

## **WEEK 4: EXERCISE #1**

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1.**

*Yes!* When it comes to the promises of God, this is our final, glorious answer. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul tells us that no matter how many promises God has made they are all *yes!* in Christ Jesus. In this lesson, we will be led into an awareness of the mercy and grace Jesus reflected in the promises of God.

### **Read Ruth 1–4 and Matthew 1:1–17.**

Ruth is a beautiful story of God's provision. The genealogy found in Matthew 1 is so often overlooked as a boring list, when in fact it is a beautiful map of God's promises fulfilled.

How do you encounter Jesus in these Scriptures? How do these two journeys (Ruth's journey, and the journey from Abraham to Jesus) give you hope for today?

What promises do you encounter in these two passages of Scripture? Make a list in your journal.

### **Encounter**

Revisit the list of promises made from the above exercise. Where has God kept that same promise in your life? Jot down some examples of how the Lord has kept His promises to you, then after each promise, write, "YES!"

## WEEK 4: EXERCISE #2

Ask most people how their lives are right now, and chances are they'll use terms like "stressed out," "busy," or "overwhelmed." It's no wonder. We are covered over by schoolwork, housework, yardwork, errands, food, meetings, exercise, church, devotional time, football games, hockey games, travel, music, bills, pets, cars, parents, kids. Not to mention whatever it is you do in order to support all those habits and responsibilities. And we are so remarkably accessible: cell phone, home phone, Facebook, texting, e-mail, Twitter.

What a life. No wonder we are all so tired! No wonder our relationships are suffering. We've become slaves to a culture that not only sets the pace but teaches us how to run: go all out until you burn out. Don't stop until you win or until it's done or until you die, whichever comes first.

Wouldn't you like another word for your life than stressed out, overworked, overwhelmed? Gandhi once said, "There is more to life than simply increasing its speed."

### **Read Isaiah 40.**

Isaiah gets us. He writes eloquently about the state of life, the uncertainties we feel, and the power of trust in a great God. This passage teaches us a lot about the character of God. Trusting in the character of who God is and putting our whole confidence in Him even in the midst of adversity is our ticket to peace. We discover in this passage that it isn't about having all the answers, but trusting in the One who does.

God is who He says He is, the Great I AM, The Light of the World. Even in the darkest hours we can trust in Him.

Read through Isaiah 40 again, this time underlining or highlighting all the words and phrases that speak of God's character. What phrases display the authority of God? Where do you encounter Jesus in this Old Testament Scripture?

There is a powerful word here for those of us who are overwhelmed by the pace of this world: Wait on the Lord. God knows how fast we are created to go. He knows that in some seasons, we'll be ready to fly like an eagle. Other times, we'll be grateful for strength to run without growing weary. And at times, it will be enough to walk without fainting. Knowing ourselves—and our God—is the trick to setting a holy pace.

What new insights from this chapter in Isaiah helps you to trust God's care over your life? In what ways have you seen the Lord work in your life in the past month, week, or day that helped you understand who He is? Make a few notes in your journal.

## **Encounter**

If you've got the capability on your cell phone, program an alert with this phrase: "God is like . . ." Schedule it to remind you often during the day to complete the sentence. Notice how your surroundings inform your responses.

If you're not a phone junkie, you can accomplish the same goal with Post-it notes. Write "God is like . . ." on several Post-its and place them on

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your bathroom mirror, computer, above the kitchen sink, on the radio dial of your car . . . wherever you spend time. Each time a note catches your eye, complete the sentence.

Don't just do this for a day; do it for a week. The goal is to realign your thoughts around the nature and goodness of God. Journal what you've learned. What did you learn about God through this experience that you can share with someone?

## WEEK 4: EXERCISE #3

One time Jesus healed a madman who lived among the tombs of Gerasenes, a region of ten cities. Reading this story in Mark, we encounter two important spiritual principles: (1) Jesus heals. (2) True healing brings freedom.

### **Read Mark 5:1-17.**

Jesus came to a city by boat, got out, and was met by a man who'd been hovering nearby among the tombs. This was not just any man. He was the poorest of the poor, living among the dead. He was the kind of guy the community tolerated but avoided. Back when people noticed him, he had often been chained but no chain was strong enough to hold him. Now, he wandered alone among the tombs and hills beyond the city, unchained but in agony.

Night and day he cried out and cut himself. The pain of the cuts on the outside of his body masked the internal pain. Even today, "cutting" is a way that many people deal with deep, emotional wounds and scars no one sees but Jesus. In fact, this is a growing trend among teens but is certainly not limited by age. And it is only one of many ways we use unhealthy habits to cope with our internal wounds. Some of us cope by self-medicating with drugs or alcohol. Still others agonize under the weight of eating disorders or by withdrawing socially.

What is your usual response to pain or suffering? Do you pull in, reach out, or draw back?

Are you dealing right now with an unhealthy response to life's disappointments? Have you taken this to Jesus? Have you shared it with a spiritual partner who can help you pray through to a better place?

### **Read Mark 5:7–8.**

This story of the man Jesus healed is a great example of Jesus' influence over demons. In verses 7–8, we see the fear He invokes as the demon sees Jesus coming. And then we encounter Jesus' authority in the spiritual realm as He speaks deliverance into this man's life. No magic, no fanfare, just two words: "Come OUT." When the One who holds the keys of hell and death speaks, no demon is safe!

### **Read Mark 5:9–10.**

All kinds of voices contend for our attention. Real voices, like those of our kids, spouses, bosses; but also voices of the world—temptations and ambitions. All those voices try to convince us they will bring happiness. On our rough days, they wear us down. Other voices bring feelings of worthlessness, doubt, fear, shame, failure. These are the voices of disgrace.

And in the midst of all those other voices, there is always one other voice—the voice of grace. That is the voice of Jesus, the still, quiet voice that calls us to a higher place.

What does the voice of Jesus sound like in your life? Have you learned to discern it? Have you trained your inner ear to hear that voice when it speaks into your life?

## **Read Psalm 46:10.**

Write it on a Post-it and put it in a place where you will see it when you are likely to be stressed out. “Be still and know that I am God,” the psalmist tells us. When the world is yelling, when the voices compete for our attention, be still. When everything in us tells us we have too much to do and not enough time to do it, be still. When the battles rage, our greatest weapon is to be still and call on the name of Jesus.

## **Read Mark 5:11–13.**

Notice that the demons ask Jesus to send them into the pigs that were grazing nearby. In His presence, they were unable to possess a pig without permission. This is an important point. In the presence of Jesus, demons must submit. His authority in the spiritual realm is absolute. This is why we want to bring Jesus into even the darkest places in us. Only Jesus has ultimate power over the powers and principalities of darkness.

## **Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.**

Some of our demons are harder to let go of than others. We will say we are “struggling” with something, but honestly . . . we just don’t want to let go of it yet. Maybe we have acknowledged it as an issue, but we are still allowing it to run around in our lives, wreaking havoc. We rationalize. We say it’s just too strong a demon to be destroyed. But Paul teaches us that no temptation has overtaken us that isn’t common or conquerable. Whatever the issue, God will not give us anything we cannot bear, and when we are tempted He will always provide a way out.

In other words, that thing you're dealing with is not bigger than God! Nor is it somehow separate from your relationship with God. Paul tells us God is the one knocking down walls and making doorways. Our part is to walk through. Because (and this is the real point) *you can't stay where you are and go with God at the same time.*

What deep wound, what root of bitterness, what pain has taken hold in the depth of your soul that Jesus wants to reveal to you and heal and cleanse you from? Will you allow Him full access to your heart and habits so you can be finally and fully free?

Remember: *there is no shame in Christ!*

**Read Mark 5:14–17.**

Fear is so often the *natural* (not supernatural) response to deliverance. We don't like change so most of the time we fight it, even if we ask for it. In the story of Jesus and the demoniac, fear takes over and the people ask Jesus to leave. With a clear choice between demons and the Savior of the world, they have chosen their demons. All because they were afraid to change.

Sound familiar? Paul tells us (2 Tim. 1:7) that we have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-discipline. Power, love, and self-discipline are the weapons with which we fight the enemy who so wants to control our minds.

Make the words of 2 Timothy 1:7 into a prayer that you can memorize and pray daily.

## Read Psalm 146.

Only God! This is the great proclamation of the psalmist. God is Creator and Redeemer, our one and only true God. Psalm 146 advises us to trust our God, because *only* He can be trusted. Only He remains faithful forever. Humans, no matter how influential and well-intentioned, will eventually disappoint.

Only God! Psalm 146 paints an amazingly accurate picture of the Messiah we know to be Jesus Christ. This Messiah, who has been there since creation, has now come in human form to uphold the cause of the oppressed, set prisoners free, give food to the hungry and sight to the blind. Our Jesus cares about the ones in the margins, defending them against the wicked. Jesus will turn the world upside down to redeem one of His own!

And *you* are one of His own. Jesus wants to redeem your past. Jesus has come to restore the years the locusts have eaten. Jesus wants to make something beautiful out of your tears. Where we see only dead ends, He sees possibilities.

## Encounter

Where are you in this healing journey? Are you just beginning? Halfway there? Almost home? Are your problems legion, or are you beginning to see progress?

(NOTE: This assignment could take a while. It may be something you want to begin today, then continue to work on throughout the rest of this study.)

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In your journal, draw a timeline. Begin with your earliest memory and end with today. Now, note those places on your timeline where you've seen progress toward a healed life. A moment when you gave or received forgiveness might be noted, or a moment when you encountered Jesus in a retreat setting or study. Use just a word or two to note a few of your more significant moments of healing.

Now, take a few minutes to offer your timeline to God as a prayer of praise. Thank Him for progress made.

## WEEK 4: EXERCISE #4

### Read Mark 5:18–20.

The scene of our story shifts as Jesus heads back to the boat. Out of a spirit of fear, the people of the region have asked Jesus to leave them. The man, now healed, begs to go with Him. He has experienced real freedom and now he is spiritually hungry. He wants to follow Jesus into this new life.

The Hebrew word for “mercy” is *hesed*. This is not an easy word to translate. It can mean grace or compassion, or sometimes loving-kindness or thankfulness. The idea is that God’s grace toward us—His patience and loyalty—come out of His love for us. The corresponding Greek word is *charis*, which means something like unmerited favor or simply, “thanks.” *Hesed* is God’s loving response to our imperfect lives. Our Father gave us His best in Jesus, even when we did not deserve it, He gave us His all, His everything, instead of what we deserved. That’s mercy. That’s grace. That’s Jesus!

And that’s who this man who was healed was ready to talk about. He was ready to share his story of this Jesus, who gave him another chance at life.

Interestingly, the disciples are silent in this story. As far as we know, they never even left the boat. These are the same men who just saw Jesus calm a storm out on the water. They have just asked, “Who is this that the wind and the waves obey him?” And now on shore, they have witnessed the demons obeying His voice. And they have witnessed the transformation of a man. And yet, they are silent.

If you were a disciple on this journey, what would your reaction be? Heading home at the end of this trip, what would you share with your family, with your friends?

Where are you seeing Jesus at work in your life, or in the world around you? How are you sharing those stories with others? Are you telling the story of Jesus?

Why do you suppose Jesus wanted the man to stay in this town? What blessings would he have missed if Jesus had allowed the man to go with Him? For so long, this man was isolated, living among tombs. Now he is asked to stay among the very people who rejected him. Do you see how this might have been part of his healing?

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With whom do you most identify in the Scripture of Mark 5:1–20? The madman, the disciples, the townspeople? Do you want to stay in your comfort zone, in the boat, in town, standing on the shore, or sitting at the feet of Jesus?

If we're honest about it, most of us are a mixed bag. We can relate to the guy who got healed, but we can also relate to the crowd that got scared and the disciples who stayed quiet. Journal on this thought. What are the healing stories in your life waiting to be told? What parts of your life are still ruled by fear? Where are you too comfortable to move forward with Jesus?

Read Romans 8:28–39. What is the promise of this passage? How do you relate this promise to the principles of the story in Mark 5? How will you claim this promise of protection and presence over your life?

## WEEK 4: EXERCISE #5

Turn to John 8:31–36. Read these passages slowly and commit them to memory.

How do these verses connect with the passage in Mark? Write down your thoughts.

Jesus tells His audience in John 8 that true freedom is not just the sum total of our circumstances. True freedom is a spiritual reality that transforms our lives, no matter what our details are. It is truth, He says, that sets us free. And truth is not a set of laws. Truth is a person. Truth is in Christ, who has come to set us free not just from uncomfortable circumstances but at a much more fundamental level. Jesus Christ sets us free from slavery to sin. He sets us free from slavery to shame and guilt. He sets us free from slavery to fear and death.

### **Read Galatians 5:13–15.**

Spiritual freedom is not the absence of boundaries. It is the pursuit of holiness, grounded in love. Translated into a prayer, Galatians 5:13 might read, “Give us the power of Kingdom restraint.” Or as Jesus taught us to pray (Matt. 6:13), “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” This is a prayer for holiness to invade us. In other words, “Take my thoughts captive, God, so I’m not constantly having to battle every choice. Give me some holy boundaries I can operate out of so I’m not always having to choose between what I want and what I can give, and so I’m not always having to wrestle between my shallowness and Your depth.”

Be honest with yourself. When you pray, “And lead us not into temptation,” do you actually mean for God to destroy every obstacle and deliver you from every demon that stands between you and holiness? Or in reality, are you praying something more like: “And lead me not into temptation . . . because I can find it all by myself”?

Are you living like a free person, or are you bound spiritually to forces that work against your relationship to Jesus?

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Jesus came to set us free. Do you believe it, even if you cannot see it?

Write this verse at the top of your journal page: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

What do you think this verse meant to its original audience? When Jesus talked about freedom, what do you think the people heard?

What does this verse mean to you? In what areas of your life have you been set free? In what areas do you need to pray for freedom?

What one practical step will you take in response to this study? Is God calling you to have a different relationship to your stuff, or to other people, or to your thoughts and habits? Is God calling you to not just sit there but do something, to participate in the in-breaking Kingdom?