

## Introduction: Parents and Children

- Every parent has a dream for their child.
- Our kids can be the source of our greatest **JOYS** or deepest **PAINS**.
- Our heavenly Father has a dream for every one of His children.
- God's dream is to make you like His **SON or DAUGHTER**.

Matthew 5:48, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:13

- God's dream for every child of His is to become a disciple –  
a **ROMANS 12** Christian!

5 Key Relationships:       $\longrightarrow$       Romans 12 Biblical Responses

1. Relationship with God:      **SURRENDERED** to God

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Romans 12:1

2. Relationship with the world:      **SEPARATE** from the World

*“**Do not conform** any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Romans 12:2

3. Relationship with yourself:      **SOBER** in Self-Assessment

*“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather **think of yourself with sober judgment**, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*

Romans 12:3-8

4. Relationship with believers:

**SERVING** in Love

*“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.** Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”*

Romans 12:9-13

5. Relationship with nonbelievers:

**SUPERNATURALLY** Responding to Evil with Good

*“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. **Do not repay anyone evil for evil.** Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is Mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, **but overcome evil with good.**”*

Romans 12:14-21

**Warning** – Romans 12 is not a “try-hard” moral code to live up to, but a faith response to what God has already done for us.

- Romans 1 - 3: **SIN** - Our problem that separates us from God.
- Romans 4 - 5: **SALVATION** - God's solution in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
- Romans 6 - 8: **SANCTIFICATION** - Living your new life in God's power and growing progressively in Christ-likeness.
- Romans 9 - 11: **SACRIFICE** - Living in confidence because God is in control and keeps all His promises...

### **Personal Application Questions:**

1. Would you like to receive everything your heavenly Father has planned for you by becoming a Romans 12 Christian?
2. Have you personally taken the step to be “all in” in your relationship with Christ?
3. How does surrender and being separate from the world's values prepare you to get God's best for your life? see Psalm 84:11
4. What “next step” would help you fulfill God's dream for your life?
5. Who could help and support you as you take that next step of obedience?

**Introduction: “Risk, reason, and the decision making process”**

– Excerpt from *Harvard Business Review*

**Case Study #1 – John's Civil War Coins**

**Case Study #2 – Sheila's Picasso**

**Questions to ponder:**

- What are the risks?
- What are the potential rewards?
- What would you do?
- Why?

**Observations that flow out of these Case Studies:**

**Three Principles:**

1. **Truth** – What is true about the issue?
2. **Knowledge** – Have you educated yourself about the issue?
3. **Faith** – Do you believe it to the point of action?

### Case Study #3 – Ancient Treasure

*<sup>44</sup>The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

*<sup>45</sup>Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

Jesus – Matthew 13:44-46

- **Four observations from Case Study #3**

- **Thesis** – Total surrender is the **CHANNEL** through which God's best and biggest blessings flow.

- **Definition** – “Total commitment is the alignment of one's motives, resources, priorities, and goals to fulfill a specific mission, accomplish a specific task, or follow a specific person.”

– Webster's Dictionary

- **Spiritual Insight** – Through which lens do you view total commitment?

<b>Positive</b>	vs.	<b>Negative</b>
Wise		Sacrifice
Logical		Self-Denial
Shrewd		Noble, Martyr
Re-evaluation		Renunciation

**The Problem:** What does total commitment look like in our relationship with God? How does it work?

**The Answer:**

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*

Romans 12:1

**The Command:** "**OFFER** your bodies"

**The Motivation:** "The **MERCY** of God"

**The Reason:** "Spiritual act of **WORSHIP.**"

**What does He want most?**

1. He wants you!
2. All that you are and all that you have fully surrendered to Him.

**Why surrender to His Lordship?**

Psalm 84:11

Because total surrender is the channel through which God's best and biggest blessings flow.

**The Question:** Are you **ALL IN**?

**Personal Application Questions:**

1. How has your view of commitment changed?
2. Why do most Christians miss out on God's best for their life?
3. What most keeps you from being "all in?"
4. What would it look like to surrender all to Christ today?

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00001

THE BLANK CHECK OF MY LIFE

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

PAY TO THE ORDER OF Jesus Christ

Amount All I am, All I have 100%

MEMO \_\_\_\_\_ AUTHORIZED BY \_\_\_\_\_

A PROVEN PATHWAY TO BECOME LIKE JESUS



**Introduction: Why are there so many decisions...  
...and so few disciples?**

**Negative Command:** "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world..."

"Do not be conformed"

- Passive voice
- Imperative
- Present tense

**Translation:** "Stop allowing yourselves to be molded by the influences and pressures of this present world system."

**Application:** We are to be **SEPARATE** from the world's values.

*<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh** and the **lust of the eyes** and the **boastful pride of life**, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."*

1 John 2:15-17

**Summary:** The world's system seeks to **SEDUCE** us from our love for Christ by

**PLEASURE**, **POSSESSIONS**, and **POSITION**.

**Positive Command:** "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

"Be transformed"

- Passive voice
- Imperative
- Present tense

### Translation

"But allow God to completely change your inward thinking and outward behavior by cooperating wholeheartedly moment-by-moment with the Spirit's renewing process."

### Application

Are you shaped more by the **WORLD** or the **WORD**?

*But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"*

Matthew 4:4

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

**The means of transformation:** "...by the renewing of your mind."

- Renewing your mind is a continual **REFOCUS** of a Romans 12:1 perspective. Colossians 3:1-4
- Renewing your mind will always involve a **BATTLE**. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5
- Renewing your mind is a **SUPERNATURAL** work of the Spirit. Romans 8:5-6

### Summary

You are what you **EAT**!!!

**Practical methods for “Renewing Your Mind”**

1. **HEARING** God's Word

Romans 10:17

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.*

2. Use your **TIME** wisely. Be in the Word.

3. **READ** God's Word

Revelation 1:3

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

4. **STUDY** God's Word

2 Timothy 2:15

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth.*

5. **MEMORIZE** God's Word

Psalms 119:9,11

*How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word. Your Word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.*

6. **MEDITATE** on God's Word

Joshua 1:8

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

**A tool for transformation: The “2PROAPT” Method**

**The purpose of transformation:** *“To get God’s best so that you may test, by experience, that God’s will is...”*

- Good - winsome, attractive, beautiful, richly satisfying
- Pleasing - acceptable to God and well-pleasing to us
- Perfect - according to design, maximizing our fullest potential in fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives

### **Personal Application Questions:**

1. What is your major “take away” from this message?
2. Why do so few Christians experience God’s best for their lives according to Romans 12:2?
3. We all struggle with the world’s system seeking to mold our lives – where are you most vulnerable? What has helped you the most to resist temptation in your areas of weakness?
4. Why is “mind renewal” so important? How does mind renewal and getting God’s best relate to one another?
5. Is there something or someone God wants you to say “no” to as it is conforming you to the world? Is there something God wants you to say “yes” to so your mind can be renewed and experience God’s best for your life?

### **Resources from Living on the Edge to Help You Apply Romans 12:2**

Pathways to Intimacy with God, MP3s – Chip Ingram

Stop Faking It!, MP3s – Chip Ingram

Love, Sex & Lasting Relationships, MP3s/Study Guide, Book – Chip Ingram

Transformed, Study Guide– Chip Ingram

Yes! You Really CAN Change, MP3s, Book – Chip Ingram

**Three questions we all ask ourselves:**

1. Who am I? (Identity)
2. Where do I belong? (Security)
3. What am I supposed to do? (Significance)

### Why is it so hard to answer these questions?

<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup>He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

<sup>11</sup>And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup>The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 3:8-13

### Three obstacles to getting right answers:

1. Fear rooted in **SHAME**.
2. Hiding rooted in **INSECURITY**.
3. Blaming rooted in denial.

**God's Answers:**

Romans 12:3-8

**1. Who are you?**

Romans 12:3

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

The Command: Think **ACCURATELY** about yourself.

**2. Where do you belong?**

Romans 12:4-5

*<sup>4</sup>Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

The Reason: You have a **ROLE** to fill.

**3. What are you supposed to do?**

Romans 12:6-8

*<sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

The Practice: Discover and **DEPLOY** your spiritual gift.

**Never forget who you really are!**

1. God uniquely created you – you are **ETERNALLY VALUABLE**.  
Psalm 139:13-14
2. God placed you in His family – you are **UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED**.  
Ephesians 3:19-22
3. God gifted you to fulfill His purpose – you are **IRREPLACEABLY SIGNIFICANT**.  
Ephesians 2:10

**Personal Application Questions:**

1. On a scale of 1 – 5, how accurately do you tend to think of yourself?  
Why? Why not?
2. On a scale of 1 – 5, how relationally connected are you to fellow believers?  
Why? Why not?
3. What is your primary spiritual gift? What do you love to do among God's people and see that it is used to help and encourage others?
4. What "next step" do you sense God wants you to take to develop a more sober self-assessment?

**Resources from Living on the Edge to Help You Apply Romans 12:3-8**

*Your Divine Design*, MP3s/Study Guide, Book – Chip Ingram

*Stop Faking It!*, MP3s – Chip Ingram

For Women: *Precious in His Sight*, MP3s, Book, Affirmation Cards – Theresa Ingram

## **Introduction:**

Why do so many good and sincere Christians get “spiritually stuck?” They love God, they want to grow, they have seen some measure of spiritual transformation, but they “stall,” they hit a spiritual ceiling. Some habits or attitudes seem to never change. Trying hard and making “re-commitments” last only for a short time. What do you do when you’re spiritually stuck?

**Axiom:** The greatest seed, in the greatest soil, cannot grow in the wrong environment.

- The **COMMAND** of Jesus requires a very specific spiritual ecosystem.

John 13:34-35

- The **EXAMPLE** of Jesus’ ministry to develop His disciples demands a specific ecosystem.

Mark 3:13-14

- The **PRACTICE** of the early church and its impact argue for a specific ecosystem.

Acts 2:42-47

- The **HISTORY** of the Church, past and present, confirms a specific ecosystem for spiritual growth and transformation.

The Spiritual Ecosystem: **AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY**.

The form this system takes is: **A SMALL GROUP**.

A critical distinction: **AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY**  $\neq$  **A SMALL GROUP**.

**The principle**: We must be engaged in the spiritual ecosystem of authentic community for spiritual maturity to occur.

**Two big questions**:

1. What is authentic community?
2. How do you get it?

**Authentic community occurs when...**

**Romans 12:9-13**

***The real you...***

verse 9

***...meets real needs...***

verse 10

***...for the right reasons...***

verse 11

***...in the right way.***

verses 12-13

**The real you** – Not a **PROJECTION** of yourself.

Romans 12:9

- **Authenticity** – *“Let love be sincere.”*
- **Purity** – *“Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good.”*

**Meets real needs** – Not **SUPERFICIAL** ones.

Romans 12:10

- **Devotion** – *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”*
- **Humility** – *“Giving preference to one another in honor.”*

**For the right reason** – Not to **PLEASE** people.

Romans 12:11

- **Motive** – *“Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”*
- **Method** – “Genuine service to God is characterized by:
  - Diligence – excellence
  - Enthusiasm – passion

**In the right way** – Not in our own **STRENGTH**.

Romans 12:12-13

- **Upward Focus** – “*Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.*”
- **Outward Focus** – “*Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing (pursuing) hospitality.*”

### **Why is authentic community so important to Jesus?**

*<sup>20</sup>“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.*

John 17:20-21

### **Application/Discussion Questions:**

1. Share a time when you've experienced authentic community in a significant way with brothers and sisters in Christ. (What made it so special to you?)
2. Describe a time when the hypocrisy of a Christian was a stumbling block for you.
3. Why do you think authenticity is so important in relationships? In having a positive impact on others?
4. What's the difference between “real needs” and superficial ones? How does motive play into meeting “real” needs?
5. What specific step of faith/obedience do you need to take to build authentic community for you or someone else in order to be an answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17?

### **Resources from Living on the Edge to Help You Apply Romans 12:9-13**

*Love One Another*, MP3s – Chip Ingram

*Five Lies That Ruin Relationships*, MP3s – Chip Ingram

Small Group Studies – Available online at [LivingontheEdge.org](http://LivingontheEdge.org)

## Introduction: How to treat your enemies

<sup>43</sup>*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

<sup>44</sup>*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

<sup>45</sup>*that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love those*

*who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?*

<sup>47</sup>*And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

<sup>48</sup>*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Jesus, Matthew 5:43-48

***Becoming a Romans 12 Christian is NOT difficult....***

***...it is IMPOSSIBLE!***

## Important review: The Romans 12 Christian

1. The commands of Romans 12 are our faith response to Romans chapters 1-11 of God's grace and mercy toward us.
2. R12 Christians focus on **RELATIONSHIPS** not rules or religious activity.
3. R12 Christians highest aim is **LOVE**.
  - Loving God through a **surrendered** life.
  - Refusing to love the **world's** false promises.
  - Loving ourselves for who God made us to be.
  - Loving fellow believers through **sacrificial service**.
  - Loving our enemies by **supernaturally** returning good for evil.

## Supernaturally responding to evil:

Romans 12:14-21

<sup>14</sup>"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

<sup>19</sup>Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is Mine to avenge; I will repay" says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

**A Romans 12 response to personal attack:**

**Positive Command = “BLESS them that persecute you.”**

- Forgiveness – Romans 12:14
- Identification – Romans 12:15
- Association – Romans 12:16

**Negative Command = “Don’t take your own REVENGE.”**

- Personal retaliation is a prohibited response for God’s people – Romans 12:17-18
- Two compelling reasons why personal retaliation is prohibited – Romans 12:19-20
  1. It usurps God’s role as JUDGE.
  2. It is an ineffective means to bring about PEACE.

**Supernatural result = GOOD will overcome evil.** Romans 12:21

**Personal Application Questions:**

1. How are we to respond to personal attack and injustice according to Romans 12:14-21? How does this differ from civil issues or violations of the law?

2. How did Jesus model this concept of overcoming evil with good in His life?

In His death?

3. What person(s) or circumstances in your life (past or present) have you had the greatest difficulty in "blessing" as defined in this passage?

4. Why is it so difficult to genuinely forgive and even bless those who have deeply wounded us?

5. What new insight have you gained to help you deal with the evil and/or injustice you have experienced in the past?

6. What is your first step in overcoming evil with good?

7. Who might help you take this first step and keep your commitment to God?

## Introduction: A change of thinking

- Every transformed life (like the prodigal son or the woman at the well) involves an awakening to a new way of thinking.
  
- Every life change story has one thing in common and that is a **CHANGE** of **THINKING**.

## The battle for your mind

*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10:5

### The law of cognition

- Like the law of gravity, this law applies to you whether you believe it or not.
- The law of cognition basically says that your life is shaped by your **THOUGHTS**.

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

Proverbs 4:23

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Romans 12:2a

### Neuroplasticity and the subconscious

- Neuroplasticity shows that our brains are constantly being molded by what we experienced and what we're exposed to.
- The average person has 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts a day, and 95% of them are subconscious.

**The connection between thoughts and life:**

1. Our thoughts establish our **EMOTIONS**.
2. Our thoughts direct our **DECISIONS**.
3. Our thoughts regulate our **RELATIONSHIPS**.

Three questions to think about as you process your thoughts and your relationships:

1. When you make assumptions about someone's intentions, do you assume the best or the worst?
  2. When you think about your past with a person, what do you remember?
  3. What narrative do you tell yourself about this person when you have to fill in the gaps?
4. Our thoughts determine our **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**.

*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

Colossians 3:2

### **Application: Break the pattern of distraction**

- The "Streaming Circus": We must break free from constant digital distraction to make space for the Holy Spirit to renew our minds (e.g., Social media fast, news detox, phone-free mornings).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Can you share a personal example of a time when a specific thought pattern (either positive or negative) directly impacted your emotions or a major decision?
2. In the "streaming circus" parable, the daughter becomes so consumed by constant digital noise that she forgets to sit with her father. Which "attraction" or distraction in the modern world do you find hardest to walk away from, and how is it affecting your spiritual growth?
3. Romans 12:2 challenges us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world. How do you see our culture trying to squeeze us into its mold today, and what is one practical step you can take to break your pattern of distraction this week?
4. We learned that our thoughts naturally try to "fill in the gaps" when interpreting other people's actions or words. In your relationships, do you tend to presume the worst or assume the best when you lack the full context? How can taking your thoughts captive change this dynamic?

## Introduction: The battleground

*<sup>3</sup> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

## Characteristics of a stronghold:

1. They feel **UNASSAILABLE**: We use identity language – “It’s just the way I am”
2. They are built on **LIES**: A stronghold is a lie that we live our lives by.
3. They resist **TRUTH**: Truth feels threatening instead of liberating.
4. They govern our **BEHAVIOR**: Strongholds don’t just affect how you think, they determine what you do.

Romans 7:15-20

### Where do strongholds come from?

1. **EARLY** and **FREQUENT** thinking
2. Cognitive **REINFORCEMENT**
3. **EMOTIONAL** association
4. **GENERATIONAL** patterns Ezekiel 18
5. **SPIRITUAL WARFARE** at its heart John 8:44

### How to fight strongholds – Cognitive reappraisal:

1. **RECOGNIZE** the lie
2. **REPLACE** with truth
3. **REINFORCE** the truth with community and content

### Common strongholds:

- Stronghold of **CONTROL**  
Proverbs 3:5  
1 Peter 5:7  
Romans 8:28
- Stronghold of **SHAME**  
Romans 8:1  
1 John 1:9  
Isaiah 53  
2 Corinthians 5:17
- Stronghold of **VICTIMHOOD**  
Philippians 4:13  
2 Peter 1:3  
1 John 4:4  
Romans 8:28

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is a lie about yourself, God, or your circumstances that you've been tempted to accept as an inescapable personality trait?
2. Strongholds can sometimes form through generational patterns. Have you noticed any negative thought patterns or behaviors passed down in your family that you want to declare, "It stops with me!"?
3. Kyle outlined a process for cognitive reappraisal: recognize the lie, replace it with God's truth, and reinforce that truth. Which of these three steps do you personally find the most difficult to practice when facing anxiety, shame, or a desire for control?
4. Why do you think it is so difficult for us to be vulnerable about our deep-rooted struggles? How does finding a safe, judgment-free Christian community help us effectively replace lies with God's truth?
5. Identify one trusted friend or spiritual mentor in your life. Commit to reaching out to them this week to share the specific stronghold you are battling, so you no longer have to fight it alone.

## Introduction: The power of spoken words

A word you speak is more **POWERFUL** than a thought you think.

### The vision of dry bones

*<sup>1</sup> The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?"*

*"O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "You alone know the answer to that."*

*<sup>4</sup> Then He said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! <sup>6</sup> I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"*

*<sup>7</sup> So I spoke this message, just as He told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. <sup>8</sup> Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then He said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'"*

*<sup>10</sup> So I spoke the message as He commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.*

Ezekiel 37:1-10

### Words create worlds

- God creates with words in Genesis 1
- Jesus raises the dead with words in the Gospels
- Jesus defeats temptation by speaking scripture

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.*

Proverbs 18:21

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,*

Proverbs 12:18a

*Let me tell you something: Every one of these careless words is going to come back to haunt you. There will be a time of Reckoning. Words are powerful; take them seriously. Words can be your salvation. Words can also be your damnation.*

Matthew 12:36-37

### The neuroscience of speaking out loud

- Embodied reinforcement: venting and complaining don't release feelings; they train your brain to look for evidence to back up your complaints.
- The garden of words parable: Words are seeds that grow either flowers or weeds.

## Speaking God's Word

<sup>10</sup> "The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. <sup>11</sup> It is the same with My word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

Isaiah 55:10-11

## The rhythm of Ezekiel

You **LISTEN** to what God says. You **SPEAK** what God says. You **WATCH** what God does.

## Biblical faith vs. Word of faith

Word of faith says I can speak my will into reality. Biblical faith says, 'I will speak **GOD'S** **WILL** over my reality.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do you think speaking truth out loud feels uncomfortable sometimes, and how can we get better at it?
2. Our culture often tells us that "venting" is healthy, but neuroscience and the "Garden of Words" parable show that it actually reinforces negativity and grows weeds in our minds. How have you seen the fruit of complaining versus the fruit of gratitude play out in your own life?
3. Biblical faith is speaking *God's will* over our reality. What is a specific, "dead or dry" area in your life right now where you need to start boldly prophesying God's promises?
4. Has someone ever spoken a "word of life" over you? Who is someone you can speak life into this week?

## Introduction: Life is difficult

*"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

John 16:33

In this world, you will have **TROUBLE**.

## Numbering our days:

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

Psalm 90:12

*Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

James 4:14

## Taking your first thoughts captive

- What you think about when you first wake up has a way of determining what you think about through the **REST** of the **DAY**.
- Examples in Scripture: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Hezekiah, Job, Isaiah, David, and Jesus all prioritized meeting God early in the morning.

## The neuroscience of the morning

- The neuroplasticity window: During the first hour or two of your day, what you think about carries disproportionate weight and has a compounding effect on your thoughts for the rest of the day.
- The cortisol awakening response: Because stress hormone levels are naturally highest in the morning, your morning thoughts have an amplified emotional impact that sets you up for either resiliency or negative thought patterns for the rest of the day.
- The primacy effect and priming: Your first thoughts about the day create neural pathways used to process whatever else happens to you; like a coat of primer on a wall, what people can see is impacted by what they can't see.
- The parable of the smudge: what you tune your mind to in the morning is what you will look for all day.

**Three things to call to mind**

Lamentations 3:21-24

1. God's compassions **NEVER FAIL**.
2. Great is His **FAITHFULNESS**.
3. The Lord is my **PORTION** – He is enough.

**Challenge: A practical morning routine**

- Don't check your phone first thing in the morning
- Take your thoughts captive
- Pray and read Scripture before engaging in the demands of your day

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What are some common "smudges" (frustrations, news headlines, comparisons) that easily distract you and ruin your perspective for the rest of the day?
2. How might your days look different if you spent the first 10 minutes taking your thoughts captive with God instead of scrolling on a screen?
3. Lamentations teaches us to bring our honest, raw grief to God, but the key principle is to "start, but don't stay" there. Why is it important to balance being honest with God about our pain while intentionally choosing to reframe our perspective?
4. In the midst of darkness, Jeremiah deliberately chose to call three things to mind: God's compassions never fail (His mercies are new every morning), His faithfulness is great, and He is enough. Which of these three truths do you need to remind yourself of the most right now, and why?

**Introduction: How do you find life, hope, and peace in a world that is really messed up?**

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

-Saint Francis of Assisi

**Paul tells us how it works:**

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;  
and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me  
and gave Himself up for me.*

Galatians 2:20

The gateway to the deepest relationships, peace that never leaves, and hope that never fades actually begins with death; because when there is no death, there can be no resurrection.

### Four basic questions:

#### 1. How did we get here?

The impact of the **FALL** (when sin entered the world) separated us from:

- God
- Each other
- Ourselves

#### 2. Where is God in the chaos?

Jesus came and did a divine **INTERVENTION** to rescue us.

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

John 3:16-17

*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*

John 16:33

### 3. What gives Jesus the right to make an outlandish offer?

Jesus makes the offer based on four things:

1. His **LIFE** – sinless and revealing God's character 2 Corinthians 5:21
2. His **DEATH** Colossians 2:9-15
3. His **RESURRECTION** Acts 1-2
4. He wants to be in union and relationship with us. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

### 4. What is the counterintuitive path that brings life, hope, and peace?

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 12:1-2

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

John 12:24

#### Two options:

- **Option A:** Remain in denial.
- **Option B:** Die to my way and ask God to come into my life so I can follow Him.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How did this message give you a better understanding of the true meaning of Easter?
2. According to Galatians 2:20, what does “dying to ourselves” mean?
3. How did Jesus divinely intervene to rescue us?
4. What might be hindering you from a genuine relationship with the Lord?
5. Read Romans 12:1-2. What are some practical ways you can renew your mind this week?