

Leader Instructions

Session Two

Checklist

- _____ Leader Guide for your use
- _____ Print material for each group member
- _____ Sign-in sheet
- _____ Small pad of paper for individual prayer requests

Agenda

- ❖ **Opening business**, allow 5 minutes, depending on the size of your group
 - Sign-in sheet
 - Hand out member Home Study Material
- ❖ **Prayer requests**, hand out sheets of paper for prayers.
- ❖ **Cover Home Study Questions from Session One**, allow 45 minutes
- ❖ **Leader Guide** material, allow 30 minutes
- ❖ **Open discussion** as time allows.
 - A few book discussion openers are attached.
- ❖ **Closing Prayer**

Session Two - Leader Guide

Discussion of Session One assignment - Allow 45 Minutes

Leader Prompt: Prior to covering the new concepts for this week, spend time discussing the Home Study Material from the previous week. Keep in mind, no one should ever feel compelled to discuss what they determined to be their state of love or lovesickness. Bear in mind as you move forward, there may be times when you feel as if you are not getting through to the group. Keep moving forward. As I have led this group, I found that many are silently wrestling with this concept or maybe even realizing that they do not have the depth of love that they presumed. Many were quiet. Most would rather take a beating than to admit such a thing in front of others. Silence is not a bad thing during this session. Just keep plugging along. Be prepared to share what *you* discovered over the past week.

Below are a few leading statements/questions. Please feel free to use your own Home Study Material to generate questions. Things that were significant to you were likely just as meaningful to others. Share your own experiences as you move through the questions.

Opening Questions:

Day One - Loving God

Belief - If you truly believe that being closer to God is what will change your life, you will do whatever it takes to draw nearer to Him.

- ? In the verse from Luke 10, we are reminded that Jesus told Martha that only one thing is needed. We work and strive for the kingdom, but often forget the main thing. Why do we so easily forget the "one thing," which is intimate time with Jesus?
- ? Explain how people can be destroyed from "lack of knowledge."
- ? No matter who you are, a Do or a Don't, isn't it true that we can all benefit from sitting with the Lord, asking Him to search us and know our heart? Can't we all use a nudge closer to the Savior?
- ? Would anyone like to share any insights from Day One. Please, feel free to keep private things private.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: test me and know my anxious thoughts."
Psalm 139:23

Day Two - Set Apart

- ? What do you think of this concept of being "set apart"?
- ? Do you believe that quiet time with God every day can begin true transformation? Any examples of how it has touched your life in the past?

- ? Any history or stories of journaling?
- ? Have you committed to any of the suggestions for setting yourself apart during our time of study?

Day Three – *God Plus*

- ? When you pictured God looking down at you and seeing your back rather than your face, how did that make you feel?
- ? What do you think about the statement that many people do not believe God is *enough*?
- ? What things do you turn to to get your needs met?
- ? Any other observations from this day?

Day Four – *Symptomatic*

- ? What do you think of this concept of treating the illness rather than the symptoms?
- ? What symptoms look like good things on the surface? (Perfectionism, pride, obsessed w/children or family, work and strive)
- ? Are there any areas of your life, what we are calling symptoms, where you have resigned yourself to believe, “that’s just the way I am”?

Day Five – *Suppression*

- ? Would anyone be willing to share what they have come to believe is a symptom?
- ? What do you think about the suppressant strategy? Any plans to implement?

Session Two – The Mended Veil

Allow 30 minutes

The Mended Veil

Leader Prompt: Anytime you feel this is too much reading, please feel free to familiarize yourself with the information and express it from memory or highlight key words or phrases in order to prompt you.

Session Concepts:

- ❖ Identifying Stitches
- ❖ Real Deal
- ❖ Intimate Prayer

In Chapter 5, Chris tells Robin, “You’ve mended the veil.”

The mended veil is a metaphor for the self-imposed barrier we construct between ourselves and God. We discovered that Robin mended the veil between herself and God stitch by stitch. That is the way it is for most of us. You may have once felt close to God but now you feel far away. It is possible that, over the course of years, one stitch at a time has worked its way into your life, until finally, you feel you see nothing of God at all. In this session, we will learn to identify our stitches and then determine how they might be removed.

Important to distinguish: The difference between Symptoms and Stitches:

Symptoms: Outward behaviors and inward attitudes that indicate we may not be as near to God as we need to be or profess to be.

Stitches: Are the things that prevent us from drawing near to God. They prevent us from seeing God for who He really is. They stand in our way.

Oddly enough, some things may be on both lists.

Concept One: Identifying Stitches

The question we will explore in this session is: Have you built a self-imposed wall between yourself and God? If so, it blocks the way where you can’t see Him and know Him fully.

How can you love the One you don’t know?

How can you trust the One you don’t know?

Removing what blocks our vision of God is critical in coming to love Him as he asks of us in Matthew 22:37-38 This will be the “unmending of the veil”.

Examples of stitches – Things that prevent us from drawing near to and knowing God.

(Members may view this list on page 2 of the Day One Home Study.)

Discontentment	Unworthiness	Self-pity	Divorce
Sexual Abuse	Judgmental	Shame	Idols
Great Daddy	Bad Daddy	Spouse	Children
Health Issues	Painful Childhood	Apathy	Loss
Self-Reliance	Unforgiveness	Abortion	Grief
Bitterness	Addiction	Pride	Self
Perfect Life	Disappointment	Unbelief	Work

Leader Prompt: From the list above, you will help the group to see how these “stitches” can keep them at a distance from God. Choose your own or use some from the descriptions below. Cover as many or as few as you would like. Prior to the session, think through some that are not indicated below, such as, addiction keeps our mind focused on the substance, work becomes our identity, sexual abuse can cause shame and wondering why God did not protect, apathy causes us to not care, etc... Based on your own history, you may be able to share from personal experience. Personal history always opens up others to discussion and sharing their own struggles.

How stitches prevent us from drawing near to God: Examples

- Great Daddy – This sounds off base, but if you have a dad who meets all your needs, it is easy to *not* need God. When trouble arises you have your dad, or even both parents you can turn to. When you never need God, you do not tend to move in close to Him, and because of that, you never really get to know Him at all.
- Bad Daddy – If your father was distant, it is easy to see your heavenly Father as distant. Consider additional characteristics in faulty human fathers such as abusive, harsh, disapproving, and other traits that can cause us to see God as the same.
- Pride can easily keep you from knowing God because *you* are in the way. You think you don't need Him because you can handle whatever comes alone. It is related to self-reliance.
- Grief/Loss – Blaming God is a common attitude when you lose someone you love. You may wonder why God did not save them. These questions can cause you to become angry with God and to turn away from Him.
- Spouse/Children – When your world revolves around your family, you have made them your idol, your god. Remember, He is jealous for you. He requires you to put Him in first place, not a distant second or third.

Open Discussion: As time allows. Have the group review the list.

- ? Can you give an example of how one of the items on the list can prevent you from seeing God for who He really is or from being near to Him?

Concept Two: Real Deal

This “mending of the veil” may not be an intentional wall you build. It may be something that happens slowly, over time.

Chris says, “*In my case, I realized that I could not reconcile what I read of the God of the Bible with what I was seeing in the world and experiencing in my life. Doubting He was active in the lives of everyday people like me, I just installed a zipper, closed the veil, and went through the religious motions.*”

From what Chris was saying, he was seeing some great things promised in the Word of God, but they were not real in his life. So out of frustration, he shut down and quit trying. It was easier to go through the religious motions. He was filled with unbelief, thinking that intimacy with God was not possible.

- ? Does that sound familiar to you? Do you see great promises in the Word of God that do not seem to be evident in your life?
 - o Examples may be: Any on the list of the fruit of the Spirit, especially joy, peace, patience, kindness or gentleness toward others.
 - o Maybe you have not seen Him as mighty in your life and circumstances.
- ? Does true intimacy with God seem possible? Is it something you know already?

What changed for Chris? He saw some “real deal” people in his life, people who had what he wanted. Because of that, he took steps to become real.

- ? What do you think a “real deal” person looks/acts like?
 - o What are their behaviors
 - o Attitudes
- ? Who are some “real deal” people you know? This can be people you know personally or even Bible teachers or preachers.

Leader: List your own real deal people.

Our goal is to become REAL DEAL people!

Concept Three: Intimate Prayer

Leader Prompt: Be prepared to share where you have your quiet time with God. Are you a morning, mid-day, or nighttime person? Think of ways in which having a set quiet time has changed your relationship with God.

- ? Where is your quiet place? Do you have one?
 - o Allow for open discussion.

- ? If not, why not? What gets in the way of quiet time spent with the Lord?
 - o Is it possible that you simply do not believe you will hear from Him?

Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Mark 6:31

Chris told Robin how he began to pray in a new way. Here are some questions to ponder:

- ? What is your prayer life like? Is it open and honest communication, or do you say overly formal prayers and feel disconnected?
- ? Do you sense His presence with you as you speak to Him?
- ? Do you hear Him speak to you, through His Word and His Spirit?

Unmending the Veil – Book Discussion

Leader Prompt: If you have time after you cover the Session One Study Material and the Session Two concepts, here are some questions you might want to use for conversation starters. Feel free to create your own.

Discussion Openers: Chapters 5-9

Chapter 5-6

- ❖ Chris suggested counseling for Robin, but she seemed to make every excuse to avoid it. Why is that so common, that we make excuses rather than seek help when we need it?
 - Why do you think Robin is giving excuses rather than accepting the offer of help?
 - Are these reasons common to most women?
- ❖ Emma told Robin she would never push her about dating again. As friends, aren't we often tempted to step in and "help" nudge others toward what we think is best for them?
 - Give some examples of good and bad examples of this.
- ❖ On page 55, Chris is marveling at the providence of God. While dealing with illness in his own life, God gave him insight into the life of another. In doing so, it helps Chris to not focus on his own misery by helping someone else.
 - Can you think of such examples in your own life, a time when God allowed you a needed distraction by directing you toward helping others?
- ❖ Chris confronts Robin's religious routines. He tells her that he sees her leave for church, yet come back without any marked changed.
 - How often do you think people go to church simply because that is their routine?
 - Do you ever feel you are guilty of that? Does church sometimes feel simply routine?
- ❖ What do you think of Chris' words that peace and chaos in your mind and heart indicate you have somehow stepped away from God?
- ❖ Robin said she kind of felt invisible most of her life. What do you think that means?
 - Have you ever experienced that kind of feeling? If so, in what season of your life?
- ❖ Early on, what do you think of young Mike?
 - Are you speculating how a couple so in love could end up so broken?
- ❖ We discover that Robin chose not to tell anyone what was happening in their home. Why do you think she remained quiet?
- ❖ Does this make you wonder how many women you know are affected by abuse yet remain silent?
- ❖ We see by the end of Chapter 6 that Chris' symptoms are becoming more severe. What are your thoughts that he is keeping this a secret from Robin.

Chapter 7-8

- ❖ Why does it seem easier for Emma to face possibilities that Robin chooses to ignore?
- ❖ When you meet Mike, do you still find yourself angry with him, or do you find a sense of compassion for him?
 - Could previous personal experience with abuse, yourself or a loved one, color the way you view this character?
- ❖ When Mike visits his mother, we find true humility in him. Have you had a similar, “I will never” experience that ultimately humbled you?
- ❖ Imagine being in Robin’s position when she hears the sound of Mike’s truck. Have you ever experienced something similar, a sound or smell that took you back to a painful memory?
- ❖ Were you surprised to find out Robin and Mike had a child together?
 - Does this new information give you better insight into why Robin turned from God in the first place?
- ❖ We begin to see the depth of Chris’ love for Robin. What are your thoughts on the timing of their relationship? Are you already hoping for a miracle for Chris?
- ❖ Have you ever considered the “would you rather” questions in your own most difficult circumstances?
- ❖ Chris used Job as a comparison with baby Michael, asserting that Michael would consider his short life to be worth the mighty things God would do in the lives of his parents. Do you ever consider challenging circumstance that God allows in your life to be His means of working in the lives of others?
- ❖ Robin took Chris’ advice and shared her happiest memories of Michael with Emma. Take time to consider this concept. Do you hold onto life or death, good or bad, happy or sad, negative or positive? What is your natural inclination?

Chapter 9

- ❖ As we begin Chapter 9, we find that Chris comes to terms with his impending death. Does this alter how you see the storyline going from what you originally hoped?
- ❖ Robin felt a sense of shame that she responded to Mike even after violent outbursts and abuse.
 - Why is shame such a destructive force in the lives of women?
- ❖ We finally get the full version of what happened that final night. What are your thoughts?
- ❖ On page 121, Chris says, “It is in the light. Now, you have given God something to work with.”
 - While you do not necessarily have to verbalize such things, bringing past traumas “into the light” or into God’s presence allows healing to begin. Why do we hold on to past hurts rather than express our hurts and wounds to God?

Session Two – Member Outline

In Chapter 5, Chris tells Robin, “*You’ve mended the veil.*” The mended veil is a metaphor for the **self-imposed barrier** we construct between ourselves and God.

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Concept One: Identifying Stitches

Removing what blocks our vision of God is critical in coming to love Him as he asks of us in Matthew 22:37-38. This will be the “unmending of the veil”.

Examples of stitches – Things that prevent us from drawing near to and knowing God.

Discontentment	Unworthiness	Self-pity	Divorce
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Self-Reliance	Unforgiveness	Abortion	Grief
Bitterness	Addiction	Pride	Self
Perfect Life	Disappointment	Unbelief	Work

Concept Two: Real Deal

My Real Deal People: (list first names of those you view as “real”)

Our goal is to become REAL DEAL people!

Concept Three: Intimate Prayer

My quiet place is: _____

Jesus says, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Mark 6:31

**Over the next few days, consider the questions in the sidebar. Your time with God should be the best part of your day, never a chore or a check mark on your to do list.

Questions to Ponder

What is your prayer life like?
Is it open and honest communication, or do you say overly formal prayers and feel disconnected?

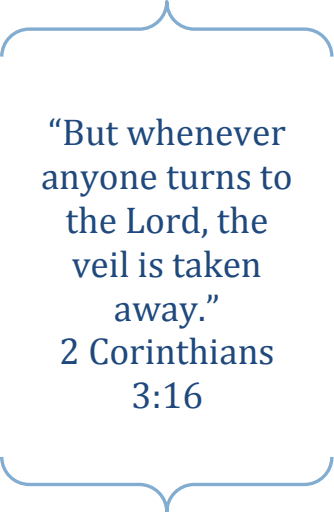
Do you sense His presence with you as you speak to Him?

Do you hear Him speak to you, through His Word and His Spirit?

Day One – The Mended Veil

The final assignment of Session One was an assessment to help identify symptoms of lovesickness. It is our determination to not dwell on the symptoms/sins, but to rather focus on getting ourselves to the place of being in God's presence and getting to know Him more intimately. Once you know Him, you will easily come to love Him. When you love Him fully, many of your symptoms will fade away. When you understand how vital his presence is, you conclude that whatever is hindering your nearness to Him must be removed. That will be the focus of our week.

The mended veil is simply a metaphor. You may have once felt near to God but now you feel far away. The true veil cannot be mended. The term, *mended veil*, simply refers to the self-imposed barrier we place between ourselves and God. Our stitches come from things that have been done to us and sometimes from things we've done. Still, it is self-imposed. Even when the stitch is the aftermath of what another has done to you, you get to choose whether or not to allow it to remain. Going forward, as you begin the process of unmending the veil, God desires to remove all your stitches, but are you willing to allow Him?



“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”
2 Corinthians 3:16

Galatians 5:1 says, “It is for _____ that Christ has set us _____. Stand firm, then, and do not _____ yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Anything that binds us and hinders us is purely by our own choice. Notice the word “let” in our Scripture reference above? We choose to hold on to what hurts us and encumbers us for many reasons. Sometimes, as Robin said, “*It’s all I know.*” For us too, it’s all we know. If you have always felt unworthy, no matter the reason you feel that way, then your heart will try to tell you that it is part of who you are. But the heart is deceitful above all things. (Jer. 17:9) If Jesus is your Savior, then He can break any bondage, remove all doubt, and unmend the veil – in order that you may see Him for who He really is.

From the list on the following page, do any of these stitches hinder your relationship with God?

Yes No

The following list is by no means exhaustive. You will notice as you read through them, some overlap and are considered symptoms as well. Bear in mind, a symptom is an outward behavior or inward attitude that indicates our distance from God. The stitch is what keeps us from God.

Discontentment	Unworthiness	Self-Pity	Divorce
Sexual Abuse	Judgmental	Shame	Idols
Great Daddy	Bad Daddy	Spouse	Children
Health Issues	Painful Childhood	Apathy	Loss
Self-Reliance	Unforgiveness	Abortion	Grief
Bitterness	Addiction	Pride	Self
Perfect Life	Disappointment	Unbelief	Work

If you answered no to the question above, then you are one amazing woman! If you said yes, you are just like the rest of us. Glancing at the list myself, I see a couple that I still allow to block my view of Him on a regular basis. Others show up on occasion. I believe as long as I live I will struggle with one or more of them. It is difficult to watch HGTV and not find discontentment creeping up on you. Can I get a witness?

Most stitches can be separated into a few categories

- ***Inflicted***– Stitches can result from painful things in life, hurts and hardships that have taken up residence inside of us and settled into our way of thinking. Physical or sexual abuse, loss, and divorce are but a few examples of things inflicted upon us that can cause us to maintain distance from God. Because of them, we might be angry that God would allow such things.
- ***Idolatry*** – We can put others or even ourselves on the throne of our lives. Our husbands and children can easily become what our world revolves around. In that case, what seems to be a good thing, devotion to your family, can instead be what keeps you from drawing near to God. Your needs are being met, or at least it seems, by your role in your family.
- ***Self***– We can be so wrapped up in ourselves, that we can hardly see God at all. Or, we can be so self-sufficient that we do not feel as if we need Him.
- ***Bitterness and Unforgiveness***– These two are cancers that will eat a believer alive. Because God chooses to forgive us, and because forgiveness is so close to His heart, holding on to unforgiveness will directly impact our nearness to God.
- ***Shame***– Guilt and a sense of unworthiness can overtake those with past experiences they cannot forget. Abortion, infidelity, divorce, and other poor choices render many believers so full of shame they can hardly believe that a holy God could love them. So their shame becomes a stitch.
- ***Ease***– Some stitches may result from never having had tremendous need for God, such as in the case of having parents, especially a daddy who met your needs. This is more commonly found in church kids. God has always been part of their family, but not truly a part of their life.
- ***Unbelief and Doubt***– The ultimate hindrance is when we do not believe closeness with God is even a possibility. In that case, we never truly try to draw near Him.

No matter their origin, the one thing all stitches have in common is this:

They prevent us from seeing God for who He really is and from drawing near to Him.

Can you think of any other stitches, things not listed here, that may hinder your closeness with God? Personalize this. It could be an abusive relationship, multiple marriages, an affair, anything that is personal to you. Along with what the stitch is, decide how it might hinder you from seeing God. Maybe you blame God. You may wonder if He could love you after what you've done. Or maybe you wonder if God really loves you based on what He has allowed into your life. Give this plenty of thought. As you think through this, be honest with yourself and with God. If you feel angry, tell Him so. If you feel unworthy, tell Him. Be real. Be yourself. Remember, the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

Focal Passage: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* Galatians 5:1

Question: *Have I built a self-imposed wall between myself and God?*

Something to consider: *"Good" things can be a stitch in the veil of how I see God.*

Day Two – Real Deal People

Chris said he could not reconcile what he saw of the God of the Bible with what he was experiencing in his life. For all of us, when we see something the Bible says is ours, yet we do not experience in our lives, it is easy to become discouraged, disappointed even. If the Bible says you should experience peace, but all you feel is anxiety, you may eventually come to believe peace is not possible – ever. That would be a stitch. Before you know it, anxiety and fear is in control of you. How does that hinder your sight of God? Anxiety tells you God is not big enough. Anxiety tells you that He will not show up. Fear causes you to react in ways and make decisions that are not in your best interest.

Do I possess what the Word says is mine?

“But you will receive _____ when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Do you feel this power in your life?

“_____ I leave with you; my _____ I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27

Do you feel this peace?

If God says through His Word that these things are yours and yet you are not experiencing them in your life, it is easy to get frustrated, a building up of disappointment. When what we read in the Bible does not seem to line up with what we experience, it affects our belief system. We come to believe that we will never experience them, so we stop trying. Next thing you know, you are simply going through the religious motions of Christianity but not really living the Christian life you were intended to live.

Chris saw some “real deal” people in his life, people who had what he wanted. Because of that, he took steps to become real. List the three “real deal” people you know or know of.

In Galatians 5:22, we are given a list of the fruit of the Spirit. Of course you know them, most Christians do. Still, have you ever heard a believer say, “I have no self-control” or, “I have no patience.”? Sure.

Most likely you have said it. I've said both. The fact is though, when the Holy Spirit came to reside in you, He brought all the fruit...the whole fruit bowl.

List the fruit here:

For most of us, because we do not experience the fruit, we think it is not present. Make no mistake, if you are "in Christ" then Christ is "in you," so it is there. The fruit goes where He goes. The farther away you *feel* from God, the less likely you are to experience this fruit in your life. Once again, like a broken record, I say – you have to get near to God. You have to know Him so intimately that He not only speaks softly to you, but He also is allowed to manifest His fruit in you and through you. It is not the fruit of Lisa, or the fruit of (insert name here), it is the fruit of the Spirit. It is what you *allow* Him to be in you. If you refuse Him full access, because of your stitches or sin, of course you do not experience the fruit.

Here are some examples of hindrances:

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your _____ in _____ give good gifts to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11

You feel a lack of peace. In this case, you most likely do not trust Him. If you do not trust Him, it is because you do not believe He has your best interest at heart in all things that happen to you and to those you love. If you do not think He has your best interest at heart, then you don't even get the concept of a loving Father. Complete the verse in the margin.

This is an area where you need to know Him for who He really is, God the Father.

Are you following the process? With each stitch, there is a trail you must follow. Lack of peace comes because you do not trust Him. You do not trust Him because you do not know who He really is. The simple solution? Get to know Him better – not about Him but to *know Him*.

Patience is not your virtue. If you struggle with lack of patience, you can pretty much be certain it is either a trust issue or a "self" issue. In the case of lack of trust, you do not trust God's timing for the things you desire in your life, whether they be longer term or even shorter term desires.

For matters that are more instantaneous, like extreme frustration when waiting in line or at a restaurant, this is more of a me, myself, and I issue – *self*. In either case, these are stitches preventing you from the closeness you need with God. Remember,

*"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
Ephesians 4:2*

“Thus, by their
fruit you will

_____.”

Matthew 7:20

it is walking closely with Him that allows Him to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in your daily life.

Consider the people that you see as the “real deal.” Now that you have a little more time to think about it, what attributes do you see in them that you would like to experience in your own life?

Would you be willing to talk with at least one of these people and ask some probing questions?

Questions like:

- ? Have you always walked with the Lord as you do now?
- ? Whatever the attribute is that you admire, ask if it is something that came easily for them, or was it a process to claim?
- ? Were there times they struggled with doubt and insecurity?
- ? Do they still struggle in certain areas?

Doing this will, for one, give you an idea of how the person you admire has gotten to where they are. You will likely find that, at some point, they chose to pursue God with all they had. Godliness does not happen casually or by chance. Godliness is a choice you make. Also, this may give you a road map to follow. For me, I told you that I came to that point where I got real before God. I was willing. Maybe they can share insights and specific steps they took that will help you along your journey.

Focal Passage: “Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:20

Question: Do I possess what the Word says is mine?

Truth: Godliness is a choice you make.

Day Three – Stitches in Review

Review your stitches list again from the list on Day One. Of the stitches you may have in your life, how might each hinder your perception of God? Ex: Because my dad wasn't in my life regularly, my perception of God was one of distance and disconnection. That was a huge hurdle for me. It took years of walking more closely with God before I felt that "child of God" feeling. I could hardly see Him as my heavenly Father because I had a skewed perspective of what a father was. Or, death/loss may cause you to see God as unwilling to help or save. You may need to pray, asking God to reveal to you how a particular issue hinders how you see Him. If you do not see Him for who He really is, because of a skewed perspective, you will not long to draw near to Him.

<i>Stitch</i>	<i>How it hinders my view of God</i>
_____	_____

_____	_____

_____	_____

We covered how some of the stitches hinder our nearness to God within the categories list, but here are a few more brief explanations to get your thought process going.

Work– Church work can be a great hindrance to our nearness to God by becoming our focus, our end goal. Rather than fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, (Heb. 12:2) we fix our eyes on the work we do. Even if you are working in humility and not to be noticed, you can still miss the One you really serve. Planning, serving, and working can never take the place of a relationship and it will never give you the relationship with Him that you need in order to feel fulfilled. Work and service should be by-products of our relationship with God. The relationship must come first.

Discontentment– This is one I will cover in terms of personal experience throughout the series. Be certain, any time you feel a constant need for more of anything, it is a strong indication that you are not getting your needs met within the bounds of your relationship with Jesus. If other things of this world constantly entice you, falsely convincing you that they will satisfy, then you have not found Him to be *enough*.

Apathy – Spiritual laziness may be an interchangeable term. If you blindly go through religious motions and never seek God beyond what you currently know of Him, then you can hardly expect to draw near to Him. Your relationship with God requires effort on your part. Investing your time and energy in Him is necessary. This stitch is closely linked with unbelief. Again I stress, when you do not believe more is available to you, you are not likely to pursue more. If you could only envision what he has planned for you, the deeply satisfying closeness that is open to you, you would pursue Him with all you have in you.

Write 1 Corinthians 2:9 on the lines below.

Pride – I know of no other wide-spread, more dangerous issue than pride. We are warned in Proverbs 16 that pride comes before a fall. I believe most of us can attest to that. Pride is the setting up of ourselves in the place of God. Was that not Lucifer's sin that got him cast out of heaven? Sad to say, if you suffer from pride, you most likely don't even see it in yourself. That is what makes it so dangerous. Our pride often comes out, as far as we can see, as good things such as perfectionism.

I am pressing the pause button. In mid-thought of the last sentence above, I found myself coming face to face with a perfect example of pride presenting itself as perfectionism. I hope you don't mind me interjecting a story here, but this is too good of a teaching moment, for both you and me, that I can't allow it to pass us by.

Last night I shot the video for Session One. If you have not seen a video online, you will know why. If there is a video, then this will apologize for it. It was a train wreck from beginning to end. It took thirteen takes just to film the introduction. My head is so full of words it would make you dizzy, but for the life of me, I couldn't get them out. There seems to be some disconnect between my brain and my mouth. And then when I looked back at one of the scenes, I realized I was blinking and blinking like I had some medical or mental condition. Funny thing is, I wasn't nervous. I just couldn't speak. And the worse I did, the more my confidence was shaken. Incredibly awful!

So this morning, in mid-sentence above about pride, I was replying to a friend via text. I told her, "He will edit and let me review. He says he thinks it will be fine. But I can't have just "fine" online." I stopped right there. I even changed the course of the text and admitted the sin of pride in such a statement. Really, what I was most concerned about was how I looked, much more so than what I said. So here is my commitment to you: If what I said is valid and helpful, I will run the video. Even if I look like as bizarre as I believe I did, I'll try my best to use the video. Who knows, maybe you need a good laugh to get you going on the study.

How can pride hinder my closeness with God in the situation above? My focus was on myself. Instead of asking, *what did I say?* I wondered, *How did I look?* So now I will wait to see how the content of the video is. If I have spoken the message He has given me, then I have to believe you will cut me some slack in the presentation of it. I seem to recall Chris asking Robin for the same.

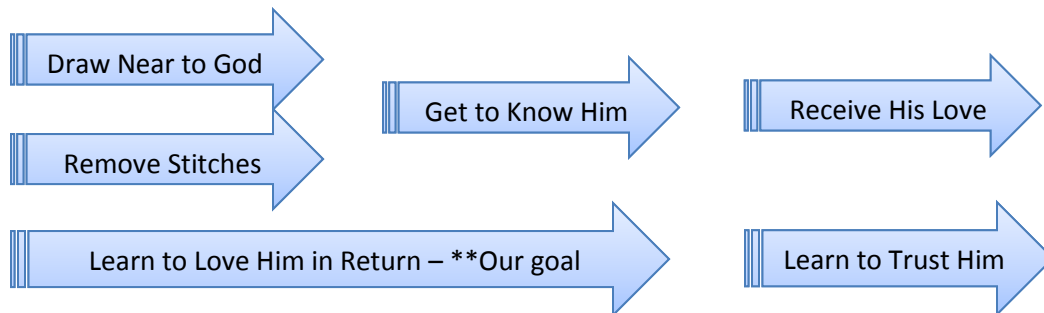
As you think through the exercise at the beginning of Day Three, I hope you will really pray and look within to try and discover how past and present wounds and issues can hinder your view of God. Sometimes, as I just had to do, you will have to take an uncomfortable look at yourself. Even when you don't like what you see, being honest and getting real is the first step in removing those hindrances.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that _____ and the sin that so easily entangles.” Hebrews 12:1

Complete the verse in the margin.

If you allow these stitches to continue to hinder your view of God, then you can never fully know the extent of His love for you. If you do not know and experience His love for you, then you cannot truly love Him in return. If you don't know His love, you cannot trust Him. If you do not trust Him, you will never know peace. If you do not trust Him, you can never possibly become the person He intends for you to be.

Do you see this interconnection? I feel as if I am talking in circles, but there are indeed interwoven truths that cannot be separated from one another. Here is the order of our journey toward a more intimate relationship with God. Notice the chain begins with parallel steps. As you choose to pursue and draw near to God, many of the stitches that once hindered you will begin to fade away.



And now, the complexity and simplicity of removing stitches. If it were only as easy as saying, “Do these three or four things and you’ve got it licked.” These stitches are interwoven into the fabric of your life, some, so much so that you wonder if you will ever be rid of them. As many have taken a lifetime to create, they may take a long season with God to untangle. Others will simply slip away, unnoticed for the most part.

Here is how I’ve seen this work in my own life. Please forgive me for being overly simplistic, but that’s how I learn best. I’m a bottom-line, keep-it-simple kind of girl.

- 1) *I chose to draw near.* I say *chose*, when in all actuality; God was drawing me back toward Him. Similar to God sending Chris to help Robin, God began the same type of pursuit of me.
- 2) *I began to catch glimpses of Him.* Even though I had tons of “stitches” keeping me from Him, He honored my small step toward Him by beginning to speak to me through His Word. He started showing up in my daily life in ways that so totally captivated me, I could hardly wait for the next encounter. That was what got me out of bed each morning, that anticipation of hearing from God or somehow experiencing His touch.
- 3) *The stitches began to unravel.* This is what we will discuss in greater detail in tomorrow’s Home Study material.

The process of removing the stitches is how you get to know Him, and yet getting to know Him is what causes the stitches to unravel. Read that last part again. It is nearly a paradox – one that is difficult to reason through.

We can use the example of shame. When a woman is filled with shame, she has likely convinced herself that God does not approve of her, and therefore, does not want to have an intimate relationship with her. So when she takes that tiny step of faith and begins to draw near, she will find Him accepting of her. How does this happen? Through His Word, by His Spirit, He will speak into her heart. Verses of grace, mercy, and acceptance will leap off of the page and into her heart. As this happens, the stitch of shame begins to fade, while at the same time she is getting to know something vital about God. He is full of grace and mercy. He accepts her as she is.

This is where faith comes in. You have to believe that He will work all this out in you and for you, no matter what stitch you are personally dealing with. All you have to do is be willing, draw near in a quiet place, read His Word, and lessen the amount of the world you allow in during this season. Give Him room to work and He will absolutely transform you, mind and spirit.

***Focal Passage:** “...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” Hebrews 12:1*

***Question:** Am I willing to walk by faith, believing that God will work all this out in me?*

***Summary:** The paradox is: You have to draw near to remove your stitches ~ yet stitches are what keep us from Him.*

Day Four – Pullin’ Weeds

We begin today by mixing our metaphors. For this assignment, we will identify our *stitches* by the term *weeds*. If you know anything at all about gardening, you know that weeds can sneak up on you and ruin a lawn or flowerbed. Without constant attention to weeds, you can be assured that they will eventually take over, choking out even the healthiest grass or hardy flowers.



Read Matthew 13:24-30



“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed _____ in his field. But while everyone was _____, his enemy came and sowed _____ among the wheat and went away.” (vs. 24-25)

Our intentions are good, well at least the majority of us. We go to church, try to live out this Christian life to the best of our ability. We read a little. Listen to preachers and teachers. We allow good seed in. Isn't that enough? In a word...no! There is an enemy who wants to prevent you from producing a healthy crop. He sneaks in and sows weeds among your good seed. The verse above says, “while everyone was sleeping.” That intrigues me. While who is sleeping? Us, you and me. When we are not diligently watching over our hearts and minds, he, the enemy, sows negativity and doubt into our lives. He whispers, causing us to question if we will ever get it right. He tempts us with the desire for more. Watch TV one evening and you'll likely be tempted by something, whatever your weakness is. The season you are about to embark on is one of pulling weeds, and simultaneously, planting good seed. Understanding the source of weeds can be helpful. What is expressed as the weed of insecurity today may have roots leading back to childhood. Something that causes you to become angry today may have a root that can be traced back to a moment when you felt mistreated. The weed of being manipulative or demanding may draw its energy from the root of feeling a lack of control in your present season or even as far back as childhood. The point is, what you are experiencing today as something that hinders your relationship with God may have its source in something that happened to you long ago. You have to track from the weed to the root.

Here is how it began for me:

Pullin’ Weeds

Soon after moving into our current house, we had a pool installed in the back yard. Once the concrete was poured and the dirt back-filled, we set out to grow grass. The dirt we were using was rich, dark pig dirt. You can only imagine how it smelled. Because it was so well fertilized and we planted good seed, we had every reason to believe it would grow healthy, thick grass. When the grass started coming in, however, these satanic weeds began to pop up all over. Obviously, they came in with the pig dirt. Not only did they outgrow the tender shoots of grass by leaps and bounds, they had these wicked, and I could not even make this part up, *red* thorns that would require you to

wear heavy gloves to even touch them. I'm telling you, they were satanic. Little did the enemy know, this would become one of the most spiritually productive seasons of my life.

I was angry and disappointed. I had always wanted a pool, and because I was getting my needs met by the things of this world at that time, the hundreds, maybe even thousands of weeds that attacked my yard devastated me. You know that feeling when you think you are getting finally getting something you have longed for but then things fall apart? How you say things like, "I can't have anything nice." Or, "Why does everything bad happen to me?" Okay, that seems overly dramatic, but for whatever reason, my high hopes were dashed and devastated is not an overestimate of my feelings at the time.

One morning I was out pulling the weeds. Furiously, I was snapping them off and tossing them aside when I very clearly heard this voice inside of me say, "If you keep snapping them off, they will only grow back. You have to dig down to the root."

Hesitating, I considered what I heard. Immediately, I knew it was God. At that point in my journey, I don't know if I had ever heard Him speak to me so clearly. But since I was convinced, I went to get my weeding tool – Him being God and all. From that moment on, I began to dig down to the root of each weed. At one point, overwhelmed and discouraged, I looked at all the weeds before me and said in my heart, "There's so many," to which He replied, "Just pull one at a time."

As I pulled weeds that day, I acknowledged before God that my life was just as full of weeds. The weeds became a metaphor for my terribly messy life at the time. From the "stitches" listed, I had over a dozen of them. I was truly a mess. My symptoms were obvious to anyone looking at me, and my stitches were thick and heavy. (Only I did not have that terminology back then. To me, they were simply wicked, red thorned weeds.)

My weeding tool became my Bible. I began to call Him my Gardner. He met me each and every day in the garden. And one by one, we pulled weeds – literally and spiritually speaking.

When this process of pulling spiritual weeds commenced, my number one question for God was where to begin? He showed me that bitterness and anger was, at that time, my greatest hindrance to drawing near to Him. There was something about the bitterness I was experiencing that was like a cancer to me. I could make no progress in many other areas until that one weed was pulled.

Through much prayer, reading Scripture, going to Bible studies at my church (and working through the homework), I began to let go of some serious anger and bitterness. Even hatred for someone significant in my life shook loose from the soil of my heart. From there, I would simply ask Him what was next.

How He showed me: I wish there were a clearer answer, something I could tell you to specifically watch for, but just as we are uniquely designed, so too will our journeys in weed pullin' differ. Here is what the process looked like for me. I asked, "Where will we begin?" And then I watched and waited. Most often, there would be a thread He would weave through my life that became His answer. The topic would be something that would come up in Sunday school, then again in something I would read soon after in Scripture or other faith based reading. It may have been a passing comment that a friend would say or a sermon I would hear. Whatever it was, say bitterness or anger issues, it was plastered all over the billboard of my life. I just *knew*. And you will too. You will *know* deep down inside where to begin.

Today's Assignment

From your list of stitches/weeds, simply go to Him and ask, "Lord, where do we begin?" And then faithfully meet with Him each and every morning (or night for you night owls). Read His Word. Don't miss a Sunday service (you never know where His direction will come from). Watch for a common thread to appear. It will weave sometimes subtly into your life, and sometimes, He will all out say, "This is it!" and you will have no doubt. Just plan on the journey being for the long haul.

Still, after digging around in my garden for years now, I have plenty of weeds that still pop up. And truthfully, that's the exciting part of the journey with Him. There is always something interesting He shows me, something He shows me about what's deep down in my heart. And please do not misunderstand this. It's not as if He's some overly critical parent, constantly looking over my shoulder saying, "And here's another thing you are doing wrong!" It is never that way. If you sense that, you can believe that is the harsh and condemning voice of the enemy. When the Lord has something that we need to work on, it once again arises as a subtle, or not so subtle, thread. Example: Maybe I keep blowing my top over little things. Because I do walk with Him, I feel that nudge of conviction in my spirit. It will become a stronger nudge in several ways. Say I'm reading Scripture, you can believe that every verse will somehow relate to gentleness or anger. The next Sunday, the sermon will be about the tongue. Worst of all, I'll see that same trait in someone else, maybe they blast me for instance. The minute I carry my hurt feelings to the Lord, He gives me a gentle reminder of how I acted the same way recently. Do you see what I mean, this tread? I call it a thread of revelation. He reveals things to me by weaving them throughout the fabric of my everyday life. Not once has He texted or emailed. I'd prefer that, but for whatever reason, He seems to enjoy subtlety and slow exposure.

Oh, and here's an interesting fact about weeds. Literally, when you are working in the garden or yard and you try to pull a weed from dry ground, it will break off, and the root remains. If you water the weed first, it will slide right out, root and all. It is because it is in loose, moist soil. This works almost every time.

In a spiritual sense, the same holds true. If you try to pluck a spiritual weed without watering it with the Word of God, Living Water, you may get rid of what's in sight, but you better believe it will come right back. Water! Water! Water! (Translated: Bible! Bible! Bible!)

"He sent forth His

_____ and

_____ them."

Psalm 107:20

Remember, Help is on the way.

There was a particular season when I looked at my life and saw nothing but weeds. When I was most discouraged, the Lord assured me we would simply pull one at a time. Now when I look back, I realize I was not even the one to choose where we would begin. Because He knows me through and through, He knew where to begin, and from there, which to tackle next.

Focal Passage: *Matthew 13:24-30 "But while everyone was sleeping..."*

Question: *Lord, where do we begin?*

Conclusion: *Weeds are sown when we least expect it.*

Day Five – Intimate Prayer

“Come with me by yourselves to a _____
_____ and get some rest.” Mark 6:31

The quiet place

Where is your quiet place? Do you have one? _____

Do you have a time when you regularly meet with God? _____

Both in the physical realm and the spiritual, you need that quiet place to be alone with Jesus and simply get to know Him. Carve out a special place where you keep your Bible, journal, index cards, and whatever devotional material you use. That is for the *physical drawing near*.

Chris told Robin how he began to pray in a new way.

- First, Chris assured Robin she had full access to God. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Basically, God tells us, He is there when we need Him. His door is always open.
- Second, he tells her that she can talk to Him wherever she feels comfortable. You may have that comfy chair, or you may walk in your neighborhood each morning. No matter where your place is, talk to Him.
- Next, Chris encourages Robin to simply talk to Him openly, without holding back. While we fear Him, in the sense that we revere and respect Him, we are not required to use Old English thee’s and thou’s as some sign of respect. Be who you are when you approach Him. Talk to Him as you would a father or your closest friend. Pour out all the things inside of you. Since He knows your deepest thoughts and hurts anyway, why not begin a dialogue about them. For instance, if you have determined that the stitch you need to work on is that your dad was distant, which causes you to see God as distant, then open up the conversation with, “Father, I’ve needed a dad all my life. I’m asking You to show Yourself to me as my Dad.” Then tell him about the hurt and disappointment you have felt. What matters is that you begin to talk in open and honest ways.
- Chris suggests she ask questions. You can too. When I’m struggling with something painful, I ask all sorts of questions. “Lord, why do I feel this way? Why is something so seemingly insignificant affecting me so strongly.” Often, when I ask such probing questions, He will bring past memories to mind. And I’m not suggesting that all weeds come from childhood. Maybe you felt embarrassed in a particular situation even as an adult. And without realizing it, since then, when in a similar situation, you immediately become uncomfortable. Truthfully, I have yet to figure

out how knowing what the root of the problem is helps as much as it does, but it does. Once He shows me what is triggering present feelings or emotions, it's as if I am then free to choose to hang on or let go of whatever that old hurt is. If I let go, I'm free of it being a reoccurring hindrance. If I choose to hold on, there seems to be an onslaught of similar situations. I'm not saying I have God figured out, but it seems as if He's determined to allow the thorn to poke me until I stop holding onto the thorn bush. Simply put, let it go, whatever it was. Choose to let go.

Robin thinks:

"This concept was foreign to her. Never, even before turning from Him had she prayed in such a way. If she had to explain what she experienced when praying, it was more like slipping words into a balloon, filling it with helium, and then releasing it into the atmosphere in the hopes it would reach the right destination."

Here are some questions to ponder

- ? What is your prayer life like? Is it open and honest communication, or do you say overly formal prayers and feel disconnected?

- ? Do you sense His presence with you as you speak to Him?

- ? Do you hear Him speak to you, through His Word and His Spirit?

To *draw near spiritually*, you have to practice the ability of being before Him, in His presence. You may begin by picturing yourself before the throne. What would you say to Him there? Based on a devotion I once read in an Oswald Chambers book, My Utmost for His Highest, I began to practice being in God's presence when I pray. I started at the throne. For a season I knelt there to pray. I imagined myself, as much as my human mind would allow, kneeling there. Somehow, that changed everything. My prayers became more real is the only way I can explain it. I seemed to stay more focused. I found I was unable to babble out repetitive prayers, ones that were not truly heart felt or specific. You know, the, "Bless everyone in this place." Or, "Thank You for all You've done for me." While nothing is wrong with either prayer, I found that once I intentionally placed myself before Him, I became more real in my conversation. More like, "I pray You will be with Adam. Do whatever it takes to make him Yours." A downright frightening prayer for any mama to pray. And my thank You's changed to, "Thank you for my husband and how hard he works to provide for us. Thank You for steady work for him."

“Yet I am
always with
you; you hold
me by my right
hand.”

Psalm 73:23

Eventually though, we, the Lord and I, moved from the throne room. Does that sound somehow unbiblical? He seems okay with it, considering He met with me each and every morning on the beach and we watched the ocean waves together. Most recently, as we have discussed the call He has placed on my life, we have moved back to the heavenlies. But we still sit on the beach on occasion. That is my favorite place to be in the world. There, He sits next to me, holding my right hand, listening to me. It is where I have gotten to know Him best. It is there too where He has helped me to get to know myself. I am open and honest. I just talk as I would to a close friend or to my husband. Besides the “bless them” and “thank You” prayers, we now talk about real stuff, my stuff. We discuss what He has planned for me, things I need to let go of, ways I can be more like Him, and best of all, He constantly reminds me of His love for me. Sometimes, He simply reminds me that I am His or that He is jealous for me, which sends shivers up and down my spine. Over the years, I have come to feel closer to Jesus than I could have ever imagined possible, closer than I feel to anyone else in the earthly realm, my husband included. I hold nothing back, and always, always, He is there. Now I realize the depth of my previous unbelief. I truly never believed that such a level of intimacy was possible. But it is. I’m proof that it is.

Since I have been praying in this new way, my life has so drastically altered that you would hardly know I’m that same mess of a woman, the one who was once so full of wicked weeds. Here’s my dilemma: He’s given me the task of being open about who I was and how far He’s brought me. I have come to realize though, that in my excitement to share the way in which I pray, I tend to freak some people out. I start talking and talking, and soon, I see arched eyebrows and immediately I can read their thoughts. “This girl’s done gone crazy!” (That was to be read with a Southern drawl.) Because my prayer life is so vibrant and real, and because I remember what disconnected prayers feel like, I am perfectly prepared to seem crazy or undignified. I can’t not tell! Even at the risk of being dismissed, I still tell what I know to be true. He truly is just a quiet place away. His presence is so real, often I open my eyes and expect Him to be there.

Granted, some people would feel totally irreverent sitting on the beach with Jesus and spilling their guts to Him. Okay, then simply kneel before the throne. At least in practicing His presence, your prayers will become more narrow and specific, rather than general and vague. Simply start somewhere. It is vital that you begin to pray in the spirit of intimacy, in the quiet place alone with Him. As for your quiet place, meet with Him where you feel most comfortable.

Today, try to decide where your spiritual quiet place is. One lady walks with Him down a path. I know one who goes to the mountains to meet Him there. Wherever you go, just know that He will teach you all things there. It takes some practice, and some days, my mind still drifts. But for the most part, when I picture sitting there with Him on the beach or in the heavenlies, Him holding my right hand, (For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” [Isaiah 41:13](#)) we simply talk. I do much of the talking much of the time. At times, He speaks into my heart. Mostly, He talks to me when I am reading my Bible or speaks to me in visions. (Not the long-

bearded prophet kind of visions, more like showing me a scene of a past moment or an analogy of something.)

I have been asked if I see His face. No, I don't. Sometimes I feel as if I catch a glimpse, but I never see His face. I see His hand holding mine. It is so real, it is so intimate that I have never felt alone again. When He says He will never leave me nor forsake me...I finally get it! No matter where I am, I can go to that quiet place and be with Him. Washing dishes, folding laundry, okay, scary enough, driving down the road, I go there. He is always waiting for me. He has become more real in our quiet place than all the reality of the world that surrounds me.

Trust me, I do realize how strange this all sounds, but if you will give it a try, you will see the difference. Just sit somewhere, knowing He is sitting near you even if you can't picture Him, and begin to talk. Tell Him your hurts and your fears. Be totally honest with Him. We have covered this, but He knows what you feel anyway. When you open up the conversation on a matter, He will give you insight you have never had, a perspective that only He can provide. Please hear me. I am not talking about some kind of meditative state or trance. I am simply talking about getting your mind focused on Him and not what is going on around you.

I hope you are willing to try it. At least for a few weeks, settle into this quiet place and talk to Him. See if He doesn't show up in your life in a new and amazing way.

Okay, this was a long week of assignments. Some are ongoing, so please be diligent and keep working through them. All I have done is to show you what He has shown me. If He can do with me what He has, I can only imagine the even better things He has in store for you, my sweet sister.

Help is on the way!

After the conversation with Chris regarding prayer, Robin felt relieved. Though she had not yet begun counseling, she felt as if help was on the way. I hope you feel that same sense of hope. Please know that He wants this close and intimate relationship with you. You may have tried for years to find that "something" that others feel. In order to find what you have always been looking for, all you have to do is begin to meet with Him there in the quiet place.

If you are participating in the group study, you will need to read Chapters 10-14 prior to your next session.

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *Have I built a self-imposed wall between myself and God?*

Day Two: *Becoming that "real deal" person.*

Day Three: *"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." Hebrews 12:1*

Day Four: *Lord, where do we begin?*

Day Five: *The quiet place – Where is mine?*