

Leader Instructions

Session Five

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 Home Study Material
- ❖ **Prayer requests**, hand out sheets of paper for prayers.
- ❖ **Cover Home Study Questions from Session Four**, allow 45 minutes
- ❖ **Leader Guide** material, allow 30 minutes
- ❖ **Open discussion** as time allows.
 - A few book discussion openers are attached.
- ❖ **Closing Prayer**

Session Five

Discussion of Session Four assignment - Allow 45 Minutes

Leader Prompt: As with all session reviews, please feel free to use some of the questions below or use things you found thought provoking during your Home Study time. You will not likely have time to cover all of the provided questions, so plan, prior to your session, which you think will elicit the greatest level of conversation.

Day One – *God Calls Us to Forgive*

- ? 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” What does this mean with regards to this concept that God calls us to forgive?
- ? Forgiveness is not optional. After spending time with God this past week, has your thinking about that truth changed?
- ? In your Day One assignment, you were asked to give a brief reason why you feel you cannot forgive. Would anyone be willing to share the situation?

Day Two – *Forgiveness Sets Us Free*

- ? Holding on to unforgiveness gives us a false sense of control. What are your thoughts on this? Does holding on to a grudge give you a sense of control in the situation?
- ? When a person is consumed by bitterness and unforgiveness, they are miserable inside. Contrast that with the person who wounded them. They are likely out living normal life, totally unconcerned. Who is really being hurt by unforgiveness?
- ? You were ask, if you were able to forgive, what might that look like in your life? Would you be willing to share? (better sleep, less bitterness and anger, peace)

Day Three – *The Process*

- ? As you worked through the process of forgiveness, where you able to empathize with others who have wounded you?
- ? How might prayer soften your heart toward the person whom you have refused forgiveness?
- ? If forgiveness is really a choice we make, why do so many feel “unable” to do it?
- ? Did you begin the process with anyone? If so, how is that going so far?

Day Four – *Forgiving Ourselves*

- ? Does being forgiven cause the consequences of our sin to disappear?
 - o Obviously not. Living with consequences of our decisions can hinder a person from forgiving themselves. Daily reminders can bring with them condemnation.

Condemnation causes shame and a feeling that they do not deserve forgiveness. This is a situation where recognizing condemnation as the enemy's voice, or sometimes our own is vital. Scripture tells us, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

- ? Discuss 1 Corinthians 2:11, specifically about motives of the heart.
 - o Can't we seem to be doing something with pure intentions, but deep down, we know our motives are less than pure?
 - o As women, do you feel we are masters at manipulation?
- ? The concept of Mike being a pretender and how differently he might have handled his son's death and wife's healing was considered. (A pretender is someone who does the church thing but is not the real deal.) Discuss in class how being a pretender can be disastrous when the storms of life come.
- ? Would anyone like to share a past history of pretending or getting real?

Day Five – *Admitting the Need*

- ? What are some common "lesser sins" that people feel less need for forgiveness for?
 - o Gossip, explosive anger, white lies, taking office supplies, cheating on your taxes, pride, lustful thoughts, covetousness, preferential treatment of some over others, racism.
- ? Have you experienced forgiveness of sins in areas that you once thought were not so sinful?

Session Five – Your New Normal

Allow 30 minutes

Leader Prompt: As with other sessions with several concepts, choose topics to cover based on the needs of your specific group. You may briefly cover each or spend more time on a few.

Session Concepts:

- ❖ New Normal
- ❖ Obedience
- ❖ Our Nevers
- ❖ Acknowledge His Call

Your New Normal

In Chapter 5, when Chris first began talking to Robin, he told her, *“Similarly, chaos and torment are the absence of peace. The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God.”*

Though we can never really be out of His presence, as He is everywhere all the time, we can, however, step away from God’s intimate presence.

- ? Have you ever felt a sense that your actions or attitudes have caused you to take a step away from God? Would you be willing to share the circumstances?
- ? Why does the absence of peace cause chaos and torment? (Without the peace that comes from God, knowing He is in control, we panic and try to handle things on our own.)

As we walk closer to God, peace becomes our new normal, so lack of peace should serve as a warning. When you feel anxious or chaotic thoughts begin to dominate you, take a look at how you might have stepped away from God. It may be in behavior, attitude, or it may be a matter of obedience.

Obedience

Key truth, when you do not love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, disobedience actually comes quiet easily. The opposite is true. When you do love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, obedience comes naturally.

Leader Prompt: Either read or have someone else read the following verse:

John 14:23. “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” (Provided on the outline.)

- ? Which statement more accurately represents the essence of the verse above?
 1. If you love me, you will prove it by your obedience. Or...

2. When you love me, you will naturally obey my teaching.
- ? What are some ways in which “good Christians” still disobey? (unkindness, lack of submission to your husband, refusal to forgive, selfishness, dishonesty)

Our Nevers

Nevers, we all have them. It may be public speaking, sharing your testimony with a stranger, forgiving someone, teaching children or youth – the list goes on forever.

- ? What are your nevers? That thing you say you either can't or won't do?
- ? Is it something you feel you are supposed to do?
- ? Have you tried and failed before?

Robin had taken the stance that she would never go back to her old hometown. In doing so, she actually took a step away from God, leading her to feel that sense of chaos and torment we discussed in the last section.

Blessing follows obedience.

- ? Can you think of a time when blessing followed your obedience in a matter?

Acknowledging His Call

Leader Prompt: Either read or have someone else read the following verse: (Provided on outline.)

Matthew 28:19-20. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

All believers are called to reach the lost *and* teach the found.

- ❖ Reaching the Lost: In order to reach the lost, we must look, act, and talk differently than the world. (I don't mean churchy words – that is rarely effective.)
 - Look up Colossians 3:12-14. What are some things these scriptures tell us about rules for holy living?

To be: compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, bear with each other, forgive – “and over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” These traits are diametrically opposed to the ways of the world. When you act and react differently than your neighbors, friends, co-workers, and maybe even your family, you actually offer something better when you share your faith. If not, why would they want what you have?

- ❖ Teaching the found: It takes a whole lot of people to keep a church running, and isn't the church building one of the places where we learn, grow, help our children learn and grow,

invite the lost, welcome the brand new believer and help them mature? You do not have to have the gift of teaching to help people be taught.

- ? Which most ignites your passion, reaching the lost or teaching the found?
- ? If reaching the lost is your passion, what unique or unusual ways have you found to strike up a conversation with a stranger?
 - o What is the most outrageous thing you have done to reach an unbeliever?
- ? If teaching the found is your passion, in what area do you teach? (age group or gender)
 - o What creative ways have you come up with to teach difficult truths?
- ? If you do not feel you have the *gift* of teaching, how can you support the work in the church of teaching the found? (Areas of service that allow the church building to operate, such as nursery workers, cleaning ministry, greeters, office work, food related ministry.)
 - o There are dozens of areas of service that make it possible for others to learn. When you meet these needs, you are assisting in “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” by allowing them to attend worship service or Bible study classes. We all have our part and none is insignificant, no matter what the enemy tries to tell you.

This week, you will look inward to the passions that drive you in order to determine what God has specifically designed you to do. For some of you, you may already know your place of service.

- ? In what area of service do you currently feel called to serve?
- ? What ways have you served that you *knew* were not for you?
 - o How did you know you were in the wrong place?
 - o Do you still serve in the wrong area?

Finally, we will conclude the week discussing the enemy of our purpose and the ways in which he tries to hinder our growth and service by whispering lies to us.

- ? How has fear prevented you from stepping out in any area of service?
- ? Can you give an example of a time you felt the fear and did it anyway?

Unmending the Veil – Book Discussion

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

Discussion Openers: Chapters 19-21

Chapter 19

- ❖ Robin goes home. What must it have felt like to be home after seven years.
- ❖ Discuss the moment when Mike realized she was home for good.
- ❖ Were you surprised they were still married?
- ❖ Mike was scarred from the shooting. How must Robin have felt when looking at them? That would be a lifetime reminder of their worst times.
- ❖ Robin's return to church – can you imagine how she felt with everyone knowing their tragic past?
- ❖ Mike openly confessed to his abuse toward Robin. Would you be able to expose your own worst sins to protect someone you love?

Chapter 20

- ❖ How did you feel as Robin entered Michael's room for the first time?
- ❖ Robin finally understood, when Michael died, God was there after all, holding her in the shelter of His wings. Have you ever looked back on your own worst moments and tried to find God in them?
- ❖ Have you ever felt God's presence in the midst of tragedy?
- ❖ Were you excited about the new baby?

Chapter 21

- ❖ Do you understand Mike's jealousy of Chris?
- ❖ Mike was justified in his nervousness over seeing Robin's parent's for the first time. How do you think you would react in Robin's parents' situation?
- ❖ Robin reflects on how each person faces their own version of the fallen world. Have you ever considered that, just as we will stand individually before God, we also walk with Him individually here on earth? None of us face the exact same set of challenges and circumstances. How might yours be different?
- ❖ Robin thinks: Learning the secret of contentment came as a result of unminging the veil. Do you realize that until you remove these things that hinder your nearness to God, you will never feel content and at peace.

Session Five – Member Outline

Your New Normal

“Similarly, chaos and torment are the absence of peace. The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God.”

As we walk closer to God, peace becomes our new normal, so lack of peace should serve as a warning.

Obedience

John 14:23. “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.”

- ? Which statement more accurately represents the essence of the verse above? (Mark one.)
1. If you love me, you will prove it by your obedience. Or...
 2. When you love me, you will naturally obey my teaching.

Our Nevers

- ? What are my nevers? I will never _____
- ? Can you think of a time when blessing followed your obedience in a matter?
-

Acknowledging His Call

Matthew 28:19-20. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

All believers are called to reach the lost and teach the found.

- ❖ Reaching the Lost: In order to reach the lost, we must look, act, and talk differently than the world.
 - ❖ Teaching the Found: You do not have to have the gift of teaching to help people be taught.
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- ❖ In what area of service do you currently feel called to serve?

 - ❖ How has fear prevented you from stepping out in any area of service?

Day One – Your New Normal

Session Six will be a more in depth review of our journey, but for today's purpose, we need a small reminder.

1. First, the question was posed, "Do I really love God, full on, passionately, and with all I have in me? We checked for symptoms – outward behaviors and inward attitudes that may indicate we do not fully love and trust God.
2. We identified our stitches – those internal things that keep us at a distance from God and set out to become "real deal" people.
3. The process began in learning how to remove stitches, with primary attention given to getting closer to God by getting to know Him through His Word.
4. Focus on forgiveness, realizing its essential role in drawing near to God.

Hopefully, in the areas above, you are making progress toward your goal, which is drawing near to God, getting to know Him more intimately, and loving Him passionately. As you have begun to travel along this path, something new should be emerging. You should be experiencing a new level of peace. When you walk closely with God, peace should be your normal, natural state of being. No matter what circumstances are going on around you, when you spend time with God every day and allow Him to begin to change your mind and heart, a sense of peace fills your life. Complete the verse in the margin.

Peace is the fruit of the Spirit. As we discussed during our "Real Deal" assignment, the fruit is already within each believer, but when we are not walking closely with God, allowing the Spirit to be our motivator and guide, peace feels absent.

"_____ I
leave with you;
my _____ I
give you."
John 14:27

In Chapter 5, when Chris first began talking to Robin, he told her, "Similarly, chaos and torment are the absence of peace. The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God."

Though we can never really be out of His presence, as He assures us He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), we can, however, step away from God's intimate presence. When we do, peace seems lost and a sense of inner turmoil takes its place.

In Robin's case, chaos and torment are exactly what she is experiencing as she visits her parents and then Mike in Chapter 17. In the time between Chris explaining this concept to Robin and her current situation, she has drawn near to God. She loves Him and is walking with Him daily. Peace is her new normal. So to suddenly begin to feel this sense of chaos and torment again should have been an indication to her that something was wrong.

In what areas of your life do you most often feel at peace?

In what areas do you feel less at peace?

In the areas where you feel less at peace, would you categorize the situations as chaotic or tormenting? Things that cause you to lose sleep, fret, or worry? *Yes or No*

If we have concluded that being near to God allows us to experience peace, then any area of your life where you feel chaos and torment must be scrutinized. Since the scenarios can vary so broadly, you will have to be your own investigator. I feel less than able to ask adequate questions to even get you started. But since the Holy Spirit resides in you and is your Teacher and Counselor, you can be certain He will help you to look within and discover the source of any inner conflict you may be experiencing. With the following questions, I will try to get your brain churning. When I have chaos going on, these are the types of questions I ask myself and the Lord. Some will not apply to your situation, but you may need them someday.

Is this situation within my control? Is there something I have done to create the problem?

If the situation is conflict driven with another, do I need to apologize?

Am I holding a grudge? Do I need to forgive?

Is my situation attached to fear? Am I scared to step out in faith in an area?

Do I doubt God on a matter?

Have I been grumbling?

I have found that a sure way to experience that "far away" feeling from God is having a critical spirit and complaining. Praise and thankfulness are the only cures I know for this syndrome.

As far as I know, am I being obedient in all areas of my life? (I know deep down when I'm not.)

Am I serving where I need to be serving?

Am I giving of myself and resources as I feel led?

Am I in a season of selfishness? Or do I put others first?

Am I allowing more of the world into my mind through TV, social media, or other avenues?

Am I trying to fill a place of emptiness in my heart with the things of this world rather than turning to God? Is my face pointing toward God or the world?

Have I been unkind in any of my dealings with others? Or have I been talking unkindly about someone behind their back?

*“...would not
God have
discovered it,
since he
_____ the
_____ of the
_____?
Psalm 44:21*

As you see, this line of questioning could go on for quite some time more. At least you have an idea of the probing questions you can ask yourself and God when you have a sense of inner conflict. What is important to know is that the only way to resolve the conflict within is through interaction with God. Even when you cannot determine what the source might be, He will show you. Just as I described in an earlier session, when we were trying to determine which stitch we begin with, God will help you see the source of your chaos in a similar way. He will show you through His Word, through something that someone might say to you, through a preacher or Sunday school lesson – basically, He will make the answer clear through any number of ways. If you take anything away from this session, it should be this: Peace should be your new normal. If you lack peace, you have somehow stepped away from that intimate path with God.

Focal Passage: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” John 14:27*

Consider: *“The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God.”*

Anticipate: *Peace should be your new normal.*

Day Two – Obedience

Obey – that four-letter word!

I intentionally began this week’s lesson with the questions you read through yesterday. Did you notice a theme? Most questions led to matters of obedience. Whether we like to admit it or not, our disobedience is what most often hinders our intimacy with God. Complete the verse in the margin.

This does NOT mean – if you love Me, prove it by obeying. For years, that was how I interpreted this verse. I thought I just needed to obey better in order to love Him. How backwards was that thinking? Instead, it is a simple statement of truth. This is more of a thermometer to check for lovesickness. If you have a problem with obeying what the Word of God says, then you have a love issue.

“If anyone
_____ me, he
will _____ my
_____.”
John 14:23

When you don't love God, disobedience comes rather easily.

In our first session, we discussed lovesickness and symptoms. I purposefully did not use this verse then because I wanted to focus much more on love rather than obedience. Why? Because I have learned by experience that once you love Him, obedience flows naturally out of that. Why work on things that will eventually work themselves out?

When you do love Him and you are walking near to Him, ignoring His leading causes conflict within, a war between the Spirit and the flesh. (Gal. 5:17) You become unsettled. When that sense comes, you better start looking for how you might have stepped away from Him or how you may be ignoring something He is saying to you. As you truly come to love God and feel His presence in your life every day, you develop a much more sensitive spirit. When you begin to veer off course, you sense it and can easily make the course correction.

If, for example, you treat someone harshly, immediately after, you will feel that conviction of the Spirit. An apology will likely be necessary, and you will feel the prompting of the Spirit to do so.

Once you feel that prompting of the Spirit, you have a choice to make. You follow Him and do what He says, or you ignore the prompting, in which case you are taking a step away from Him.

On the following lines, write out Isaiah 30:21.

Your Father in heaven wants you to hear Him. He wants you to know the way. Because of that, He instructs you clearly through prayer, quiet time reading His Word, and through the Spirit within you. He often speaks, but we all too often ignore.

Robin compared her refusal to listen to God to a child with her fingers in her ears, trying to block out the instruction of a parent. She had suspected the Lord’s leading but ignored it, “*secretly hoping He would change His mind or somehow forget.*” Does that sound at all familiar?

Don’t we all do the same at one time or another? In what areas are you now choosing to ignore the instruction of God?

Obedience comes in many forms, so it stands to reason that ignoring God’s leading too can take many forms. Ignoring God can be something such as:

- Refusing to be kind to others, or a specific other.

“Be _____ and _____ to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

Are you kind? How do you react when you wait in lines, or when your order is wrong at a restaurant? How do you treat others when they make a mess of things and those things just happen to affect you? Are you kind to others? Even to those within your own home? Just as we learned to do with forgiveness, practicing empathy can go a long way in remaining kind even when you are frustrated. Consider that the server at your restaurant works long hours on her feet or that the grocery store clerk may have just left a sick child.

Ask yourself if your cross is showing! Do you have one looped around your neck? If so, you better be representing your Lord well. If you react out of frustration while wearing your cross around your neck and driving around with your fish bumper sticker, you are not representing Jesus well. If you are prone to angry outbursts, I’m asking you as a sister to skip the Christian paraphernalia. I’m not trying to be funny. I truly would rather see you bare necked than giving our Lord a bad reputation. And don’t think I am not holding myself up to this same standard. I’m the worst when it comes to frustration at bad service, but I also know I am Jesus to my little community.

- In your heart, you refuse to submit to your husband. (I know the hairs on the back of your neck just bristled when you read that.) You may submit outwardly, but inside, you have no true respect for him.

“Wives, _____ to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is Savior.” Ephesians 5:22-23

Notice in this verse it says, “as to the Lord,” meaning that when you submit to your husband, you are actually submitting to the Lord. You may say you do not trust your husband’s leading, but you can trust God to take care of those things. As a matter of fact, when a man is given the opportunity to lead his family, often something new rises up within him. He begins to take the

responsibility more seriously, especially if you have voiced your trust in his leadership. At that point, God will step in and guide your husband. So what if your husband refuses to listen to God? God can still make all things work out for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose – which means you. He will take care of the misstep if your husband makes one. Obviously, you will not follow a husband who leads you toward sin or immoral behavior. Since we read above that submitting to your husband is in essence submitting to the Lord, the Lord will never lead you toward sinfulness.

— You are withholding forgiveness still.

“ _____ us our debts, as we also have _____
our debtors.” Matthew 6:12

Since we spent an entire session on forgiveness, I think we can say, “enough said.”

— You do what it takes to get by, but never more than required.

“Whatever you do, work at it with _____,
as working for the Lord, not for men.” Colossians 3:23

Do you give yourself fully to what is required of you? Are you faithful in the small things? The monotony of life wears us down – another load of wash, another sink full of dishes – it is easy to begin to doubt why it matters. So why does it matter? Mostly, because others are watching you. Just like wearing your cross while blessing someone out in a restaurant, doing things half-hearted and half-way will be noticed. Your kids, grandkids, friends, and neighbors see you at work, even at the small stuff. Also, we are told that “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.” Luke 16:10

Since we are concluding our series with purpose, doesn't it stand to reason that if we want God to lead us toward our kingdom purpose, we first need to be found faithful in the monotony of life, the daily act of living?

• Dying to self and putting others first.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after
me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”
Matthew 16:24

Putting our wants, desires, and needs behind the needs of others can be difficult. We dig our feet in the sand and hold on to our rights, our rights to ourselves, our rights to do things our way, our rights to have what we want. Self is the greatest deterrent to living a productive Christian life. There is only one way to stop this pattern of self – self-appreciation, self-reliance, self-aggrandizement, self-sufficiency, self-love, self-self and that is to “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16

Walking closely with God means you are allowing the Spirit to lead you. The Spirit in control is the only remedy for our “self” affliction. Knowing God, realizing He will fight for you and that you do not have to fight for yourself, is the means of letting go of self.

Now that we have covered some of the areas above, do you need to re-visit or add to the list of areas where you might be ignoring the voice of God? Remember, chaos and turmoil are symptoms that you have stepped away from God. Do you have any areas where chaos and turmoil reign?

Our Nevers

Nevers, we all have them. Public speaking was mine. Now, I do it easily when I am called to. First though, He made me ready. If I would have remained far from Him, I could have never – in the literal sense. What are your nevers? What are the things you say you either can’t or won’t do? Is it forgiving someone? That is a common one. Is it that you believe you will never be on a deeper spiritual level as you see others are? Are you sure you will never be “all in” in your Christian walk? Is there where you are okay with you? Think back to some things you may have sensed God calling you to: working with children or youth, singing in the praise team, teaching a Sunday school class, or even beginning a Women’s Ministry in your church. Have you felt a stirring but believed you could never...?

Robin had taken the firm stance that she would never go back to her old hometown. In doing so, she actually took a step away from God.

- She made this decision based on what she felt rather than what God said.
- As the story develops, she admits that she sensed His instruction for some time but was ignoring it.

Blessing follows obedience. Can you think of a time when blessing followed your obedience in a matter?

Now, when I speak in front of any group, I feel tremendously blessed that I am able to share what God has done in me over these past years. My “never” became my blessing. Every time I speak, when I walk away, I feel as if I am walking in the clouds, unable to believe He would choose to use me.

I have never once heard anyone say, “I regret following where God led,” especially with the privilege of hindsight. Maybe as they were following they felt unclear as to what He was doing, but most anyone you ask will confirm that following God was the right choice.

Off Course

When God gives you direction, no matter what you decide to do, He keeps walking in His intended direction. If you choose *not* to walk where He walks, you have stepped away from Him and are guaranteed to have chaos and turmoil in your life. That is His way of gently inviting you back with Him.

Also, if you continue walking away from His path, you might miss your purpose. Don't we all want to know what that is?

We all have this innate sense that we were created for something more. We want to believe that what we have experienced has meaning. There is tremendous comfort in knowing that God has a plan for each and every one of us. Sadly, most Christians either don't believe God has a purpose for them, or they've given up trying to figure out what it is. That is where we will spend the remainder of our week together.

Finally today, I hope you are serious about reviewing where you stand on matters of obedience. I have heard some Christians say that such thinking is legalistic. Not so. Jesus Himself gave us a gauge relative to love and obedience in our opening verse. If He considered matters of obedience important, then so do I. Now though, I simply better understand His way of thinking about it. He sees my obedience as an expression of my love for Him.

What are your final thoughts about today's lesson on obedience?

"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

Focal Passage: *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching." John 14:23*

Consider: *Your "nevers" may possibly be what God uses mightily in your life.*

Anticipate: *Blessing follows obedience.*

Day Three – Acknowledging His Call

Finally, back to the fun stuff! Discussing obedience is never fun, but it is critical to know where our heart stands on the matter. Remember, it is a thermometer of your love condition. Once you are walking closely with God – you know Him, you love Him, you trust Him, you obey Him, then, you are finally in prime position to be what He desires for you to be, a fruitful vineyard. He wants you to bear fruit that will last. Only a healthy tree bears healthy fruit. Throughout this entire study, we have been building toward this one point. We have been seeking closeness with our Lord and health within our hearts. Why draw near? So we can become.

“Therefore go and _____
_____ of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit, _____ teaching them
to obey everything I have
commanded you.”
Matthew 28:19-20

Complete the verse in the margin.

God has placed a call on the life of every believer. In the Great Commission, he directs us to make disciples of all nations *and* to teach them to obey everything He commanded. Often, we think that getting people “saved” is the only step. I intentionally had you fill in the blank for *and* in the verse in the margin to remind you that this is a broader task than getting people saved and putting them to work. That mentality breeds many Christian babies but does not create disciples. A disciple is a follower, one who imitates the one whom they profess to follow.

Those studying this material will fall under one of the three categories below. Which are you?

- *New in my Christian walk*, learning, eager to grow, and desire to become a true disciple.
- *Have been at this for years*, but still I feel I do not know enough about Jesus and the Bible to articulate my beliefs. My faith is still weak.
- *I am a true disciple*. Though I will always have room to grow, I have come far from that entry point of faith. I passionately love and trust Jesus, and I consistently obey the teachings of Scripture.

One of these statements may not represent you exactly, but most likely one will be what describes you best. If you feel that one of the first two is where you currently are, then it is my truest hope that this study is helping you to draw nearer to God. That is the point of all I do in writing. It is my calling, to take women deeper and nearer to God. My calling addresses the second part of the Great Commission as we read above, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” I believe this has been the call on my life for quite a long time. The problem was, I was not ready or able to answer the call. The Lord has spent years preparing me for what He had planned for me all along. Much of that time, I drug

my feet, in a spiritual sense, causing the process to drag on and on and on. I pray for a speedier journey for you. But that is entirely up to you.

If the third category most accurately portrays where you currently are, then you have indeed come far. You can identify with David in the following prayer. If you are in the first two categories, this prayer should give you motivating hope. You can be certain that when you seek Him with your whole heart, He will bring you just as far.

Write 2 Samuel 7:18 on the following lines. This is a verse that should be familiar from Session Four.

No matter which category you fall in, you may wonder what the calling on your life is. In tomorrow's assignment, you will look within and try to determine where you fit in the kingdom. Today though, let's try to comprehend the big picture "what" prior to the individual "what" of your calling.

Glorify God

We are all called to glorify God. First, read in the margin, Jesus' definition of glorifying God. That seems pretty clear-cut. We glorify God when we complete the work He gives us to do. We will spend the latter part of this week discussing that.

Another way we glorify God is to represent Him well to others.

"They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor."

Isaiah 61:3b

We can show God to an unbelieving world and sometimes to the believing world who has erected a wall between themselves and Him. We can be His hands and feet. We can be light in dark places. We can use our testimony of what God had done in our lives to help others desire what we have.

Please turn to Isaiah 61:-3. This is a prophecy regarding the coming of Jesus Christ.

As you read through this text, you can see it is a progressive journey, Jesus coming alongside you, offering salvation, healing you, and setting you free. What is His ultimate goal of this journey? At the end it says, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." The journey leads to His purpose for you – to glorify Him.

As you draw nearer to Him, He will heal you and free you in ways you never believed you would know freedom. He removes your stitches so that you may know Him fully. Then, He makes you who He always planned for you to be, long before the foundation of the world. He has much bigger plans than simply making you a "good" Christian, one who can do the dos and don't the don'ts. You were created with His

"I have brought
you glory on earth
by completing the
work you gave me
to do."
John 17:4

specific purpose in mind. The big picture is bigger than you can comprehend, and your part in the big picture is more significant than you believe.

A Fruitful Vineyard

Complete the verse in the margin.

Note in the verse in the margin, this fruit is fruit that will last. Not fruit that is temporary and for this world. Often, what we focus on is the perishable things, like our homes, clothes, looks, body shape, and bank accounts. I have been and often am still guilty in each area. It is difficult to maintain balance between making a comfortable home for your family and making a showplace for your friends. Know what I mean? I love home decorating and paint and design, but I often have to remind myself that enough is enough. And what I have is more than enough. Balance, Lisa, balance!

Back to the fruit that will last. *Reaching the lost* and *teaching the found* are the things that last. Beyond those two things, what else matters when viewed through the scope of eternity? Since this sums up the Great Commission, I can think of nothing more vital. Somewhere contained within those two statements is your calling. You either have a passion for reaching the lost or helping in the teaching of the found – or maybe a mixture of both. Now before you spout off that you are not a teacher, let me remind you that rocking babies while parents learn or making a building ready through a cleaning ministry is preparing the way for the body to be taught. Our parts in the teaching process simply look different. It takes much more than teachers to teach the found. As a matter of fact, without the supporting Body of Christ, the teacher has little ability or forum.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear _____ -

_____.

John 15:16

No matter what you feel capable of, God intends to make you to be a Fruitful Vineyard.

“In that day – ‘Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I the LORD watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.’” Isaiah 27:2-3

This verse has become a significant verse to me. As the Lord has worked within me, assuring me He will make me fruitful and productive in the kingdom, He assures me of his provision for me and protection over me. The fruit I produce will be of His making, not mine. It will not be forced fruit – like forced greenhouse tomatoes – but I will yield good fruit, fruit that will last, fruit that can only come after a season of growth – of getting closer to God. He intends this same growth in you, and a life of fruitfulness will be the outcome.

Now read the verse above again and this time, personalize it with you as the fruitful vineyard. (The LORD watches over you. He waters you continually. He guards you day and night so that no harm may come to you.)

Shifting in our metaphor, we will become the vessel.

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John 7:38

We are not called to sit and soak in the Living Water but to be vessels who carry that Living Water to others. Only once we are close to Him – only once we have been filled – will we be able to pour. At that time – it will come naturally from within us. In order to pour, you must first be filled.

Pouring from an empty pitcher

Have you ever tried to pour into the life of another when you felt empty yourself? This is how Mike and Robin were after Michael died, each trying to help the other when they had nothing to draw from. Since neither was close to God, they had no source of Living Water to be filled by, and because of that, they both collapsed.

I think of this concept in my own life. Years ago, before my time of falling away, I met this woman who desperately needed encouragement. I was sympathetic to her situation, as she had a son who was constantly in trouble as my oldest had been. Her son, a precious little boy in my younger son's kindergarten class, was so much like Adam, that I was drawn to him when the other room mothers steered clear of him. On field trips, I asked that he be in my group. Honestly, I loved that child. One day at a school event, I told this mother how much I loved her son and that God had a great plan for him. Unexpectedly, she burst into tears. Like I was with Adam, she just needed to see there was hope for this wild-child of hers. She desperately needed to know that someone else saw in her son what she undoubtedly did. I gave her a bit of hope.

From there, I tried and tried to pour into her, oblivious to how empty I was. She would call for advice on various matters, and I would try to help her. She was in the very early stages of her Christian walk and was insisting on living a lifestyle that was not honoring to God. Like many women, she thought that her answer was a man. Most often my words of advice fell on deaf ears. I can't remember what actually ended our communication, but eventually, it did end.

Years later as the Lord began to prepare me to become fruitful, to begin this journey of reaching women through writing, this story became a turning point for me in trusting Him. I was reading a Beth Moore book and the question was asked, "To what are your fears attached." She gave this amazing story of how God had spoken to her through another teacher. It was His assurance that He would not fail her. So I asked the Lord, "To what are my fears attached?" Later that same day, and by divine appointment, I saw that mother sitting in her car at a stop light. That would not be so amazing other than I had not seen her in years. She lives in the next city from where I currently live. I just so happened to turn my head and look into a little car as I made a right turn. It was all too much to be coincidental. God placed her there so that I would see her.

Immediately upon seeing her, I remembered how I failed her. I remembered how I tried to reach her and how desperately she needed a hand up. I recalled how I was clueless as to how to help her and then eventually, I fell to pieces myself and never even wondered about her again. I found my answer. I sat in my driveway sobbing. With my head resting on the steering wheel, I kept reminding Him what a failure I was and how she needed me, and I failed her.

What was I afraid of? Failing Him. Failing everyone. I always had and I likely always would. That was my real fear. As many times as I had tried to help others, I was too big of a mess to ever really be effective. So that was what was hindering me from my purpose. I was a failure.

It was over the next few days that the Lord reminded me of how empty I was at that time and that I was trying to pour out of an empty pitcher. It was before I loved Him with my whole heart, so how could I be expected to pour out what I did not even possess? I was just as empty inside as that poor mother. I just happened to "look" like the proper Christian mom. Inside, I was just as full of mess. Do you see how I empathized with myself and forgave my failures?

From there, the Lord assured me, when the time was right, I would pour because He was pouring into me. That is why the Isaiah 27 verse is so meaningful. "I water it continually," He promises about His fruitful vineyard (me).

You have kingdom purpose in the journey of others. There is no way you can imagine the trickledown effect of your touch in the life of those around you.

He watches over me and waters me and guards me. How can I fail?

Comfort

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

2 Corinthians 1:3b-4

The verse in the margin is quite the tongue twister. We are to comfort those with the comfort that God has comforted us with. In an earlier session I said, "We want to believe that what we have experienced has meaning." What we have and are experiencing does matter. God uses those things to touch the lives of people who are hurting. The woman I told you of earlier, I could hardly comfort her since I had yet to receive comfort.

Here is a sweet side note: When I shared this story with a group of ladies, someone reminded me that, most likely, the few words I did speak to that mother, especially assuring her that God had a plan for her son, meant something significant to her. I did not fail her completely. God was certainly able to use those few words as a comfort to that desperate mama. I think sometimes we hold ourselves up to a much higher standard than God does. He knew I had little to offer, but He took what I did have and touched her life.

These days, He is using me to reach out to people who may not be near to Him, and they do not even know it. That was me. That was the journey He took me on, so now, He is allowing me to help women along that same journey. All that matters to me now is that people know

there is indeed something more! There really is intimacy and closeness with Jesus. See, the comfort He gave me, I am using to comfort others. There is this phrase that often goes through my head, "If I don't, the fire will consume me," meaning, if I don't share what He has shown me with others, I feel as if it will burn me alive. It will be the same with you. You will long to comfort others with the comfort you have been comforted with, whatever your situation is.

If you do not feel that need to share and comfort others now, maybe you are still in the stage of needing to be comforted. That's okay. Just accept His comfort.

So as a brief summary, the following is God's high-level, big-picture call on your life.

Glorify God – Completing the work He has given us and represent Him well to the lost world and to the found who have somehow missed the true image of God.

A Fruitful Vineyard – Bearing fruit that will last, reaching the lost and teaching the found.

Pouring out the Living Water – Taking the Living Water that He has poured out upon you, the comfort He comforted you with and pouring into others.

Take your temperature in each area? In the space below, write your thoughts about where you currently are and what your goals are even after you complete this study.

Glorifying God

Becoming a Fruitful Vineyard

Pouring Living Water

Focal Passage: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20

Consider: The big picture is bigger than you can comprehend, and your part in the big picture is more significant than you believe.

Outcome: We comfort with the comfort we have been comforted with.

Day Four – Becoming Who You Are

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”
1 Corinthians 12:4-6

“Simply Become Who You Are!”

The above phrase has been following me around for years now. God has been trying to tell me and show me that who He created me to be and what He created me to do is a perfect fit for me. Same with you. He made no mistake with either of us. Our problem is that we spend way too much time trying to be like and do what others do. He created you uniquely to bear fruit and glorify Him in this exact time and in your generation. God filled you with gifts and passions that suit your purpose exactly. Often though, we

spend so much time trying to cultivate gifts we do not possess that we tend to let our natural gifts and abilities sink into the background. If it comes easily or if we enjoy doing it, it must not be worthy enough. Right? Baloney!

I spent years trying to talk myself out of writing fiction. Especially because the stories in my head were all romantic in nature, I believed them to be insignificant. I kept telling myself that I should be writing deeply spiritual stuff. I was even embarrassed to admit I write romancey type books. Obviously, I got over it! What changed? I was reading a book called Redeeming Love. The story is a western times version of the book of Hosea, which happens to be my favorite Old Testament book of the Bible. Now, I can hardly even remember what the book was all about, just the highlights, but I do know this, after I read it, Jesus used one word from the book to change my entire life. The word was “beloved.” After I finished the book, that one word echoed in my head for hours, days even. It was Jesus speaking to me, calling me, Beloved. All these years later, He still calls me that very often.

Also, Marah was another word He used later on to heal me of my bitterness on a matter. The man in the book, Michael Hosea, called his wife Marah. When she asked why, he told her it meant bitterness. She was bitter. The Lord woke me up one morning with the word Marah, again I say, echoing around in my head. It was all I could hear. Even with normal life happening around me later in the day, the word was loud and clear in my head. Over and over it resounded.

From those two words, the Lord made such tremendous progress in my transformation that I cannot possibly deny the significance of Christian fiction or how the Lord can use it. So now...I write. I write what I love. I love what I do. How many of us can say that?

In a book by Max Lucado, he says, “As the wind turns the weather vane, so God uses your passions to turn your life.”

I am passionate about writing. I love writing stories and always have one or two tinkling around in my head. Lucado goes on to say, “God is too gracious to ask you to do something you hate.” *Just Like Jesus* Once you are near to God and living the life He always planned for you, expect your call or purpose to begin to surface. It will not likely be something from out of left field. It will more than likely be something that is already buried in your heart. Maybe you already have an inkling of what it is.

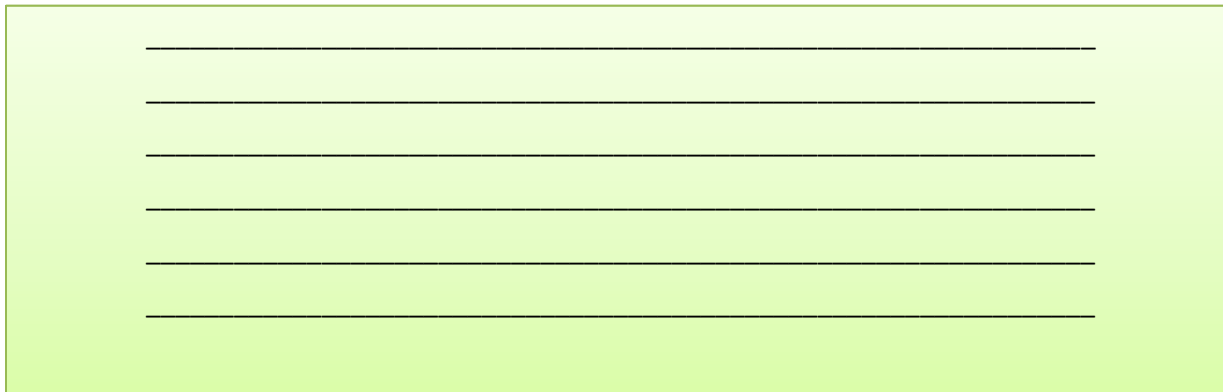
What passions drive you?

What keeps you up at night? What makes your heart burn within your chest? Is it reaching the lost, teaching the found, rocking little babies, providing meals, leading, serving, guiding, writing cards, making home visits? You have a natural inclination toward something, yet you likely underestimate its significance. Are you a natural hostess? Are you open and friendly? Do you realize with those gifts, you can greet a first time visitor to church and make them feel welcome? How can you undervalue that? What if, simply because you took time to say hello and make a little small-talk, that person returns? Then again. Then again. Then they are saved. Then their family is transformed because they know the Lord. Then their children are raised in church...This could go on and on.

Do you see the significance of being a door greeter? Do you see how your gift can touch a life, which in turn, will touch other lives? It is that trickledown of Living Water.

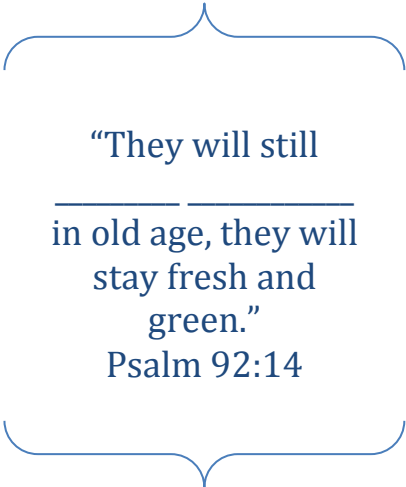
From this point forward, as you walk more closely with the Lord, ask childlike questions. "Lord, what did you create me to do and to be? What do You see in me that I am unable to see in myself? How can I reach others for Your kingdom? Once you ask these questions, be prepared for answers. He will send people to compliment you in certain areas. He will give you opportunities to use your abilities and in doing so will help you see what He sees.

Write out a few questions. Get creative. Ask specific questions.



This will be a lifelong process. It is doubtful that what you see now as your calling will always be so. Different seasons require different skills. If you are in a season of small children, then serving in children's ministry may be where you are called. With the arrival of the teenage years, you may gravitate toward youth. In the meantime, you may always have a desire to reach out to neighbors and strangers with the Good News.

Or, you may be in your retirement years. You do realize, don't you; there is no retirement plan from the Kingdom of God? No one is too old to serve. No one has "done their time." Sure, you may have done your time with children or youth, but you are as valuable in your golden years as you were in your...what would that be called? Bronze years? Gold is the top level, not the dropping out level. It means you have earned wisdom and experience that the younger generation can benefit from. Lead a small group. Mentor a young mother. "Adopt" a family with no grandparents who live nearby. Be a prayer warrior. Write cards. Stuff envelopes at church. Just remain in active service. True retirement is when you officially retire from this earth, and even then, He says He has plans for us in heaven. Complete the verse in the margin.



**"They will still
in old age, they will
stay fresh and
green."
Psalm 92:14**

Older: For those of you who are older, God assures us that we can still bear fruit in our old age. If you back up to verse 12, you see that “the righteous” is who this is referring to, righteous, meaning in right relationship with God through salvation and through walking with Him in a close and intimate daily relationship.

Younger: For those who are younger, you are not off the hook. As a matter of fact, the word “still” in this verse indicates that you should already be bearing fruit prior to old age.

No matter your season, you can be sure your purpose goes beyond yourself and your family. Once Robin and Mike reunited, she decided this: *“Different than they were before, she wanted to live a life outside of just them.”*

That was their problem to begin with. They each were so totally focused on the other and on themselves, neither one of them ever saw God. What happens when we only look inward, into ourselves and families, is that we become of little use in the kingdom.

Earlier, when Chris died, Robin considered her own impact on the world, determining her existence was inconsequential for the most part. Because she did not know God or walk closely with Him, she did make very little impact. She was so busy looking inward and backward, she had no idea where she was going. If there were indeed possibilities God gave her, she was unable to see them.

Chris, on the other hand, chose to look outside of himself. At his funeral Robin noted that Chris *was loved, as he had loved well*. The difference in Chris? Besides the obvious that he looked outside of himself, the deeper truth was that he had gotten to know God. He was able to see that he was but a small part of a larger whole. Yet he never felt insignificant to God. As a matter of fact, he became aware that his death would be what God used to work out His ultimate purpose in Robin’s life. Little did Chris know, but God would use Robin’s healing to help others like Emma, Becky, and Kathy. Because she was transformed and was able to forgive, her marriage was resurrected. A new baby was the result. This trickle-down of Living Water is monumental. It is the way God operates in this world. By giving us the Living Water we need, by filling our emptiness, He enables us to continually pour.

Are you pouring out or only drinking in? Do you live your life looking inward and backward or outside of yourself and your family?

Most of us can find a place of service, but often, it is our “least we can do” service. It is something that fills a need but may not satisfy our passion. If you continue on with the least you can do, if you do not attempt to discover what passions drive you, you will never be excited about Christian service. Also, if you keep working in areas where you are not really gifted, you do two things:

1. You prevent the right person from being where they are supposed to be.
2. You are too busy doing what you are not supposed to be doing to do what you are supposed to do.

You will hurt yourself and others by not discovering what God has designed you to uniquely do.

Here are a some examples:

- ❖ I taught Kindergarten Sunday School because I was asked. At the time, I did not even know I could ask God if that was where He wanted me and then Him actually answer me. I loved the kids, still do. As a matter of fact, sometimes I see one of them driving and feel incredibly old. But for that entire year, I was miserable. I dreaded Saturday because Sunday would

follow. It was never because of the kids, but rather the planning that it took. There were crafts that would be needed. I'm not crafty or creative. I admit, I usually brought treats so that would kill some time. I just did not like it. The reason was, I am not a typical teacher. Let me write a lesson and I'm thrilled. Just don't ask me to show up week after week and teach it.

- ❖ More recently, I was asked to do a church newsletter. I prayed about it until I received a specific answer through God's Word. Since the answer was, "yes," even though it was already a busy season of life for me, I agreed and it went well. Each month things would come together just as they needed to. Most months we had a twelve page newsletter. It came pretty easily because, for one, I am gifted at working with computer programs. And two, because God gave me a yes. What if I would have been asked to do the newsletter, and then thought, "Hey, I'm good at that kind of stuff," and just told them I would do it – but never waited on an answer from God? I could have really set myself up for a Kindergarten Sunday School kind of year. I would have been miserable. But He said, "yes," and that was my green light to proceed.
- ❖ When asked to provide a meal, I panic. Of course I agree to do it, but then I literally panic. I don't have that gift. Immediately, I begin to worry about things like: How much do I take? What if they don't like this or that? How do I keep the hot food hot and the cold food cold? How do I cook dinner for my family at the same time? Doubling recipes stresses me out. Should I make something different for the kids? What about dessert? – Seriously, I really do stress over this when most of you would think, no big deal, throw a little extra on and take it over. It is the most complicated process for me. I overthink every aspect of it.

In my defense, I will talk to anyone who will listen about drawing near to God. I will all but beg them to love Him. I spend hours on end trying to figure out how I can best get my message across. Just don't ask me to cook.

My point is not to demonstrate how weird I am. My point is to stress that we are all unique. He created us to meet a variety of kingdom needs. Mine look different, and that is okay. Now, when I am asked to do something outside of my giftedness, especially if it is a longer term commitment, I pray long and hard about it. I wait for an answer. I do admit though, something as short-term as preparing a dinner, I simply say yes. I can handle the stress of it. Actually, it probably helps me grow in some way. If I figure out how, I'll let you know.

What I want you to know is: *Simply become who you are*. He likes you and your gifts and your talents and even your quirks. If you don't know who you are, then get ready for the journey. He will begin right now to show you. He will make you a fruitful vineyard if you allow Him.

Now that you have had more time to think it through, and since I have given you a few more of my examples, reexamine your passions that you listed earlier in the assignment. Then begin to consider your gifts and talents. What are you currently doing with your gifts and talents? Do they match up with what you feel passionate about? Ask yourself the following questions:

The place(s) I am currently serving:

Am I serving in this or these areas because I am passionate about it or because I am filling a need.

Does my current area of service utilize my gifts and talents? _____

Explain your answer.

Take a look at your history of service. I am giving some examples, but please include other areas I have not considered.

Areas Served	I did so because... (place a check mark in proper column)	
	I am passionate about it	I was filling a need
Served on a committee		
Greeter		
Office Volunteer		
Adult Sunday school		
Provide meals		
Women's Ministry		
Homebound visits		
Contacting visitors		
Intercessory prayer		
Praise Team		
Cleaning		
Youth Ministry		
Children's Ministry		
Nursery		
Preschool		
SS Teacher		
VBS		
Reaching out to the lost		

Once you have considered your current and previous areas of service, begin to ask yourself the following questions. These will assist you in finding what God uniquely designed you to do and where He has best suited you to serve.

While serving in areas I feel passionate about:	Yes	No
I am excited and energized by what I do.		
I find that time flies by.		
I am eager to serve.		
I often come up with new ideas of ways I can do things better.		
I am excited to share with others my area of ministry.		

Now, when you have served in areas simply to fill a need, ask the same questions.

While serving in to fill the need:	Yes	No
I am excited and energized by what I do.		
I find that time flies by.		
I am eager to serve.		
I often come up with new ideas of ways I can do things better.		
I am excited to share with others my area of ministry.		

These are rather crude charts, but maybe they will get the wheels of your mind turning and allow you to openly and honestly dialog with God about how you are gifted and how you are not. Your gifts, talents, and passions, or lack thereof, will come as no surprise to God. He created you that way. If you do not like working with children, He's okay with that! He knows. If you love cooking and feel excited about the prospect of preparing a meal and taking it to a family...bring my family dinner. That's not my gift, remember. Or, use your gift to provide a meal for a family who really needs it. Simply *become* who you are. He will help you figure that out, and once He does, then simply *be* who you are. You don't have to look or cook like anyone else. In my case, thankfully!

More than anything, I have covered areas of service within the church. There are dozens of areas where you may be using how God has gifted you to reach those outside of the church, so please don't limit yourself to my list above. Think this through, pray about it, and then watch and wait for God to help you see how He uniquely designed you.

Focal Passage: *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:4*

Question: *What passions drive me?*

Conclusion: *Simply become who you are.*

Day Five – The Enemy of Purpose

The Enemy of Our Purpose

We have an enemy. I won't even waste ink to print his name, but you know who he is. He's been around pestering you long enough. His goal is first to hinder your closeness with God and to prevent you from loving Him. If he can do that, he's in for a pretty easy ride with your ineffective life. If you draw near to God, however, he becomes worried, and well he should.

The concept of the fruitful vineyard is dangerous to the dark world. If you become fruitful, you will reach out to others, others whom the enemy has in an ineffective place. Make no mistake; the enemy knows the danger of the trickle-down effect of Living Water.

1. Primarily his goal is to prevent you from reaching the Living Water (through salvation).
2. Once you are saved, his goals change. He simply needs to keep you from being filled by the Living Water (keep you distant from God).
3. When he fails there too, his last ditch effort is to prevent you from pouring out the Living Water into the lives of others.

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water _____.”
John 7:37-38

Guess what? Too late! Once you are close to God, filled by the Living Water, there is hardly any stopping you. The love you have becomes a burning fire, one that you must share or the fire will consume you. That's how I feel. That's how all the other loudmouthed teachers and speakers and preachers feel. So what are the enemy's tactics at this point? Whispers and temptations.

When the Whispers Come

When Mike was asked to lead a men's Bible study group, he told Robin, *“They all know...”* All the men who would be in his study knew of his past, of his time in prison, and of his failures as a husband. The whispers came and could have prevented Mike from answering the call. What did Robin ask him? *Has the Lord told you to do this, and if so, what verse did He use?*

Robin was pretty wise in this question. If the Lord said so and gave Mike a verse as confirmation, then the whispers meant nothing. God would show up; He would go ahead and make the way.

The whispers came against Robin. When she considered going home, she heard the same things. *They all knew of their failings and that they were not perfect after all.*

The whispers come against me often. If you knew me and my past, you would have not likely taken this journey with me. I sometimes remind God of who He is choosing to use here. He always reminds me that He knows me inside and out and approves anyway. Does He approve of who I was and the things I did? Hardly. He approves though of whom He has made me to be. I am His, and because I am, He guides me. It's not like He's just turned me out in the world to do this on my own. What a mistake that would be, knowing me as He does. But He's filled me with Himself. He knows that I will ask Him to lead me and He knows it is my greatest desire to follow Him. Do I always get it right? Well no. Do you? I'm still a work in progress. I figure as long as I am on planet earth there will be more for Him to do in me. So when I get it wrong, I accept His forgiveness and get back on the path with Him.

What are your whispers? What are your nevers? You'll never be this or that. You can never do this or that. What does the enemy whisper from your past that you often listen to, the things that hinder you?

He is called the father of lies for a reason. These things you are hearing are lies. How do you combat a lie? By knowing the truth. Whatever the enemy says of you, you must find out what God says about you instead.

Here we go again with the questions. Ask God what He says about you in the areas where the liar lies to you. Ask Him to replace the lies with His truth.

Now, you will have to take the time to listen. Begin each day with such questions. Ask, "Lord, what do You see when you see me? Who do you say I am? What do you want me to know about myself?" All of these are questions He will answer through His Word, though others, and He will also whisper into your heart. Quiet time with Him daily matters. You need to learn to distinguish between the whispers of the enemy and the voice of God.

The Tactic of Temptation

"No temptation has seized you except what is _____ . And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

The enemy hopes to prevent your fruitfulness by keeping you bound by sin and selfishness. Most of my life, he was very effective. Temptations come at us all. God's Word says so. But it also says He provides a way out. We will not be tempted beyond what we can bear. There is a difference though of how we will react to temptation based on our nearness to God. How I reacted to temptation before was totally different than how I react now.

Far

If you are one of the millions of Christians who believe that walking out your Christian life can be accomplished without a real and intimate relationship with Jesus, temptation will overwhelm you and easily cause you to fall. Why? What about Him saying you will not be tempted beyond what you can

bear? Oh, that promise stands. But if you are not near to Him, if you are not allowing His Spirit to control your life, then you have, in some ways, forfeited his offer. If you are not near to Him, you will not likely hear Him when He shows you the way out. Or, if it is not your natural inclination to follow Him, when He tries to lead you away from the temptation, you have no idea which way to go.

Near

If you are near to Him, when temptation comes, the Spirit causes warning bells to go off so loud and so clear, you are more easily able to identify the temptation and flee from it. (James 4:7) Read the verse in the margin.

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

Two verbs here are our actions. Submit and Resist. What you are doing through the course of this study is learning to submit yourself to God. The more you draw near to Him, the more you will know temptation when it comes and the more strength you will have in resisting it. So maintain your new course. Meet with God daily. Read His Word faithfully and remain near to Him. If you do those things, the enemy cannot possibly hinder you in your call and purpose.

During the time I have been working on this study, a variety of temptations have come against me, including the one I am most susceptible to. Immediately I know they are temptations. Immediately I know they come because the enemy does not want you to draw near to God nor to love Him. The enemy wants to shut me up. Ha! Has he met me? Do you want to know what I know? If I fall, I render this entire work void. If I fall, no one will listen. If I fall, it might take years to recover. So I don't plan on falling. Instead, I submit myself to the Lord daily.

When temptation comes, if you are near to God, you can do what Jesus did during the temptation in the wilderness. You can speak scripture over the situation, and you will not fall victim to it. Here's the deal though, you have to have those scriptures in your head and heart in order to do this kind of battle. How do you get them there? By reading and studying the Scriptures daily. You must build up your arsenal of scriptures in order to do battle.

Please consider this – the good news – if you are hearing whispers and facing temptation, then you must be on to something! You are moving toward your kingdom purpose. So keep moving.

On the lines below, note how it makes you feel to know you are moving toward your kingdom purpose. Do you feel excited, nervous, unworthy? Maybe you feel a combination of many things.

I know I feel a variety of emotions at this very moment. I see His purpose in the fact that you are reading what He has compelled me to write. The other day as I was working on some final formatting of the UtV novel, wave after wave of fear came against me. No matter what though, I kept standing firm and pressing on. (I call this Faith Forward Movement.) And that was by no means an indication of my own power or strength. Instead, it was His voice in my head calling, “This is the way, walk in it.” Since I know He has called me to do this, nothing, no whispers or temptations will cause me to believe anything other

than the fact that He can be trusted to lead me. All I have to do is be faithful and follow. Will you be faithful and follow? I can answer that for you. Yes, if you draw near enough to Him and learn to love Him passionately and trust Him completely. Knowing, loving, and trusting God will set you on fire for the kingdom in a way that will totally transform your life, and as an outflow of the change in you, the lives of others around you. You will become the trickle-down of Living Water.. Our final verse below will become one that you can identify with.

“But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name’, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” Jeremiah 20:9

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *Your new normal should be peace.*

Day Two: *Obedience flows naturally out of love.*

Day Three: *The Great Commission calls us to reach the lost and teach the found.*

Day Four: *Simply become who you are.*

Day Five: *The enemy of our purpose uses whispers and temptations.*