpose' flow out of our new identity in Christ?

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A FATHER'S DELIGHT (LUKE 15:20-24): Deep down do you really think that God delights in you in the way that the Father delights in the return of his son in Luke 15? (Additional Quotes 11, Isaiah 61:10 & Zephaniah 3:17 and Song of Songs 5:2-5)

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What practically can we do to become more aware of our identity in Christ? How can we let this identity define who we are rather than allowing 'our baggage' to define us? How might looking elsewhere for our sense of identity compromise our sense of identity?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Spend a few minutes praising God for the way that He made us and for all of the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. Pray through some of the truths about our new identity contained in Appendix 1 on pg. 24 (Neil Anderson).

MEMORY VERSES: PSALM 139:13-14

STUDY 5 – UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – LIVING OUT OUR IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION: We introduced some ideas last week to help us understand our identity. Our hope this week is to deepen our understanding by looking at 2 case studies (David & the 'sinful' Woman) and a few key aspects of our new identity in Christ (dearly loved, Children of God, heirs).

SETTING THE SCENE: Following our previous study about identity, what difference (if any) have these thoughts made to your everyday lives? If not, what examples can you give of how you have seen these things worked out in the lives of others?

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1. DAVID: GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART (1 SAM 16:2-13): Which of Jesse's sons would you have chosen to succeed Saul as King, and why? What surprises you about God's choice of David? Contrast God's selection criteria (v7) with our own (as demonstrated by the responses of Samuel & Jesse)?

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FACING OUR GIANTS (1 SAM 17:26-58): The same criteria are employed when Saul is looking for a man to fight against Goliath. How did David's understanding of himself and of God give him the courage to fight against Goliath? As we face our own giants, what difference does knowing our identity in Christ make? How can we learn to focus not on the giant but on God (See Additional Quotes 12)?

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2. SIMON THE PHARISEE (LUKE 7:36-50): What do we know about who Simon the Pharisee was and why do you think he invited Jesus to eat at his house? How did the events that unfolded convince Simon about who the woman was and who Jesus was (v37 & 39)?

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THE SINFUL WOMAN (v37-38): What do we know about the woman and why was she there? How would her attendance, and behaviour have been perceived? What would be a parallel scenario today? What do her actions say about her own understanding of who she is and what Jesus had done for her?

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THE TWO DEBTORS (v41-46): How does Jesus' mini parable (v41-42) challenge Simon's identity, and lack of respect for Jesus (v43-46)? Who would you say understood their identity better? Why? What can we learn from this account about our own identity and how it should affect our lives?

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DEARLY LOVED CHILDREN (1 JOHN 3:1-3): What kind of love has the Father lavished upon us and what has it accomplished for us? What does John say will be the ultimate outcome of this love relationship (v2)? How should this love (and its implications) affect our daily lives (v3)?

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CHILDREN, HEIRS & CO-HEIRS (ROM 8:14-17): What are the implications of being children of God, heirs and co-heirs with Christ (consider rights & privileges)? What is the significance of the Spirit's role in helping us to know who we are?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In light of all that we have seen why do you think we still try and find ways to try and feel good about ourselves and look for identity elsewhere (Additional Quotes 13)? How do we change our attitude so that we start trusting God's verdict about us?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another how you respond emotionally from the 2 case studies and the deeper look at some of the things that are true about us if we are in Christ. Pray for one another that these truths would move from head to heart; that we would truly know God's delight in us.

MEMORY VERSES: EPHESIANS 1:4-5

STUDY 6 – UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

INTRODUCTION: We've seen that our *value, significance, acceptance and security* are ultimately only found in God. In this study we consider the nature of God's love and think about the implications of our questions about identity in how we relate to one another in various kinds of relationships.

SETTING THE SCENE: To what extent would you describe God's love as an emotional love (*'phileo' love*) or as an active, sacrificial love (*'agapao' love*)? How have you experienced the emotional sides of God's love (e.g. Exodus 20:4-6, 32:6,10, Psalm 78:40, 103:13, Isaiah 62:5)? What does Deuteronomy 7:7-9 have to say about why God chose to love His people?

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'GOD IS LOVE' (1 JOHN 4:7-16): If God doesn't love us because of *who we are*, then why does He love us (v8, 16)? What does this tell us about the nature of God's love? How was this love demonstrated at the cross? If God loves us because it is in His nature to love (not because we are lovable); how can we model this in our own relationships?

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BECAUSE 'HE FIRST LOVED US' (1 JOHN 4:11, 19): How have you experienced God's love as stimulus to love others (see also John 13:34-35)? In a broader sense how can understanding our identity in Christ help our relationships to flourish?

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DANGER OF SELF-PROTECTION: Larry Crabb (Additional Quotes 14) says that we go to lengths to protect ourselves from allowing ourselves to be hurt: to what extent would you agree that this self-protective tendency is the opposite of love? How does it hold us back from being involved with others?

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DANGER OF SEEKING VALIDATION FROM OTHERS: In what ways do we search for *value, significance, acceptance and security* through relationships with others? How does this manifest itself and what are the dangers of doing this both generally, and also, in boy-girl relationships?

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GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR MARRIAGE (EPH 5:22-33, 1 PET 3:1-7): What do the instructions contained within these passages teach us about how to relate to one another within the context of marriage? To what extent do these instructions help us find our true identity in God and prevent ourselves seeking to protect ourselves or seek validation in others?

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PRINCIPLE OF LOVE & SUBMISSION: What do the 'principle of submission' and the different roles Paul defines for men & women mean for our sense of value and acceptance? What is the significance of the fact that our relationships should reflect the relationship between Christ and the church?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How has what we've studied in the past few weeks helped you in thinking about our relationship with God, about understanding our identity, and about how these things impact on our relationships? What steps do you need to take in order to grow in these areas?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: We live in a broken world and so our relationships with one another are broken too. Share with one another some of your struggles in the area of relationships, and pray for one another that you would be secure in your identity in Christ, and allow that to shape those relationships.

MEMORY VERSES: ROMANS 8:38-39

STUDY 7 – BATTLES WE FACE – THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION: There is pressure to conform (rather than be transformed) to the ways of the world around us. Building on our identity in Christ, we will consider what's involved in living a holy life and tackle some of the issues we face as we live 'in the world' without being 'of the world' (John 17:15-18).

SETTING THE SCENE: What are the issues which make living a holy life difficult as a student? Why are the pressures to conform to the ways of the 'world' around us so strong? What do you think the Bible means when it talks about 'the world' (John 3:16 vs 1 John 2:15-17 or James 4:4)?

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TRANSFORMED OR CONFORMED (ROMANS 12:1-2): How does Paul contrast the difference between 'being conformed' and 'being transformed'? What does 'renewing our minds' look like in practice, and what is the fruit of doing so?

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OUR THREE CAPTORS (EPH 2:1-3): Before we came to Christ Paul says *we were* captive to the "ways of this world", "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" and the "cravings of our flesh". What exactly are these 'captors', and in what sense *were we* captive to them?

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A MOTIVATION TO BE HOLY (1 PETER 1:13-16, 2:9-12): How would you define holiness (Additional Quotes 15)? What should be our motivation to be holy (See also Lev 11:44-45, 19:1-2 & 20:6-8)? How is the call to be holy based on our relationship with God (1:15-16), and our new identity in Christ (2:9-12)? In what areas have you experienced the call to be holy to be at odds with society around us?

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Where do we start as we seek to live as obedient children, who do not conform to the evil desires of ignorance (e.g. Romans 12:1-2 & Eph 4:22-24)?

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MOULDED FOR PURPOSE (DANIEL 1:1-7): How would you contrast Daniel's three year training programme in Babylon with the challenges of being a student today? What were the consequences for Daniel of being a 'foreigner and an exile' (consider what the Babylonian training scheme was meant to achieve)? What about us (1 Peter 1:11)?
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RESOLVE TO BE DIFFERENT (DANIEL 1:8-21): Why do you think that Daniel resolved not to eat the royal 'food and wine'? Why do you think that Daniel chose to make a stand on this issue? How did God honour Daniel's decision to make a stand for Him?
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DRAWING THE LINE (JOHN 17:15-18): Where are you currently 'drawing the line,' and resolving to be different on issues of holiness? How do we strike a balance between being 'in the world' while not being 'of the world'; involvement rather than withdrawal, no compromise rather than conformity?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (1 COR 10:23-32): What might it look like to cause others to stumble as we exercise our freedom? How can we exercise the freedom we have in Christ responsibly, without compromise and without causing our brothers and sisters in Christ to stumble?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another about the pressures you face to compromise and conform to the world around us. Pray for one another that you would each live distinctive Christian lives that cause unbelievers 'to glorify God on the day he visits us' (1 Peter 2:12).

MEMORY VERSES: JOHN 17:15-18

STUDY 8 – BATTLES WE FACE – THE FLESH

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will wrestle with the apparent discrepancy between the truth that we are free from sin, and the reality that we struggle with sin in our daily lives. Our hope will be to develop further our appreciation for God's work of grace and forgiveness in our lives.

SETTING THE SCENE (PSALM 51:5, EPHESIANS 2:1-3): In what sense are we sinful *by nature*, and what are the consequences? Before you were a Christian can you remember what it was like to be 'dead in your transgressions and sins', 'gratifying the cravings of our flesh, and following its desires and thoughts'? How do you respond to the idea that we were 'objects of God's wrath'?

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The Bible takes sin far more seriously than we are ever likely to; how do the words *gone astray* (Isaiah 53:6), *rebellion* (Leviticus 16:21), *despising God* (2 Sam 12:9-10) and *defying God* (1 Kings 13:21) illustrate this seriousness? Why does our sin grieve God so much (Additional Quotes 16)?

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SLAVES TO SIN (JOHN 8:31-36): To what extent can you relate to the idea of being a 'slave to sin'? If *by nature* this is our condition how then can we be made righteous before a holy God (Rom 3:21-26)?

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DEAD TO SIN (ROMANS 6:1 & 15): If we are under grace rather than the law does it really matter what we do (see 5:20)? What is Paul's answer to this same question in v1 and v15? Why might the explanation of grace lead us to ask such a question?

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What does it look like to 'count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God' (v11)? How do you understand his contrast between slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness (v15-18)? How does having this sort of attitude help us in our battle against sin?

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THE INNER BATTLE (ROMANS 7:15-25): If we have been set free from sin (John 8:36), why then do we still struggle with sin? To what extent can you identify with Paul's description of his inner conflict with sin? How would you encourage someone who is feeling defeated by their sin and thinking about giving up their faith all together?

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NO CONDEMNATION (ROMANS 8:1-4): What does Paul actually mean when he says that there is 'now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus' (v1 & Additional Quotes 17)? What encouragement to live 'according to the Spirit' (v4) can we draw from these verses (See also 1 John 1:9 and Hebrews 4:15-16)? What does it mean to live according to the Spirit?

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THE NATURE OF GRACE: How would you define grace (Additional Quotes 18)? Why do we find this such a hard concept to fully grasp? Why is it so easy to fall into what Jerry Bridges calls the *performance treadmill*; i.e. trying to pay our own way by our performance?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (TITUS 2:11-12): How would a deeper understanding of the nature of sin and a clearer understanding of grace transform our lives? How should grace motivate us to say "no" to sin and live godly lives for Jesus?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk through specific areas of your lives in which you struggle with sin. Spend time praying and encouraging each other that you would increasingly know the freedom for which Christ died for you, and have a deeper appreciation and understanding of His grace.

MEMORY VERSES: GALATIANS 5:16-17

STUDY 9 – BATTLES WE FACE – SPIRITUAL FORCES

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will seek to better understand what it means to be part of a spiritual battle. We'll try and understand how Satan schemes against us in order to render us ineffective and unfruitful. Finally, we'll look at the weapons available to us through the Holy Spirit.

SETTING THE SCENE (EPHESIANS 6:10-12): What has been your experience of the fact that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood' but against the spiritual forces of evil? Which of the two errors that C.S. Lewis speaks of (Additional Quote 19) would you say you were most likely to make? What aspects of this spiritual reality do you find hardest to grasp or accept?

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A DEFEATED FOE (COL 2:13-15, HEB 2:14-15): What happened at the cross in regard to sin, death and Satan? If Satan has indeed been defeated, and therefore has no *authority* over us, how can he still have *influence/power* over us? In what ways do we see his influence in our lives, and in the lives of others? What would you say that his main strategies are in different places around the world?

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1. TEMPTATION (GENESIS 3:1-5): How would you define temptation? What was the process by which Satan tempted Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden? Specifically, how did he challenge their dependence of God, their confidence in God, and their obedience in God? What are some of the ways that Satan tempts you/us? (Alternatively look at the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13)

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THE WAY OUT (1 COR 10:12-13, HEB 4:14-15): How do these verses challenge and encourage you? When have you experienced what Paul describes as the 'way out' (v13)?

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THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND (2 COR 10:3-5): Temptation itself is not wrong (Hebrews 4:15) until we act on that temptation. How practically can we take such thoughts and make them 'obedient to Christ' (v5)? What are these divinely powerful weapons that Paul speaks of in v3-5?

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2. ACCUSATION (ZECHARIAH 3:1-5): How can we learn about the nature and consequences of Satan's accusation at this heavenly courtroom scene? To what extent is receiving such accusation both an encouragement, and a discouragement? How can we tell the difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and the accusations of the devil (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)?

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3. DECEPTION (JOHN 8:44, 2 COR 11:14): In what ways do you think Satan (who 'masquerades as an angel of light') deceives us in the areas that we've been talking about, i.e. knowing God, idolatry, understanding our identity, relationships and our struggle with the world / flesh?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (EPHESIANS 6:10-18): How do you respond to the 'active' role we are instructed to take to ensure our protection despite the security of our position in Christ? How does each piece of armour help us to make a stand against the devil's schemes? What would it look like practically to put on this armour each day to prepare us for battle?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share your experiences of spiritual warfare (temptation, accusation or deception). Discuss potential strategies for helping one another to make your stand for Christ. Pray and encourage with the freedom that comes from knowing the truth.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 PETER 5:8-9

APPENDIX 1 – WHO AM IN CHRIST?

I am Accepted

I am God's child - John 1:12
I am Christ's friend - John 15:15
I have been justified - Romans 5:1
I have been united with the Lord, and am one spirit with Him - 1 Cor 6:7
I have been bought at a price I belong to God - 1 Cor 6:19-20
I am a member of Christ's body - 1 Cor 12:27
I have been adopted as God's child - Eph 2:18
I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins - Col 1:14
I am complete in Christ - Col 2:10

I am Secure

I am free forever from condemnation - Rom 8:1
I am assured that all things work together for good - Rom 8:28
I am free from any condemning charge against me - Rom 8:35-39
I cannot be separated from the love of God - Rom 8:35-39
I have been established, anointed and sealed by God - 2 Cor 1:21-22
I am hidden with Christ in God - Col 3:3
I am confident that the good work that God has begun in me will be perfected - Phil 1:6
I am a citizen of heaven - now - Phil 3:20
I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind - 2 Tim 1:7
I can find grace and mercy to help in times of need - Heb 4:16
I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me - 1 John 5:18

I am Significant

I am the salt and light of the earth - Matt 5:13-14
I am a branch of the True Vine, a channel of His life - John 15:1-5
I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit - John 15:16
I am a personal witness of Christ - Acts 1:18
I am God's temple - 1 Cor 3:16
I am a minister of reconciliation for God - 2 Cor 5:17-21
I am God's co-worker - 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1
I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm - Eph 2:6
I am God's workmanship - Eph 2:10
I may approach God with freedom and confidence - Eph 3:12
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me - Phil 4:13

I am Loved

Even if I am His enemy He loves me – Matthew 5:44,45
Only my will, not my guilt can keep me from His love – Luke 13:34
Because I believe Christ, He loves me – John 16:27
I am loved with all He had when I was the worst I could be - Romans 5:8
He loves me so much and He calls me His child – 1 John 3:1
I am loved yet He will rebuke and discipline me – Rev 3:19
I am His great delight and He rejoices over me - Zephaniah 3:17
My face is beautiful and my voice lovely to Him - Song of Songs 2:14
I have been upheld by Him since my conception and will be until my old age - Isaiah 46:3,4
I am engraved on the palms of His hands – Isaiah 49:15,16
I am fearfully and wonderfully made, He knows me intimately - Psalm 139:14,15

From The Bondage Breaker, Dr Neil T Anderson, pg 44

APPENDIX 2 – ADDITIONAL QUOTES

QUOTE 1: “To be ‘in the image of God’... is not *primarily* a matter of our capacity to be or do something. It is about the relationship that God has towards us...It is not about some characteristic we possess: it is about our whole existence. True humanness is found in personal communion with God – it is in such personal communion that his glory is reflected, his image is seen.” *The Message of Genesis 1-11, David Atkinson, pg. 38*

QUOTE 2: “In many areas of life, freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, the liberating restrictions. Those that fit with the reality of our nature and the world produce greater power and scope for our abilities and a deeper joy and fulfillment...What then is the moral-spiritual reality we must acknowledge to thrive? What is the environment that liberates us if we confine ourselves to it, like water liberates the fish? Love. Love is the most liberating freedom-loss of all. One of the principles of love – either love for a friend or romantic love – is that you have to lose independence to attain greater intimacy...To experience the joy and freedom of love, you must give up your personal autonomy...A love relationship limits your personal options. Again we are confronted with the complexity of the concept of ‘freedom’. Human beings are most free and alive in relationships of love. We only become ourselves in love, and yet healthy love relationships involve mutual, unselfish service, a mutual loss of independence.” *Timothy Keller, The Reason for God, pg. 46-48*

QUOTE 3: “A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him...Interest in theology, and knowledge about God, and the capacity to think clearly and talk well on Christian themes, is not at all the same thing as knowing Him. We may know much about God and yet all the time we may hardly know God at all.” *Knowing God, J.I. Packer, pg. 25-26*

QUOTE 4: “People who know their God are before anything else people who pray, and the first point where their zeal and energy for God’s glory come to expression is in their prayers...Yet the invariable fruit of true knowledge of God is energy to pray for God’s cause – energy, indeed, which can only find an outlet and a relief of inner tension when channelled into such prayer – and the more knowledge the more energy! ... If, however there is in us little energy for prayer and little consequent practice of it, this is a sure sign that as yet we scarcely know our God.” *Knowing God, J.I. Packer, pg. 29*

QUOTE 5: “But there is still a higher and deeper level of intimacy and partnership awaiting us at the top of this metaphorical ascent. We are lovers. The courtship that began with a honeymoon in the Garden culminates in the wedding feast of the Lamb. “I will take delight in you,” he says to us, “as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will I rejoice over you,” so that we might say in return, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me.” *Brent Curtis & John Elredge, The Sacred Romance, p. 96.*

QUOTE 6: “What is an idol? It is anything more important to us than God, anything that absorbs our hearts and imagination more than God, anything we seek to give us what only God can give. A counterfeit God is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would not be worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to

describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship." *Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, Introduction pg. xvii-xviii*

QUOTE 7: "The core problem isn't the fact that we're half-hearted, or stagnant Christians. The crux of it all is why we are this way, and it is because we have an inaccurate view of God. We see Him as a benevolent being who is satisfied when people manage to fit Him into their lives in some small way. We forget that God never had an identity crisis; He knows that He's great and deserves to be the centre of our lives. Jesus came humbly as a servant, but He never begs us to give Him some small part of ourselves. He commands everything from His followers." *Crazy Love, Frances Chan, pg. 22*

QUOTE 8: "We must not trim God down to the poor limits of a God small enough to suit our emotions and nice enough to fit our logic." *Alex Motyer, The Message of Amos, pg. 97*

QUOTE 9: "If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great." *John Piper Hunger for God, pg. 23*

QUOTE 10: "Try as we might by our appearance, performance or social status to find self-verification for a sense of being somebody, we always come short of satisfaction. Whatever pinnacle of self-identity we achieve soon crumbles under the pressure of hostile rejection or criticism, introspection or guilt, fear or anxiety. We cannot do anything to qualify for the by-product of being loved unconditionally and voluntarily." *Maurice Wagner, The Sensation of being someone, © 1975 Zondervan, pg. 163.*

QUOTE 11: "Listen to Him, my children. He speaks to you in a thousand ways every day. Through the love of those who love you and live to help you, He touches you and He speaks to you. In the sunrise and sunset, and in the moonlight, through the loneliness of the things that He has made, through the thousand joys that He plans for every one of you, through the sorrows that come too, in all these things, through all these things, He who loved you unto death is speaking to you. Listen; do not be deaf and blind to Him, and as you keep quiet and listen, you will know deep down in your heart that you are loved As the air is round about you, so is His love round about you now. It is enough. Trust that love to guide your lives. It will never, never fail." *Amy Carmichael, from a letter to her "children," excerpted from Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur, Frank L. Houghton*

QUOTE 12: "Giants. We must face them. Yet we need not face them alone. Focus first, and most, on God. The times David did, giants fell. The days he didn't David did. Test this theory by listing the observations David made regarding Goliath...God-thoughts outnumber Goliath-thoughts nine to two. How does this ratio compare with yours? Do you ponder God's grace 4 times as much as you ponder your guilt? Is your list of blessings 4 times as long as you list of complaints? Is your mental file of hope 4 times as thick as your mental file of dread? Are you 4 times more likely to describe the strength of God as you are the demands of your day? No? Then David is your man. Some note the absence of miracles in the story... But there is one. David is one. A rough-edged walking wonder of God who neon-lights this truth: *Focus on giants – you stumble. Focus on God – Your giants tumble.* Lift your eyes, giant slayer. The God who made a miracle out of David stands ready to make one out of you." *Max Lucado, Facing Your Giants, pg. 9*

QUOTE 13: "It is really this simple. To accept God's grace is to accept God's offer to be adopted into his family. Your identity is not in your possessions, talents, tattoos, kudos, or accomplishments. Nor are you defined by your divorce, deficiencies, debt, or dumb choices. You are God's child. You get to

call him “Papa”. You “may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph 3:12). You receive the blessings of his special love (1 John 4:9-11) and provision (Luke 11:11-13). And you will inherit the riches of Christ and reign with him forever (Rom 8:17). The adoption is horizontal as well as vertical. You are included in the forever family. Dividing walls of hostility are broken down and community is created on the basis of a common Father. Instant family worldwide! Rather than conjure up reasons to feel good about yourself, trust God’s verdict. If God loves you, you must be worth loving. If he wants to have you in his Kingdom, then you be worth having. God’s grace invites you-no, requires you-to change your attitude about yourself and takes sides with God against your feelings of rejection.” *Grace, Max Lucado, pg 120*

QUOTE 14: “The sin of self-protection to which I refer occurs when our legitimate thirst for receiving love creates a demand to not be hurt that overrides a commitment to lovingly involve ourselves with others [...] “The more clearly we recognize how deep our commitment to self-protection operates in our relational style and the more courageously we face the ugliness of protecting ourselves rather than loving others, the more we’ll shift our direction.” *Inside Out, Larry Crabb, pg. 115, 200*

QUOTE 15: “To be holy is to be morally blameless. It is to be separated from sin and, therefore, consecrated to God. The word signifies separation to God [...] To live a holy life, then, is to live a life in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world. It is to live a life characterized by the “(putting) off of your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... and (putting) on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22, 24). If holiness, then, is so basic to the Christian life, why do we not experience it more in daily living? Why do so many Christians feel constantly defeated in their struggle with sin? Why does the Church of Jesus Christ so often seem to be more conformed to the world around it than to God?” *The Pursuit of Holiness, Jerry Bridges, © 1996, pg. 16*

QUOTE 16: “Sin grieves God. We must not downplay the seriousness of it in the life of a believer. But we must come to terms with the fact that God’s grace is greater than all our sins. Repentance is one of the Christians highest privileges. A repentant Christian focuses on God’s mercy and grace.” *The Discipline of grace, Jerry Bridges, pg. 26*

QUOTE 17: “There is never a point at which you are any less saved than you were the first moment he saved you. Just because you were grumpy at breakfast doesn’t mean you were condemned at breakfast. When you lost your temper yesterday, you didn’t lose your salvation. Your name doesn’t disappear and reappear in the book of life according to your moods and actions. Such is the message of grace. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). You are saved, not because of what you do, but because of what Christ did. And you are special, not because of what you do, but because of whose you are. And you are his.” *In the Grip of Grace, Max Lucado, pg. 148*

QUOTE 18: “Grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more – no amount of spiritual activities, no amount of knowledge gained, no amount of campaigning on behalf of righteous causes. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.” *What is so amazing about grace?, Phillip Yancey, pg. 70*

QUOTE 19: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe and feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” *The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, Preface*

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: INTRODUCING FREEDOM – THE NATURE OF FREEDOM

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:18**

STUDY 2: FREEDOM TO KNOW GOD – THE SACRED ROMANCE

²³This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, ²⁴but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

STUDY 3: FREEDOM TO KNOW GOD – IDOLATRY AND THE TRUE GOD

⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. **Isaiah 55:8-9**

STUDY 4: UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – GOD'S DELIGHT IN ME

¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. **Psalms 139:13-14**

STUDY 5: UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – LIVING OUT OUR IDENTITY

⁴Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. **Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT**

STUDY 6: UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY – RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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. **Romans 8:38-39**

STUDY 7: BATTLES WE FACE – THE WORLD

¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. **John 17:15-18**

STUDY 8: BATTLES WE FACE – THE FLESH

¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. **Galatians 5:16-17**

STUDY 9: BATTLES WE FACE – SPIRITUAL POWERS

⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. **1 Peter 5:8-9**