

Series Based Bible Study



Vineyard Columbus

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Silent Killers

A Vineyard Columbus Small Group Study Series

Series Description

Most of us have gotten used to the threat of silent killers. We're used to being cautioned against diets that lead to high blood pressure and high cholesterol-- illnesses that quietly wreck havoc on bodies of all ages. We know friends or family members whose homes have secretly harbored the hazards of lead paint and asbestos. And we're all familiar with filtering our water and air for fear of ingesting



fatal chemicals and bacteria. But what about emotional and spiritual silent killers? What about the lethal threat of things like guilt, shame and low self-worth? How do we test for these? What can we use to protect ourselves against them? In this series, we will un-mute the silent killers of our emotional and spiritual lives and learn God's plan for effectively deterring, detecting, and defeating them.

This guide offers the **seven weeks** for your small group to work through. At Vineyard Columbus, we encourage your group to use this study as one component of your time together. We truly believe that disciples of Jesus will mature best when they engage in corporate worship, prayer ministry, practicing the prophetic, studying the Bible, serving our neighbors, community, church, and fellowshiping

together. This study only covers one of those aspects, the Bible. Suggestions and ideas will be posited to aid the leader regarding the other areas. We pray this will be helpful to your group as you explore “Silent Killers.”

Table of Contents:	Page
Week 1- Hopelessness.....	6
Week 2- Low Self-Worth.....h.....	16
Week 3- Guilt.....	26
Week 4- Shame.....	34
Week 5- Anxiety.....	45
Week 6- Bitterness.....	58
Week 7- Covetousness & Envy.....	68
Summary of Ministry Time.....	75

How to use this Study Series

Leaders are encouraged to briefly look over all studies before you teach or hand them out to alternative teachers within the group. ***There is a summary of Ministry Ideas from the entire series in the back. The ministry ideas are meant to build upon each other whenever possible and some ideas will take longer planning than others. Reading the full arch of Ministry Ideas before you start the series as a small group may provide a much richer and fuller experience.***

Having all studies provided at the start of a sermon series will give leaders the opportunity to give studies to potential teachers or co-leaders weeks ahead of time. Our prayer is that many more disciples of Jesus will feel comfortable sharing and

leading others in discussion during small group. If you have any questions, please email us at: smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

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Week 1



Hopelessness

I Thessalonians 1:1-7, 4:13-14, 5:8-11

Tips: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Before the lesson (for the Leader):

The city of Thessalonica was the chief seaport of ancient Macedonia and an important commercial and military center. The letter was probably written around 50-51 A.D. making it one of the earliest letters we have from the Apostle Paul. Paul and his companion Silas were forced to leave Philippi and traveled along the Egnatian Way to Thessalonica.

Introduction (for the Group):

Tonight we are going to talk about one of the Silent Killers to our emotional and spiritual lives. Before we read the relevant verses from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, it is helpful to understand some context.

Paul and his friend Silas came to Thessalonica to spread the gospel, but were only allowed to stay for a few weeks. They were kicked out and accused of spreading “treasonous ideas” (Acts 17:1-10). After they left, the believers in Thessalonica were persecuted for following the pattern set by Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:13-15). Philosophers like Aristotle taught you should not expect good or evil in your future. Other philosophers taught that hopefulness was merely an illusion to be ignored. For a people who had seen and experienced hardship, hope may not have been the easiest to come by.

Opening Questions - Would someone share an instance where what you hoped would happen, did not happen?

What were your feelings leading up to that time? What were your emotions like after? How often do you think about this instance?

Is anyone truly hoping for something currently that you consider improbable to actually happen?

Opening Prayer - Pray for God to help you and your group see your lives in the Genesis story, and to give you faith to trust him and go forward with him on your journey.

Scripture: We are going to be reading from a few parts of 1 Thessalonians as Paul repeatedly revisits the idea of hope. To get familiar with these passages, could we have someone read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7? Could someone read chapter 4 verses 13-14? And finally, could someone please read 5:8-11?

Bible Verses

1 Thessalonians 1:1-7

Paul, Silas[a] and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Thanks so much!

Discussion Questions:

Let's turn back to chapter 1 verses 1-7 to begin. As was said earlier, the Jesus followers in Thessalonica were under threat and had even suffered for their faith. One direct reason for this is even in Paul's greeting to them. He calls Jesus "Lord" two times in the first three verses. Roman government insisted that the Lord of the earth was Caesar. This is why the Jews were able to get Paul and Silas thrown out of the city.

- What does Paul call the people in verses 6 & 7?
 - He calls them imitators of the Lord and himself. He calls them a model/example to other believers/followers of Jesus.
- When you think of following Jesus closely, being called an "imitator" or a "model example", what kind of life do you initially think of? What would you expect a life following Jesus would result in?
 - A blessed life, a carefree life, a life free of troubles, a pure life, a respectable reputation, etc.
- What actions are the people guilty of and what is the source for each according to verse 3?
 - Work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, endurance inspired by hope

According to what Paul writes here, these people sound amazing. They are what we might call an “inspiration” to others. Yet despite being this kind of people, faithful imitators of Jesus, they have been victims of severe persecution and suffering according to verse 6. It may be for this reason that they were tempted to lose hope.

- What is your definition of hope?
 - Allow various answers and look for the words that you think are synonyms. Paul touches on his definition for “hope” which is the Greek word *elpis* in Romans 8:24-25 when he says, “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Optimism about the future, especially if your circumstances are bleak or troublesome, is easier said than done. It is really hard to just “muster” up hope out of nowhere. Especially if someone is feeling despair due to circumstances seen as “final” like death of a spouse or parent, hope is not always readily accessible. In fact, Paul touches on this the next time he mentions hope in chapter 4.

- Can someone reread 4:13-14? (*have someone read*)

As Paul stated (1 Thessalonians 4:13) hopelessness is common. In fact, in the ancient world many philosophers taught that having a positive expectation for your future was foolish. They believed that anything good would have to come from your own strength or activity. Aristotle taught it was wise to have neither

Tips:

Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quite personalities in your group.

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

positive nor negative expectations for one's future. Still others thought it wise to anticipate a negative future. After all, the Fates in Greek mythology were not typically swayed to help humanity. If we were to define "hope" as a "simple optimism about the future based on present realities", then we might think it possible to attain if we just concentrate on anything good in our present circumstance. Of course, there is a big difference between plain optimism and optimism based on believing God's activity is in your present and future.

- What are some signs that your optimism is based on your faith in God's activity in your future?
 - One sign may be in our personal prayers. If our prayers primarily reflect the belief that God will work for your good! Another may be our conversations with others. If our conversations with others reveal good possibilities for the future and **include** being surprised by God! In our advice to others we may reveal the right thing to do AND explain the reward for doing the right thing. In other words, there is expectation for the transformation and provision from God even in the advice we give. A question may be to ask yourself, "Do people describe my speech and behavior as expecting God to show up in life?" Or in your stories about your life include stories of how God has surprised you in the past?
- What are signs that your optimism is based on your own strength?

- It could be: You don't often pray intentionally and extensively about the difficult things you experience or are fearful of. Your conversations about anything positive always involves the activity you will take on your own. When you think of anything positive for your future, it is dependent on you and other people to make it happen. Your conversations with others don't involve God doing things out of your control. These may be signs that your optimism is based in your own strength.
- What are some signs you have a pessimistic view regarding God's activity in your future?
 - Some signs might be: Your prayers to God about your current circumstances only involve desperate language. You find it difficult to see anything good in your future. Your conversations about the future always involve the worst case scenario and don't include God's activity on your behalf. When good things happen you are more often skeptical than joyful.

In this passage, Paul is specifically addressing the idea of "death" the ultimate and final gloom for humanity. If there is anything that causes despair or hopelessness, it is that death is not only everyone's fate, but it is the end for us all. Most of Paul's contemporaries believed in a shadowy afterlife in the underworld. Paul says that not even death, the seemingly permanent separation from this life, is hopeless for the Christian. Others may have

trepidation about disease, death, sickness, or the grave, but a Christian remembers that Jesus rose from the grave and promises to lift his followers also. Grieve death yes. That is healthy says Paul. But hopelessness is not the result for followers of Jesus. Even here they can have hope. For them, they will have a greater joy to come! Yet in the face of despair or hopeless situations, many people use “time” as a healer, but psychologists agree that time merely covers up instead of heals.

- How do you typically deal with suffering, frustration, deep sadness or despair? Maybe you can share a time you felt hopeless. (allow people to share)

The people Paul was writing to were suffering. Paul offers them a formula for how to combat harsh situations and suffering. Let’s see what he says.

- Can someone read chapter 5:8-11 once more?
(*allow someone to read*)

Thanks so much!

We may read this too quickly and think that Paul limits our hope to our salvation from sin, but when we look carefully we see he is saying more. He is offering them encouragement that God intends to deliver them from present persecutions. In other words, hope for the Christian is not limited to the fact that we have sins forgiven and we’ll be raised from the dead. Paul gives a formula for how to operate when life seems bleak and then offers encouragement about our current life with God.

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

- What is the formula for enduring desperate times? (*verse 8.*)
- What do you think it looks like to exercise self-control in the midst of hardship? (*allow several answers*)
- How do you combine love and faith in order to protect your emotional state? (*allow several answers*)
- How can knowing that God saved you and intends to ultimately save you influence your belief about the circumstances you face? (*allow several answers*)

Ministry Time Application:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Write down any areas or situations that are current which you feel are hopeless without an intervention from God. Include any unhealed areas from your past that you may have used “time” to heal, but never truly healed from?

Break into groups of two or three people and pray over what you wrote down.

Option 2:

Map out how you view difficulty and desperate times. This may take 10 minutes of reflection and writing things down. Ask yourself: Do you only count on your only strength in your process? How much is God involved in your view of the future? Do you expect him to provide finances? Provide friendships? Provide joy?

Share what you've mapped out with two or three people and ask for God to intervene in your reaction to difficult or desperate times.

Week 2



Low Self-Worth

Colossians 2:6-15, 3:1-10

Tips:

There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quiet personalities in your group.

Before the Lesson (for the Leader):

The city of Colossae was located 120 miles east of Ephesus. It was a prosperous industrial center renowned for making textiles, and biblically it is known as the home of Onesimus and Philemon. However, at the time of this letter it had been overshadowed by Laodicea, and eventually, around AD 61 it was deserted following an earthquake. The letter was probably written around 60-61 A.D. by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul wrote the letter to provide spiritual understanding for the Christians to live their new resurrected life in Christ. He was putting down a growing heresy that taught matter and flesh were inherently evil, which then postulated that between God and evil flesh there could be no relationship. Thus the

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces[a] of this world rather than on Christ.

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Colossians needed find ways outside of Christ to rid themselves of their flesh or earthly lives to attain heaven. Paul emphatically stressed that it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9).

Introduction (for the Group):

This evening we will continue our talk about other Silent Killers: our emotional and spiritual lives, and low self worth. Before we read the relevant verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians, it is helpful to understand the context of why Paul wrote the letter. Epaphras, a close friend and disciple of Paul's, had visited him in prison. Epahras lead the church in Colossae and probably discussed his concerns about the church to Paul. In particular the Colossians were being influenced by false teachings, which encouraged them to add philosophical and man-made practices to their lives in order to become worthy Christians. Paul refuted these heresies with a strong doctrine of Christ's sovereignty, certifying that we are the children of God, redeemed through the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection has saved us from simply being a product of our environment, our pedigree, or our choices. The first part of the letter that we will read (2:15) proclaims the sovereignty of Christ, while the second part (3:1-5) applies his lordship to our daily living.

Starter Questions:

Can someone share about a time when they thought they were just not worthy, that they were just not good enough.

14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 3:1-10
 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

What caused you to think this way? Did these thoughts originate from within you or from what others said about you? (*as the leader, feel free to offer your own story first*)

What were your reactions and your emotional state?

Do these feelings still follow you?

Opening Prayer:

Pray for God to speak to each person, to give each person more courage and depth, and to open your hearts to receive whatever he has for you.

Scripture:

We are going to read from two parts of Colossians to learn Paul's thinking about in whom and in what do we have our self worth. To get familiar with these passages, could we have someone read Colossians 2:6-15? And could someone else read chapter 3 verses 1-10?

Thanks so much!

Discussion Questions

Let's turn back to chapter 2 verses 6-8. As was said earlier the Christians in Colossae were listening to false teachers. The Colossians were being told to adapt Greek and Jewish philosophical beliefs into their understanding of Christianity. They were being told in order to live as Christians they needed to believe and practice additional things beyond Christ. In these verses Paul strongly warns against depending on anything other than Christ to define you.

- What does Paul call the people to remember as their foundation for living and growing?

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- They received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him and be rooted and built up in him.
- How can being built up in Christ help your feelings of self worth?
 - When you grow in the understanding of who you are in Christ, you can let go of wrong thinking (theology) and/or any rejection from others. You see yourself as Christ sees you - forgiven of your debt, free to be who he calls you to be, empowered with his fullness.
- When you think of living your life in Christ Jesus, what does that mean to you? What do you think it meant to the Colossians?
 - That Jesus is the model for how to live and His word is the truth and all that is needed as a guide for living.
 - For the Colossians, that they could put off all beliefs and practices that were not taught when they received Christ as Lord.

Both the Colossians and we are subjected to philosophies that appear reasonable on the surface and have become a part of our societal language, for example we often hear people refer to things that happen life as “Karma”.

- Discuss how Karma affects our self worth.
 - If you believe you reap what you sow, then every mistake you make will continually haunt you having devastating effects on your self worth.

- The gospel teaches through the sacrifice of Jesus our sinful debt is paid.
- Describe other modern ideas and activities that could cause people to have low self worth.
 - Modern ideas and standards for success and beauty, which cause people to always compare themselves to others, to overwork themselves, and to focus only on themselves.
- What truth do we have to combat these philosophies and made-made ideas?
 - As Christians, we must wholly subscribe to the truth of Christ's sovereignty where everything is under the lordship of Christ.

Let's reread and review verses 9-12. The apostle argues his case against heresy on the basis of the absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ. He teaches the incarnation, Jesus is fully God and fully man, and he teaches our salvation through the resurrection of Christ. We are complete in Jesus and we do not need any other tradition or philosophy to be saved. Paul says we are brought to fullness in Him as we have a new life.

- How does fullness in Christ build us up?
 - We can rest in being the children of God, and we can rest knowing we cannot work our way into grace, it has been freely given. This is a state of confident enjoyment of our relationship in Christ.
- What are some of the false teachings you can surmise from verse 9-12?

- That Christ was not both God and man, that there were powers higher than Jesus, probably angels, that you must be circumcised to be in relationship with God, and that the resurrection of Christ was not enough for our full salvation.
- Paul describes both spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism. What do you think he means? Why would these concepts be important to the self worth of the Christian Gentiles in Colossae?
 - Spiritual circumcision refers to the cleansing of the heart and entering into relationship with Jesus. Spiritual baptism means as believers we have died and have been resurrected in Christ.
 - The Gentiles would not have been circumcised as the Jewish converts were and would have felt they were in a lesser relationship with God. Additionally they would not have observed the ritual water cleansing and purify rites held by the Jewish Christians.

Will someone volunteer to reread Colossians 2:13-15?

- Paul is declaring that the work of Jesus for us on the cross is enough. With this work in mind we are uplifted to know we have a savior, a New Covenant, a new life, and a new Kingdom to come. Why then is it so easy to slip back into believing we have low self-worth?

- We live in a fallen world, and unfortunately our faith waxes and wanes under societal influences.
- Identify ways we can strengthen one another.
 - Remain in the small group community, share our lives with another, pray together and focus more on the life death and resurrection of our Lord.

Let's begin the next section by reading chapter 3 verses 1-10. Will someone please read?

A contemporary hearsay during this time was there was a mystical separation between Godly heaven and evil earth but heaven could be achieved through an ascetic way of life and/or strict legalism. In this heresy it followed that Christ was divine and not human. What Paul does here is firmly equates all things heavenly with Christ who sits at the right hand of God, but does not detach Christ from earthly man.

- Identify words in verses 1-4 that signal we have a new life in Christ's resurrection?
 - Raised, died, and appeared
- What does Paul say will occur when Christ's appears?
 - We will appear with Him

Let's read verses 5-10. Read aloud together.

In this section we see Paul connecting us further to the resurrection of Christ and to our new self. He uses our new life in Christ to identify practical ways we should live among one another.

Tips:

When people partner up in pairs to pray, it will build trust and intimacy over time. This is a great way to have your group improve overall discussion. The more people you end up trusting in your group, the more open your discussion time will be.

- What is it that we must put to death and how?
 - Our earthly nature by keeping our minds on the truth in Christ.
- The sins Paul list in verse 8, stem from what we say to one another, sins that greatly affect our self worth. What might we do to build up one another?
 - We might reflect on the tone we use, and the motives we have when we speak to one another. And certainly think before we speak and always strive to be polite.
- In verse 10 Paul states we have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. When we come to see ourselves as God sees us, we will understand just how much we're really worth as the redeemed children of the most high God. How can seeing yourself as loved and redeemed in God's image improve sense of self worth. (Allow time to discuss.)

Ministry Time Application:

Option 1:

Read aloud a few key verse Matt 6:26, Luke 12:6-7, John 3:16, John 1:12, Psalm 139:14. Allow friends the time to reflect and then share what they are feeling.

Option 2:

The resurrection of Christ had beginning leaving the tomb, leaving dead things behind ascending into heaven, living with God.

- Make a list of all the dead characteristics you will leave behind and throw them away.
- Make a list of all the heavenly characteristics you will carry with you daily.

Week 3



Guilt

Psalm 32

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through, so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Materials Needed:

A timer and writing materials for ministry time.

Before the Lesson:

Psalm 32 is a psalm written by King David, and is also classified as a maskil in scripture. Maskil is a Hebrew term of uncertain significance, but scholars have found its root meaning to be “to understand” or “to ponder”, indicating that this is a teaching psalm. David was using his own experience to enlighten others.

Starting the Lesson:

Bible Verses: Psalm 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

9 Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

We are currently in the middle of a sermon series called "Silent Killers," about those things that threaten our emotional and spiritual health much as an unhealthy diet can threaten our physical health. Tonight we'll be taking a look at the silent killer of guilt by reading through a psalm written by King David.

Starter Questions:

Would someone share an instance when you felt guilty about something, only to later find out their guilt was unnecessary, or blown out of proportion? How did you feel when you were free of that guilt?

When you experience guilt, is your first impulse to hide it, or to express it to someone?

Opening Prayer:

Thank God for the people in attendance and ask him to bless the teaching and your time together.

Scripture:

Read Psalm 32. Depending on the willingness of the members of the group to read aloud, you may want to call on one or several readers.

Discussion Questions:

Have someone read Psalm 32: 1-2 again, and thank them.

10 Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

- What characteristics make up a blessed person in these verses?
 - His transgressions are forgiven, his sins are covered, his sin does not count against him, and there's no deceit in his spirit.

David lists four things here. Which of these are directly related to what we do, and which are done for us?

- Most of these things are things God does for us. We can't forgive our own transgressions, cover our own sins, or decide they don't count against us; God does that, when we accept Jesus into our lives. He also cleanses our spirit of deceit, but we can choose not to be deceitful. Notice David doesn't say here, "Blessed is he who doesn't transgress, and does not sin." Everyone sins, but we can decide what to do about our sins.

Do you think you fit the description of a blessed person in verses 1-2?

Have someone read Psalm 32:3-5, and thank them.

- What symptoms is David experiencing in these verses?
 - His bones wasted away, he groaned all day long, God's hand was heavy upon him day and night, and his strength was sapped, like it would be in the summer heat.
- What brought on these symptoms, and what alleviated them?
 - David says these things happened "when he kept silent" (verse 3), and then says he acknowledged

Tip: You don't have to make sure every one of these gets answered. Your role is to be a discussion facilitator, not a professor; the idea isn't simply to give the group information, but to allow everyone to learn from the scripture and from each other. It's okay to spend more time on some questions than on others depending on how the group is responding.

his sin to God, did not cover up his iniquity, and confessed his transgressions, and God forgave the guilt of his sin (verse 5).

- Have you ever experienced symptoms or relief like David did here? Share with the group if you feel comfortable; if not, think about what brought on your suffering, and what took it away.
- How many different types of guilt can you think of? What sort of damage can guilt do?
 - You can experience guilt for 1) something you did, 2) something you didn't do, but wanted to, and 3) something you think you did. You can also experience guilt because 4) you didn't do enough to help someone, or 5) you're doing better than someone else. In all of these cases, dealing with guilt involves some sort of acknowledgement of it. You may be surprised to learn that a study found we experience five hours a week of guilty feelings! Guilt can be useful in small doses to maintain good relationships with others, such as when guilt reminds you to get your brother a birthday present, but in large doses guilt gets in the way of clear thinking, hinders our enjoyment of life, makes us punish ourselves, makes us avoid people, and feels like a literal burden weighing us down.

Have someone read Psalm 32: 6-7, and thank them.

David starts these verses with the word "Therefore;" which means the statement he's about to make is directly related to the words preceding it. In other

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words, he's using the description of his experience in verses 5 and 6 to justify his instruction in verses 7-8.

- In your own words, how would you link the story David tells in verses 5 and 6 with his instruction in verses 7 and 8?
 - An example would be, "I suffered because I didn't confess my sins and my guilt to God, but when I did, he took that guilt away. Therefore, let everyone pray to God so that they can experience the same blessing."
- What does David say will happen to those who pray to God?
 - He says they'll be protected. "Surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance."

Have someone read Psalm 32:8-11, and thank them.

- God is the speaker in the next verse. What are the promises given to us in these verses?
 - "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (verse 8). "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him" (verse 10.)
- How does David say we should react to these promises in verse 11?
 - Rejoice, be glad, and sing!

- How is guilt keeping you from rejoicing in the Lord?

Ministry Time Application

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Step 1: Explain that the group will be praying silently for three minutes. Instruct the members of the group to pray for God to reveal guilt in their lives that is damaging their relationships with others and their relationship with Him. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have them pray about dealing with the guilt in their lives.

Option 2:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you’d like everyone to prayerfully consider and write

down an action they can take in the coming week to deal with the guilt in their lives. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Go around the room and have each member of the group share what their action will be this week. Be clear that sharing doesn’t have to involve specifics about the guilt; for instance, someone can say he needs to apologize to someone else or confess to God without getting into details about the apology or confession.

Step 3: If you have time, have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have them pray about what they wrote down. Tell everyone to follow up with his or her prayer partner at the next small group meeting to stay accountable for following the plans that were written down.

Week 4



Shame

Hebrews 12:1-13

Tip: The starter questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks; and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

Materials Needed:

One of the questions below invites the group to share statements about the true identity of Christians from Scripture. We've included at the bottom of the page a number of such statements and the correlating verses with them. You are welcome to use some of the examples from this list, or come up with your own. You may also print out these statements and have different members of your group take turns reading them aloud.

Before the Lesson:

We are not certain who wrote the book of Hebrews. We believe it was written to a group of Hebrew Christians,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

in what may have been a house church, between 50 and 90 CE and suspect that it was before 70 CE as it makes no mention of the temple being destroyed. Because this passage was written to Christians, we want to be mindful about how we speak about the contents of the passage. If you have the privilege of studying the Bible with non-Christians, you may want to speak in terms of inviting them into this reality, where Jesus forgives and restores us from shame. For Christians, we can tend to identify ourselves as sinners, which can lead to shame. But this lesson endeavors to remind us that we have been absolved and washed clean of our sins, and we are something new and redeemed.

Starting the Lesson:

Our discussion tonight will be a continuation of our series called "Silent Killers," where we identify some of the things that can subversively threaten health and relationships with God and one another. We will specifically be thinking together about the topic of shame, and how the author of the book of Hebrews instructs Christians to release and be healed of shame.

Starter Questions:

Share with us a time when you learned a valuable lesson "the hard way", where the consequences of an action caused you to change your behavior.

- Some answers might include: "I burned my hand on the stove when I was a kid" or "I went to a job interview completely unprepared" or "I

8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

put off working on an assignment until the last minute and received a poor grade”.

Do you own an outfit or an article of clothing that you never wear because you’re afraid it is too quirky, audacious, or loud? What is it? Why do you choose not to wear it?

- Some examples might be a very brightly colored shirt with a strange design, pastel shorts, a tie with an atypical print, or any outfit that might be significantly different than what you normally wear.

Opening Prayer:

Pray for God to speak to each person, to give each person more courage and depth, and to open your hearts to receive whatever he has for you.

Scripture:

Read Hebrews 12:1-13. Depending on the willingness of the members of the group to read aloud, you may want to call on one or several readers.

Discussion Questions

- What does vv. 1-2 direct us to do?
 - Throw off everything that hinders [us] and the sin that so easily entangles us.

Notes

- How are we to accomplish throwing of our hindrances and sins?
 - By persevering in faith. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Modeling Jesus, who for joy endured the cross, and is now at the right hand of the throne of the Father.
- V. 3 instructs us to not grow weary or lose heart by reflecting on Jesus' endurance through his persecution and crucifixion. How can reflecting on Jesus' suffering and opposition help us to preserve and retain hope?
 - Jesus endured the cross, unconcerned with, or stopped by, the perception of others, who viewed execution on a cross as a deeply shameful fate. He knew who he was, and the purpose of the cross, and that confident knowledge prevented him from being ashamed of that course.
- The author of Hebrews quotes Proverbs in vv. 5-6. According to this proverb, why does the Lord discipline us?
 - Because the Lord loves us as children.
- The author of Hebrews says that this truth, that God disciplines the ones he loves, is an encouragement. Why is it this an encouragement?
 - It affirms that we are, in fact, God's children, and that He loves us so much that he is concerned with our wellbeing. He wants us to grow into mature, faithful disciples. V. 10

affirms that the discipline of the Lord is for our good!

- What is the product of the Lord's discipline for those who are trained by it?
 - It produces a harvest of righteousness (that is, being faithful and lovingly obedient to God) and peace.
- What are some ways that God disciplines us?
 - There are a number of "right" answers here. We cannot ignore that this passage says that often discipline is unpleasant and painful at times. There are often hard consequences attached to our sins, which sometimes require that we confess things we'd rather not, or face circumstances that are embarrassing or humbling. Sometimes God lets the consequences of our actions convict us to turn away from them and change our behavior. In Luke 15, the younger, prodigal son, has a moment where he "comes to himself". Sometimes we are disciplined into coming to ourselves as he did.
- Let's now shift our discussion to the silent killer of shame. Do you believe that guilt and shame are different? How are they different?
 - Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston delineates shame and guilt this way: Shame is a focus on self; guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is "I am bad". Guilt is "I did something bad". Shame is

highly correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, and eating disorders. Guilt is inversely correlated with those things. The ability to hold something we've done or failed to do up against who we want to be is incredibly adaptive. That is, guilt is helpful (and a function of the discipline we just read about), shame is not helpful.

- Often we confuse or compound guilt and shame. But shame speaks to our identity. What has this passage from Hebrews told us about who we are?
 - We are surrounded by a crowd of witnesses. Runners in a race marked out by Jesus. We are God's daughters and sons, dearly loved. We are on a path to righteousness and peace. We are being healed.
- What else does the Bible say that we are?
 - We have included some different identity statements with correlating Scripture passages below. Feel free to use these to help your group identify truths about our identity from the Bible. Or, let your group name some. There may be a tendency towards our sinfulness, but remember, if we are followers of Jesus, we are forgiven and healed. Paul regularly refers to Christians as saints, no longer sinners of our old, dead ways.
- Jesus was not ashamed of the cross, and his early disciples were not ashamed to follow and praise a condemned man, even though many outside the

Church believed this to be a very shameful idea. How does knowing who we are and what has been done for us free us from the suffocating grasp of shame?

- We know that we are loved. As Christians, we know that our sins have been forgiven and we are cleaned as white as the driven snow. We are no longer what we were, but we are changed and made new. This is not a function of our own work or striving, but of Jesus' work.
- How can we be people who help others be freed from their shame?
 - We can identify them as God identifies them. In his book, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, Larry Crabb writes,

In the middle of the wild ocean of shattered dreams and broken lives, the community of Christ celebrates God's forgiveness; they believe in what each other could become, they never minimize sin but they love to maximize grace. They are carriers of Christ to one another.

and

When I believe that you believe I am a good [person], I don't tend towards arrogance or presumption I rest. And in my rest, I am more able to face my Diabolical Self and to then discover and celebrate my Celestial Self.

- When we are warm and unflappable as Jesus was, we allow others to share with us about the places they have fallen short of God's will, acknowledge their shortcomings, but we aim to see them as God sees them.

Ministry Time Application:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Ask members to think about the discussions on the benefit of discipline (correcting our course back towards Jesus) and the harm of shame. Have them silently consider if at any time they heard God speaking to them about these things. Invite them to sit quietly for 2-5 minutes and invite the Holy Spirit to show them places where they may be holding onto shame. Have them ask the Holy Spirit to free them of these things.

Also, if God has used discipline in their lives to draw them closer to himself, instruct them to thank God for his loving correction.

Option 2:

Have the group review one or two of the statements you read through earlier about who you according to Scripture. Encourage them to pick one that really resonated with them, and one statement that they found hard to accept or that challenged them. Spend several minutes allowing them to read over these statements

silently and letting the Holy Spirit solidify these truths for them.

WHO AM I?

- Thank you, Lord, that you have forgiven me. (Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 4:32, Psalm 86:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am but a branch, but you are the Vine. (John 15:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am beloved to you, and that you love me. (John 15:13, 1 John 4:11)
- Thank you, Lord, that I have received mercy from you. (Romans 11:32, Jude 1:21, Nehemiah 9:31)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a descendant of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7-9)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am your dwelling place. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- Thank you, Lord, that you know me. (1 Corinthians 8:3)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a member of your body. (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have adopted us as your children. (Galatians 4:4-5, Ephesians 1:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have chosen me to be yours. (Ephesians 1:11)
- Thank you, Lord, that though I was dead, you have made me alive. (Ephesians 2:1-6)

- Thank you, Lord, that you have brought me near to You and to my brothers and sisters by your blood. (Ephesians 2:13)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have called me with a heavenly calling. (Hebrews 3:1)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have made me a partaker of you. (Hebrews 3:14)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am among "the first fruits of your creatures." (James 1:18)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am now part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, once no people, but now yours, proclaiming your marvelous light. (1 Peter 2: 9)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a choice and precious living stone in your house. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Week 5



Anxiety

Matthew 6:19-34

Tip: You don't have to make sure every one of these gets answered. Your role is to be a discussion facilitator, not a professor; the idea isn't simply to give the group information, but to allow everyone to learn from the scripture and from each other. It's okay to

Before the Lesson:

Matthew wrote his Gospel account somewhere between 70 and 80 AD (actual date is debated) in the area of present day Syria-Palestine. Unique among the four Gospels is that Matthew's writings are believed to have been used as a sort of training manual for new Christians. Times preceding this involved rabbis or religious leaders using mainly oral tradition to train their disciples, but Jewish Christians needed a body of Jesus' teachings to share with Gentile converts. This Gospel is also not in chronological order in terms of events, but rather grouped topically to cover large focal points of Jesus' life and teaching together. For us today, Matthew's writing presents quite a gift and a lifeline to live by.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, [c] your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Introduction:

For the past few weeks we've been diving into the realities of the Silent Killers in our lives and faith. Being human, it's apparent that none of us are completely immune to these things, but also equally vital for us to realize is the truth that each of us has grace, hope, and strength available through Jesus. In this session, we will be looking at the silent killer of anxiety, an aspect of life that many of us are all too familiar with. In the Gospels, Jesus has much to say regarding our emotional lives, where we place our hope, and how we can live with true peace. The Gospel of Matthew, the first of the four Gospel accounts, does not shy away from addressing this topic directly. During the famous "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus calls out the silent killer, and addresses how to move towards more life and peace.

Starter Questions:

All of our minds wander. What do you typically think or daydream about when yours wanders?

What do you find yourself focusing on, researching, or reading about most often?

Think of your day-to-day life. How do you spend your time? How is your day broken up?

Opening Prayer:

27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Express gratitude to God for his word, for the people who are present in your group, and ask for him to be present in your midst and to open your hearts and minds to receive whatever he has for you.

If you are comfortable doing so, I encourage that you read Psalm 139:23-24 aloud to the group as part of your prayer.

Scripture:

We will be looking at two of Jesus' teachings that flow right into one another. Let's jump in to Matthew, chapter 6, and will someone please read verses 19 through 24 to begin?

(Ask a group member to read aloud, and thank them when they've finished.)

Discussion Questions

Jesus, just prior to this, was speaking on prayer and fasting, and now goes right in to addressing the things we value most. Firstly he touches on where we place our "treasures."

- What comes to mind when you think of "storing up treasures on earth?" It might sound quite a bit spiritual to you, but I'm sure you can think of ways we can place our value in various things that may not be healthy or good.

- Money, possessions, status, power

Tips:

When people partner up in pairs to pray, it will build trust and intimacy over time. This is a great way to have your group improve overall discussion. The more people you end up trusting in your group, the more open your discussion time will be.

- Jesus says that those things will be destroyed by “moths and vermin” and that “thieves break in and steal.” How could the things we just mentioned be suspect to that?
 - They are dependent upon other people and outside of your control, you can't take them with you when you die, all possessions age and deteriorate and can be taken from you, you could lose your job

It's as if Jesus is warning us, stating that he knows the hearts of people and the world itself much more deeply and clearly than we do. It's not that he doesn't want us to have things, or even very nice things, but he knows the potential and the temptation for us to place too much importance on them. If we do this, Jesus warns, all that we have will eventually be taken from us.

But, Jesus gives us the better alternative: to store up our treasures in heaven.

- How do you translate this? He says that nothing will destroy or steal our treasures “in heaven,” but what does he mean?
 - We may not be able to physically store things there, but when our ultimate hope and trust is in God and his goodness to us, a place that cannot be destroyed or changed, we have no need to fear or worry. Possessions remain in their rightful place.

Possessions will always attempt to possess us, and Jesus is well aware of this. We are not possessed by any thing, but only by God in Jesus, and he gives us good gifts that

we can enjoy in this life. We are encouraged to keep this posture throughout life.

Ancient Jewish tradition believed that light came from the eye from the inside, rather than what more modern science has taught us that light comes into the eye from the outside. This is what Jesus is tapping into next.

- Thinking of this verse this way, what do you interpret Jesus to mean?
 - Whatever is in you will come out of you. How you view things or people or possessions determines what is inside of you.

Jesus quickly transitions into talk of masters and servants.

Timothy Keller, pastor and author, says in his book, *The Reason for God* (highly recommended):

“Everybody has to live for something. Whatever that something is becomes “Lord of your life,” whether you think of it that way or not. Jesus is the only Lord who, if you receive him, will fulfill you completely, and, if you fail him, will forgive you eternally.”

Jesus, without even a second breath, jumps right into this and attempts to convey that message to his close friends. We cannot “toe the line” in our walk with God. He is gracious, and desires us to enjoy the possessions he graciously and generously gives to us, but he does not share us with anyone or any thing.

Scripture Reading:

- Will someone continue reading verses 25 through 34?
This is a bit longer, so thank you in advance! (Ask a group member to read aloud, and thank them when they've finished.)

I want to first highlight the very last sentence Jesus speaks, because I think it's crucial for us to not completely overlook it and misunderstand Jesus's heart.

He says, "Each day has enough trouble of its own." Now, does this sound like a God who is out of touch with the difficulties and trials of life? Certainly not! With this short sentence Jesus is validating our troubles and hardships. He is not saying these are trivial, we mustn't miss this.

- What then is he saying? What are the sources of worry that Jesus addresses?
 - Eating, drinking, clothes

Don't kid yourself. How many of us worry about these things daily? When was the last time you said, "I don't know what to wear!" or "What are we going to feed your parents/friends/family when they come over?" And you spend an hour thinking before finally giving in?

Jesus understands that we worry about these seemingly trivial things all the time. But he's not simply addressing them alone. He is getting at our deepest insecurities that drive us every single day, the things that can debilitate us and rob us of joy.

- What do people think of me?
- How do I look?
- Will I measure up?

- If this was known about me then I could never be loved.
- I need to look a certain way to be accepted.
- I don't have as much as him or her; therefore I must not be as good.

Then we fight and claw and worry and we place our treasures in those things, in the hands and perceptions of others where we know, deep down, they will ultimately be stolen and will leave us empty instead of in the hands of God where they will never be touched and he will leave us fulfilled.

- If we have experienced anxiety before, what does it feel like?
 - Tightness in chest, head spinning, like someone is watching me, fear, tired but unable to rest

“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

Anxiety is a real thing, but it's also something that the enemy can feed on to make us distrust or be skeptical of God and feel alone.

If those of us who have experienced deep anxiety say that's not true then we are crazy. We know the feeling all too well of anxiety prowling all around us, waiting to strike us down.

But we are not alone in our struggle with worry. The disciples did it all throughout the New Testament, David worried in the Psalms, Abraham worried about God's promises, and so many others did as well.

They did not succumb to their roaring lion anxieties, but instead had two common weapons:

1. Honesty before God in prayer, and
2. They placed their treasures on God's character and promises, even if they couldn't feel or see them.

What they did is what Jesus prescribes for us as an antidote to our worry.

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

This is not a prosperity promise, but a truth of God the Creator and Sustainer that he will give us what we need as our good and sovereign Father.

- What do you believe he means by this? How do we “seek first?”
 - Literally, by being with God first thing every day. Read scripture daily, spend time serving less fortunate, focus on how God sees you and not how the world may see you.
- How will we, by seeking God first, be given “all these things” as well?
 - Our focus won't be on the things alone, but on the Giver of the thing, so that when they do come, we will be able to receive them with open hands and an open heart, without clinging or grasping.
- What might “all these things” be?

- Not just food, drink, and clothing, but life will fall in to line and begin to make more sense once our priorities are placed rightly.

C.S. Lewis once said, “You can’t get second things first by putting them first. You get second things only by putting first things first.” God made us to be in complete union with him. He is always pursuing that with us. When we don’t pursue that with him, our lives will always be off-center and unfulfilled.

- How does this connect with anxiety?
 - Off-center, lacking peace, always worrying, are the constant companions of anxiety.

Anxiety is, among many things, a fear that we are not cared for and we must always look out for ourselves. Not only that, it’s also being uncomfortable with our truest selves.

Jesus, the one whom scripture says knows us deeper and more intimately than we even know ourselves, wants this placed in bold letters on our hearts.

“Are you not much more valuable than they?...and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”

How do we fight the silent killer of anxiety?

We often are anxious because we do not trust. This is many times not due to any fault of our own. But, slowly, deliberately, and over time trust can be built. We must over and over again, present ourselves to Jesus in small moments every day, and at some point throw our whole selves, scars and all, into the hands of the man whose hands were scarred for us, full of love and grace, and

trust that we are far more valuable than we can ever imagine.

Remember that, if you do feel anxious and worried about your life, Jesus never turns away people with real need, real fears, and real anxieties. He stays present with them and uncovers the pain and anxiety that's beneath the surface of their prayer or request. We must never fear vulnerability before Jesus, for all that is in us is already known by him anyways. He asks, "What is it that you want?" not because he doesn't know, but because he wants us to ask ourselves that same question, and respond with honesty. He will meet us with healing, redirect our souls, and give us the things our hearts truly long for.

Prayer to Close

(If you are comfortable, Psalm 139 is a good scripture to read as a closing prayer here, specifically verses 1 through 18.)

Ministry Time Application:

Option 1:

Prayer of Examen

This is a spiritual discipline that has been practiced by people all over the world for centuries. It is simply the practice of slowing down, being quiet, both literally and within your heart and mind, and contemplating your day. The goal is to invite Jesus to be with you as you walk through the events of the past 24 hours, remembering all the thoughts, events, feelings, and activities of your day. Bringing those things to Jesus, we desire to acknowledge

whether or not, in each moment, we were either moving toward God (known as consolation) or away from God (known as desolation). We are not to place judgment, criticism, shame, or arrogant pride on any one thing, but acknowledge them for what they are. At the end of the time, we thank God that he is with us through it all, and humbly request that we be made more aware of each moment so that we can move more toward him in all that we do.

This should only take 5-15 minutes a day, and can be done in the group in 5 minutes. If this is chosen, a good quote to remember is this:

“Contemplation is a long, loving look at what really is.” – Richard Rohr, *Simplicity*

Encourage everyone to attempt this once each day over the next week. Ask how they did next week to see if God has done anything unique in anyone’s life.

Option 2:

This may depend on the closeness and level of comfort of your group.

Wait on the Lord in silence for 3 minutes. Ask him to speak to each of you in the group regarding what it is that you are anxious about.

Give the Vineyard disclaimer that God is still alive and active today, and desires to meet with us in real ways. This often happens by him speaking to us in the form of pictures, memories, words or phrases flashing across our minds, in order to reveal something to us.

Get comfortable, and simply relax where you are. When you begin, pray a simple prayer like, “Come, Lord Jesus. Let us hear your voice,” and be silent.

After the 3 minutes is up, if you are comfortable and if appropriate, leader, please share those things you are anxious about with the group. Be vulnerable first so that others feel safe to share.

Once each person that wants to has shared, break into smaller groups of two or three to pray specifically for the anxieties. Close group after.

Week 6



Bitterness

Acts 8:9-25

Tips: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Before the lesson (for the Leader):

The book of Acts is a historical account written by Luke, and is considered to be a sequel to his gospel, bridging the gap between Jesus' life and the letters that make up the remainder of the New Testament. It serves as a record of the growth of the early church with an emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit and world evangelism.

Introduction (for the Group):

Today we'll be discussing a Silent Killer that has affected almost all of us, although we may not have wanted to admit it (or even realized we were harboring it): Bitterness. We'll be exploring this topic through the

story of a Samaritan man named Simon who heard the Good News from Phillip, an early missionary. Philip had taken Jesus' command to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth literally, and headed to Samaria, a city long avoided by the Jews. There he encountered Simon, a local celebrity known as a sorcerer or magician — someone who performed seemingly miraculous signs and wonders — who would become enchanted by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Questions -

Can you pinpoint a time when you felt wronged or hurt by someone, and found yourself holding a grudge toward them? How did it make you feel?

When was the last time you forgave someone, or asked for forgiveness, and truly meant it? How did this act of forgiveness alter your relationship with that person?

Opening Prayer - Thank God for those that have come to group today, that he might touch their lives through the lesson and ask God to lead us all regularly on path towards forgiveness, renewed peace and joy.

Scripture: We are going to be reading from Acts chapter 8. Could I get a couple of volunteers to read Acts 8:9-25? (Have a couple people read it aloud. It may be helpful to read it through twice!)

Thanks so much!

Discussion Questions:

- Based on his introduction in verses 9-11, what sort of man was Simon? How was he treated by others?

Bible Verses

Acts 8:9-25

9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. 14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit,...

- He was a sorcerer/magician, he boasted of his own greatness, he was revered and followed by many and was believed to have great powers.

We learn in verse 12 that Philip, a follower of Jesus, has come to Samaria to share the gospel.

- How does Simon respond?
 - He believes and becomes baptized, then follows Philip in awe of signs and miracles.

Peter and John come to Samaria to visit the believers there and to pray with them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

- What does Simon do when he sees the Spirit come after the apostles lay hands and pray?
 - He offers the apostles money in exchange for the ability to give the Holy Spirit by laying hands on others.

Peter rebukes Simon for trying to "buy the gift of God with money (v. 20)."

- What sort of motives do you imagine Simon might have had for offering to buy this gift?
 - Answers might include jealousy, selfishness, wanting to learn another "trick" so he can continue being perceived as great.

16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." ...

Peter tells Simon that his "heart is not right before God (v. 21) and that he is "full of bitterness (v. 23)."

- How do you think these two things might be connected? (*allow for answers*)

Bitterness is a complicated emotion: It has been described in such poetic terms as "smoldering resentment (Stephen Diamond)" and "unforgiveness fermented (Gregory Popcak)." It often begins with us feeling hurt by someone or something, resenting the injustice we feel, and finally becoming bitter toward the situation. It can show up in our lives in situations where we view ourselves as a victim, and let our righteous anger get the best of us.

- Has there been a time in your life when you were wronged by someone, maybe a coworker or a loved one? How did it make you feel? How did you respond to the situation? (*maybe ask a couple people to share, you may want to share first*)

Without meaning to — or even without realizing it — we can easily fall into the trap of bitterness. And while harboring bitterness and feeling anger towards someone for causing our pain may feel like a justified way of dealing with the situation, in reality doing so can actually have an adverse effect on many areas of our lives. Studies have shown that bitterness can:

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Prolong pain

Cause anxiety

Prevent living in the present

Cause distrust and cynicism

Damage healthy relationships

Undermine physical health through insomnia, high blood pressure, headaches, etc

- Have you noticed any of these symptoms creeping into your life? Take a moment and think about the areas of your life in which you experience one or more of them. Is it possible that it might be caused by some bitterness that you've been holding on to?

- *(allow for answers, share some of your own)*

The good news is that while bitterness and its adverse effects can feel like despair, God has given us clear direction on how to bring healing and restoration to the situation. Let's return to the story of Simon and his interaction with Peter. Reread Acts 8: 20-23 aloud.

- What two steps does Peter tell Simon to take in response to trying to buy the power of God for himself?

- 1. to repent of his wickedness and 2. to pray for forgiveness

Tips:
Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quite personalities in your group.

Peter observes two truths about Simon's life, and offers him ways to fix both of them. He sees that Simon is "captive to sin (v. 23)" and asks him to repent; and that he is "full of bitterness" and should seek forgiveness.

- When you have been hurt, do you find it easy or hard to forgive the person who has wronged you? Why do you think you react this way? (allow people to share)

Just as holding tightly to bitterness can have a negative impact on our lives, practicing forgiveness has been shown to have a positive impact. It can:

Lead to a greater spiritual and psychological well-being

Reduce stress and anxiety

Create higher self-esteem

Strengthen healthy relationships

Lower blood pressure and create a stronger immune system

Forgiveness can be an extremely hard response to a situation in which we've been hurt deeply. The Mayo Clinic explains that "Forgiveness doesn't mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize or justify the wrong. You can forgive the person without excusing the act.

Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life."

Matthew 6:9-13

9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 11 Give us today our daily bread.
 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

In this light, forgiveness is more than saying sorry, and more than simply accepting an apology: It is a restorative act that brings peace and joy back into our lives. We often use the phrase "practicing forgiveness" (you've heard it at least once today in this lesson!).

- Do you think it is true that forgiveness is less of a feeling and more of an action that requires practice? What has been your experience with practicing forgiveness?
(allow people to share)

Learning to practice forgiveness is so important to God that it is included in the sample prayer Jesus outlined for us.

- Can someone read Matthew 6:9-13 for us?
(Allow someone to read and then thank them!)

In the New Living Translation, verses 11-12 read "Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us." How often, then, does God asks us to forgive others? (Daily.) It has long been said that practicing forgiveness is more about bringing restoration to ourselves than to the person we are forgiving. Living with bitterness — that is, without forgiveness — is therefore more damaging to ourselves. The Mayo Clinic also had this to say about the changing power of forgiveness in the face of bitterness: "As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt." God calls us into a new life, one of hope and not of pain and bitterness that comes from dwelling on our past. Peter would go on to say

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

in one of his letters, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Peter 1:3-4a).” By practicing forgiveness, we can escape the silent killer of bitterness and instead have a living hope and a restored sense of peace and joy.

Ministry Time Application:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Author and Bible teacher Joyce Meyer famously has said, “I know from personal experience how damaging it can be to live with bitterness and unforgiveness. I like to say it’s like taking poison and hoping your enemy will die. And it really is that harmful to us to live this way.”

Have you ever caught yourself in the situation Meyer describes, poisoning yourself and hoping it will effect someone else? Break into pairs or small groups for prayer time today and share about the situation and how you found restoration. If the situation hasn’t been resolved, spend some time praying with one another that God would help you to stop poisoning yourself and learn to extend forgiveness to your enemy..

Option 2:

SUPPLIES NEEDED: paper, envelopes, writing utensils for each member

Overcoming bitterness is not easy, but mental health counselor James J. Messina, Ph. D., has outlined a 5-step process that can help. Take some time at the end of group today to prayerfully consider the following steps, asking God to be with you as you experience this process towards forgiveness. You may need to take some paper and an envelope home with you should the situation require more time.

Identify the source of bitterness and what was done to cause that feeling.

Consider how holding on to bitterness has effected your life, and how it would change for the better if you were to be rid of it.

Write a letter to the person who offended you, explaining why you were hurt, and expressing forgiveness. Seal the note in the envelope, but do not send it — destroy or dispose of it instead.

Visualize a restored future that no longer includes bitterness.

Repeat as necessary — forgiveness takes practice!

Week 7



Covetousness & Envy

Genesis 37:3-36, Acts 7:9

Tips: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Before the lesson (for the Leader):

The ancestors of Joseph are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, biblically known as the patriarchs. Abraham had left his home and his family, when God called him and promised to make him a great nation and bless him. When Abraham was 100 and Sarai 90, she birthed Isaac, the promised son. Isaac married Rebecca who birthed fraternal twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob married Rachel and her sister, Leah, and Rachel and Leah's servants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Between these four women, Jacob fathered 12 sons and one daughter. Joseph was the elder son of Rachel, Jacob's most beloved wife. There was precedent for younger siblings to receive a blessing over the older sibling within this family;

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." 8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Abraham over Haran, Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau, Joseph's brothers would have wearied of him being so highly favored by their father and God.

Introduction (for the Group):

Tonight we are going to follow-up with our final Silent Killers to our emotional and spiritual lives, covetousness and envy. Before we read the relevant chapter and verse, let's develop some context. Throughout the book of Genesis there is noticeable sibling rivalry specifically over occurrences of the ascension of a younger brother over the firstborn. Three generations of this behavior exist in Abraham's family, however it is all God ordained. So it is no surprise when we see envy rear it's head in Genesis 37:4. Joseph's brothers were envious of him, because he was the favorite of their father, and because he had visions that he would lead them all.

Opening Questions -

Would someone share an instance where someone, a sibling or relative had something you wanted, either relational or physical.

Did you try to obtain it? What happened?

What were your feelings during that time? What were your emotions? How often do you think about this instance?

Opening Prayer - Thank God for each person who is there, ask God for understanding and for transformation to take place in each person's life, ask God to bless each person and show his favor on him or her.

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, 13 and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them." "Very well," he replied. 14 So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" 16 He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" 17 "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. 18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." 21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said.

Scripture: We are going to be reading from Genesis 37:3-36, let just take turns reading 2-4 verses each. And finally will some read Acts 7:9.

Thanks so much!

Discussion Questions:

This is quite a passage of family turmoil! While most of our family experiences are different from those we just read about, many family stories are just as tragic and just as dysfunctional. This family was the recipient of God's blessing in Genesis 12, 15, and explicitly in Genesis 17. The blessing, although a good gift, was perhaps a source of strife due to the cultural norms in which it was given. Often birth order was the major determinant for inheritance and financial security. This, coupled with poor examples to follow, made for what we've read. What do we mean by poor examples to follow? Well, we see patterns of trickery (like when Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah instead of Rachel), lying (like Abraham lying to Pharaoh and again later about his relationship to Sarah), threats between siblings (like Esau and Jacob) and maybe most poignantly covetousness (like when Rachel coveted her sister's fruitfulness as a mother).

- What object did Joseph possess that cause envy among his brothers?
 - The multi-colored cloak.
- What behavior of Joseph 's caused envy and hatred?
 - His dreams, v 6-8

22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him."

Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it. 25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. 26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. 28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. 29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" 31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.

- What behaviors can cause others to feel envious?
 - Bragging, showing off, boasting, pretending like things are better than they really are.

The significance of the multi-colored cloak presented to Joseph was a sign that Joseph was valued above his brothers and Jacob's choice for the family leader, an honor normally given to the firstborn son.

- Who should have received the coat?
 - The eldest son, Reuben
- Who will reread verses 19-20 for us? (*Allow them to read and say, "Thank you!"*)

Joseph could not help the dream he had. It may have been a shock, an insult, and perhaps one to be kept to himself! However, we see the sour attitude reflected in his brothers immediately.

- What piece of wisdom would you give someone like Joseph? Especially with his family dynamics. (*have people share*)
- What was most upsetting to the brothers do you think? (*allow people to share*)

Often poorly translated as "jealousy" in English, covetousness and envy is what drove Joseph's brothers to fake his death and sell him into slavery. Jealousy is best understood in English as "fear of losing what we possess." Envy creates sorrow in us because others have what we do not. Envy can drive us to do things we never hoped we'd do.

- Does Reuben show any outward signs that he

32 They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." 33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." 34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him. 36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Acts 7:9

9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him.

possessed more envy toward Joseph than his brothers?

- Perhaps no. He attempts to save Joseph's life and very distraught to learn he has been sold as a slave.
- What may have been his motivation for attempting to save Joseph's life in verses 21- 22?
 - To gain favor with his father and Joseph, and perhaps other things.

The Ten Commandments that were given to Moses long after this story took place illustrate how God feels about coveting. The tenth commandment, Do Not Covet, was thought by some Rabbis to be the reward for following the other commandments. In other words, if you follow the first nine really well, you won't be covetous of anyone on earth.

- What is the opposite of covetousness?
 - Contentment and satisfaction.
- What techniques or strategies have you used to counteract envy in your life?
 - Allow for various answers.

Ministry Time Application:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Tips:

Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quite personalities in your group.

In groups of two or three, spend time sharing areas that you may struggle with envy (believing you deserve things you don't have). Ask God to replace that disposition with one of gratitude and satisfaction.

Option 2:

For those who have taken Meeting God 301, spend time "waiting on the Lord to speak." If you need a refresher, then visit VCSMALLGROUPS.org and watch the Leader Training Two Module: Naturally Supernatural. Practice this in your group.

Ministry Applications



Ministry Time

Series: The Journey of Faith

Read through all of the Ministry Time ideas for each week before you begin teaching through the series. This will help you plan and pray for stronger impact!

Blessings!

Week 1:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Write down any areas or situations that are current which you feel are hopeless without an intervention from God. Include any unhealed areas from your past that you may have used “time” to heal, but never truly healed from?

Break into groups of two or three people and pray over what you wrote down.

Option 2:

Map out how you view difficulty and desperate times. This may take 10 minutes of reflection and writing things down. Ask yourself: Do you only count on your own strength in your process? How much is God involved in your view of the future? Do you expect him to provide finances? Provide friendships? Provide joy?

Share what you’ve mapped out with two or three people and ask for God to intervene in your reaction to difficult or desperate times.

Week 2:

Option 1:

Read aloud a few key verse Matt 6:26, Luke 12:6-7, John 3:16, John 1:12, Psalm 139:14. Allow friends the time to reflect and then share what they are feeling.

Option 2:

The resurrection of Christ had beginning leaving the tomb, leaving dead things behind ascending into heaven, living with God.

- Make a list of all the dead characteristics you will leave behind and throw them away.
- Make a list of all the heavenly characteristics you will carry with you daily.

Week 3:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Step 1: Explain that the group will be praying silently for three minutes. Instruct the members of the group to pray for God to reveal guilt in their lives that is damaging their relationships with others and their relationship with Him. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy

Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Wait for three minutes. If you want, you can softly play worship music in the background.

Step 3: Have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have them pray about dealing with the guilt in their lives.

Option 2:

Step 1: Pass out writing materials to the group. Explain that the group will sit in silence for three minutes, and you'd like everyone to prayerfully consider and write down an action they can take in the coming week to deal with the guilt in their lives. Have someone set a timer for three minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Step 2: Go around the room and have each member of the group share what their action will be this week. Be clear that sharing doesn't have to involve specifics about the guilt; for instance, someone can say he needs to apologize to someone else or confess to God without getting into details about the apology or confession.

Step 3: If you have time, have the group break up into groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls, and have them pray about what they wrote down. Tell everyone to follow up with his or her prayer partner

at the next small group meeting to stay accountable for following the plans that were written down.

Week 4:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

Ask members to think about the discussions on the benefit of discipline (correcting our course back towards Jesus) and the harm of shame. Have them silently consider if at any time they heard God speaking to them about these things. Invite them to sit quietly for 2-5 minutes and invite the Holy Spirit to show them places where they may be holding onto shame. Have them ask the Holy Spirit to free them of these things.

Also, if God has used discipline in their lives to draw them closer to himself, instruct them to thank God for his loving correction.

Option 2:

Have the group review one or two of the statements you read through earlier about who you according to Scripture. Encourage them to pick one that really resonated with them, and one statement that they found hard to accept or that challenged them. Spend several minutes allowing them to read over these statements silently and letting the Holy Spirit solidify these truths for them.

WHO AM I?

- Thank you, Lord, that you have forgiven me. (Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 4:32, Psalm 86:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am but a branch, but you are the Vine. (John 15:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am beloved to you, and that you love me. (John 15:13, 1 John 4:11)
- Thank you, Lord, that I have received mercy from you. (Romans 11:32, Jude 1:21, Nehemiah 9:31)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a descendant of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7-9)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am your dwelling place. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- Thank you, Lord, that you know me. (1 Corinthians 8:3)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a member of your body. (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have adopted us as your children. (Galatians 4:4-5, Ephesians 1:5)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have chosen me to be yours. (Ephesians 1:11)
- Thank you, Lord, that though I was dead, you have made me alive. (Ephesians 2:1-6)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have brought me near to You and to my brothers and sisters by your blood. (Ephesians 2:13)

- Thank you, Lord, that you have called me with a heavenly calling. (Hebrews 3:1)
- Thank you, Lord, that you have made me a partaker of you. (Hebrews 3:14)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am among "the first fruits of your creatures." (James 1:18)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am now part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, once no people, but now yours, proclaiming your marvelous light. (1 Peter 2: 9)
- Thank you, Lord, that I am a choice and precious living stone in your house. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Week 5:

Option 1:

Prayer of Examen

This is a spiritual discipline that has been practiced by people all over the world for centuries. It is simply the practice of slowing down, being quiet, both literally and within your heart and mind, and contemplating your day. The goal is to invite Jesus to be with you as you walk through the events of the past 24 hours, remembering all the thoughts, events, feelings, and activities of your day. Bringing those things to Jesus, we desire to acknowledge whether or not, in each moment, we were either moving toward God (known as consolation) or away from God (known as desolation). We are not to place judgment, criticism, shame, or arrogant pride on any one thing, but acknowledge them for what they are. At the end of the

time, we thank God that he is with us through it all, and humbly request that we be made more aware of each moment so that we can move more toward him in all that we do.

This should only take 5-15 minutes a day, and can be done in the group in 5 minutes. If this is chosen, a good quote to remember is this:

“Contemplation is a long, loving look at what really is.” – Richard Rohr, *Simplicity*

Encourage everyone to attempt this once each day over the next week. Ask how they did next week to see if God has done anything unique in anyone’s life.

Option 2:

This may depend on the closeness and level of comfort of your group.

Wait on the Lord in silence for 3 minutes. Ask him to speak to each of you in the group regarding what it is that you are anxious about.

Give the Vineyard disclaimer that God is still alive and active today, and desires to meet with us in real ways. This often happens by him speaking to us in the form of pictures, memories, words or phrases flashing across our minds, in order to reveal something to us.

Get comfortable, and simply relax where you are. When you begin, pray a simple prayer like, “Come, Lord Jesus. Let us hear your voice,” and be silent.

After the 3 minutes is up, if you are comfortable and if appropriate, leader, please share those things you are

anxious about with the group. Be vulnerable first so that others feel safe to share.

Once each person that wants to has shared, break into smaller groups of two or three to pray specifically for the anxieties. Close group after.

Week 6:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Author and Bible teacher Joyce Meyer famously has said, “I know from personal experience how damaging it can be to live with bitterness and unforgiveness. I like to say it’s like taking poison and hoping your enemy will die. And it really is that harmful to us to live this way.”

Have you ever caught yourself in the situation Meyer describes, poisoning yourself and hoping it will effect someone else? Break into pairs or small groups for prayer time today and share about the situation and how you found restoration. If the situation hasn’t been resolved, spend some time praying with one another that God would help you to stop poisoning yourself and learn to extend forgiveness to your enemy..

Option 2:

SUPPLIES NEEDED: paper, envelopes, writing utensils for each member

Overcoming bitterness is not easy, but mental health counselor James J. Messina, Ph. D., has outlined a 5-step

process that can help. Take some time at the end of group today to prayerfully consider the following steps, asking God to be with you as you experience this process towards forgiveness. You may need to take some paper and an envelope home with you should the situation require more time.

Identify the source of bitterness and what was done to cause that feeling.

Consider how holding on to bitterness has effected your life, and how it would change for the better if you were to be rid of it.

Write a letter to the person who offended you, explaining why you were hurt, and expressing forgiveness. Seal the note in the envelope, but do not send it — destroy or dispose of it instead.

Visualize a restored future that no longer includes bitterness.

Repeat as necessary — forgiveness takes practice!

Week 7:

Have writing utensils and note cards/paper available for your group.

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

In groups of two or three, spend time sharing areas that you may struggle with envy (believing you deserve things you don't have). Ask God to replace that disposition with one of gratitude and satisfaction.

Option 2:

For those who have taken Meeting God 301, spend time “waiting on the Lord to speak.” If you need a refresher, then visit VCSMALLGROUPS.org and watch the Leader Training Two Module: Naturally Supernatural. Practice this in your group.