

TTT - October 2016

## #1 - How to Change Your Behavior

I was caught in the act. And now mom was going to help me remember to ask first. I thought I could get away with it. I wanted to taste just one hot chocolate chip cookie from the cooling rack, so while she had her back turned, I grabbed one. But I wasn't fast enough. As she turned around, I was caught. And now I would suffer the consequences.

Maybe you can relate. You didn't get caught stealing cookies, but maybe you were trapped in a lie or someone found out you started a rumor. Trust and harmony needed to be restored. This must first happen with our relationship with God, when we admit our condition, confess our sin and ask him for help. 1 John 2:1 reminds us, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense -- Jesus Christ, the righteous One."

A harmonious relationship is based on trust and obedience -- when either is lacking it affects the quality of the relationship. God is not a finger-wagging, inspecting kind of God. We don't need to earn our way back into His good books, we are already in them because of what Jesus has done. I confessed my sin of stealing cookies to God, apologized to my mom and then had some time to think about my actions as I sat alone in time out. God forgave me for my sin. And now I could behave according to my beliefs. Let's pray, "Father, thank you for reminding me to see myself as a saint who sometimes sins. Thank you for your love for me. In Jesus' name, Amen"

## #2 - Accept Me

I was glad when I was asked to play on the girls' softball team. It felt good to be wanted, needed and included. I remembered last season, I'd been overlooked, I waited to be picked and at the end of the selection process, I was not chosen until the very end. I was the last person to be invited to be on the team. It felt horrible to be left out.

The effects of the sin of Adam and Eve meant separation and disconnection from God. Ephesians 4:18 says, "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." We can relate to few of the negative emotions they felt: fearful and anxious, guilty and ashamed, rejected, weak. Oh and also, powerless, depressed and angry. Human

beings are created to need a sense of security, of significance, a need for acceptance, a need for strength and control. We are specifically chosen by God. We are set apart to be used by God.

The world offers us many false solutions to recover what Adam and Eve lost. No matter how hard we might try to perform or make a name for ourselves. Or try to improve our appearance or attempt to be accepted, these things will never satisfy. John 10:10 reminds us, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In Christ, he grants us significance, acceptance and security, as we abide in this truth it changes the way we live. Let's pray, "Father, thank you for forgiving our sins though the death of your son. Thank you for his precious blood that cleanses us and protects us. Thank you for accepting us in Jesus' name, Amen."

### #3 Out With The Old

Each spring I take time to purge and store my worn out winter clothes to prepare for the summer. This habit helps me re-discover pieces of my wardrobe I forgot I owned. It also makes room for new clothes. We can apply the same discipline to purging our old ways of handling life's problems. That moment you and I became believers was a defining moment of our lives. Everything changed. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." Ephesians 5:8 "For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Colossians 1:13 "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."

So why don't we feel different? If we want to change our behavior, we must see ourselves as more than just forgiven. We must view ourselves as saints who sometimes sin. Satan can't do anything to change the fact of who we are. But if we believe a lie about who we are, our walk with the Lord will not go forward. We are not saved by how we behave but by how we believe. If we want to change our behavior, we must see ourselves as more than just forgiven. The key to becoming a mature Christian is realizing we can come straight back to God in repentance when we have gone wrong. And this is the secret to victorious Christian living." Let's pray, Heavenly Father, thank you for you for helping us take out the old and make room for the new. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

### #4 Renounce Lies, Claim Truth

Do we need to do anything more to be accepted by God? Absolutely not. We are already accepted because of what Christ has done. It's not what we do that determines who we are. It's who we are that determines what we do. We need to be who we are now: children of God. Some have a clouded view of God because of human experience. Instead of feeling God is distant and uninterested in us, we can accept the truth that our Father God is intimate and involved. Or do you think God is insensitive and uncaring? Just the opposite, he is kind and compassionate. Felt like God is stern and demanding?

Oh no, God is accepting and filled with joy and love. Or passive or cold? Nope, Father God is warm and affectionate. Have you thought God is absent or too busy? Never, He is always with us and eager to be with us. Wondered if he is angry or never happy with you? Wrong again, God is patient and slow to anger and delights in those who put their hope in his unfailing love. Mean, cruel or abusive? it's not God's nature. Our Heavenly Father is loving and gentle and protective. Unlike some earthy examples, God is full of grace and mercy and gives us freedom to fail. He is tender-hearted and forgiving, His heart and arms are always open to us. God is committed to our growth and proud of us as his growing children. Have you felt like God wants to take all the fun out of life? Oh no, God wants to give us a full, exciting and abundant life. His will is good, acceptable and perfect. Amen!

#### #5 My Father God Is

Some have a clouded view of God because of human experience. Do we need to do anything more to be accepted by God? Absolutely not. We are already accepted because of what Christ has done. It's not what we do that determines who we are. It's who we are in Christ that determines what we do. We need to remember who we are now: children of God. Instead of feeling God is distant and not interested in us, we can accept the truth that our Father God is intimate and involved. Or do you think God is insensitive and uncaring? Just the opposite, he is kind and compassionate. Felt like God is stern and demanding? Oh no, God is accepting and filled with joy and love. Or passive or cold?

Nope, Father God is warm and affectionate. Have you thought God is absent or too busy? Wrong again, He is always with us and eager to be with us. Wondered if he is angry or never happy with you? No, He is patient and slow to anger and delights in those who put their hope in his unfailing love. Ever feel like God is controlling or manipulative? Just the opposite.

God is full of grace and mercy and gives us freedom to fail. Have you thought God is condemning or unforgiving? On the contrary, God is tender-hearted, forgiving, His heart and arms are always open to us. Have you perceived God as a nit-picking or demanding perfectionist? Wrong. He is absolutely committed to your growth and proud of you as his growing child. Let's pray. "Heavenly Father, thank you for your love, acceptance, grace and freedom. Thank you for being our perfect father. In Jesus' name, amen."

#### #6 He Calls Me Restored

In the rat race of making our way in the world, we are driven by the need to be accepted, secure and significant. Now, in Christ, we are spiritually alive children of God who are accepted, secure and significant. Because of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, we are sign important. We are no longer worthless, helpless or hopeless. In Christ, you are significant. God says, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You are a branch of the true vine, Jesus. You have been chosen and appointed by God to bear good fruit. God says, you are a spirit-empowered witness of Christ. You are a temple of God.

You are a minister of reconciliation for God. You are God's fellow worker. You are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. You are God's workmanship, created for good works. You may approach God with freedom and confidence. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. You are Secure. You are no longer guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned. In Christ you are totally secure. God says, You are free forever from condemnation. You are assured that all things work together for good. You are free from condemning charges against you. You cannot be separated from the love of God. You have been established, anointed and sealed by God. You can be confident that the good work God has begun in you will be perfected. You are a citizen of heaven. You are hidden with Christ in God. Let's pray, "Father thank you for the truth of who we are in Christ. Help us to remember what you say about us is true. In Jesus' name Amen"

#### #7 He Calls Me His Beloved

We, members of the human race, are driven by the need to be loved, safe and important. Now, in Christ, we are spiritually alive children of God who are accepted, secure and significant. You and I are no longer guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned. Because of Jesus' death on the cross

and resurrection from the dead, we are significant. You and I are no longer worthless, helpless or hopeless. Friend, you are very important to God. He has not forgotten about you. God says, You are free forever from condemnation. You are assured that all things work together for good. You are free from condemning charges against you.

In Christ, you are totally secure. He wants you to remember, you have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. You can find grace and mercy to help in time of need. You are born of God and the evil one cannot touch you. In Christ, you are no longer rejected, unloved or dirty. In Christ, you are completely accepted. You are God's child, you are Christ's friend. You have been justified. You are united with the Lord, you are one spirit with Him. You have been bought with a price. You belong to God. You are a member of Christ's body. You are a saint. You have been adopted as God's child. You have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit. You have been redeemed and forgiven for all your sins. You are complete in Christ. Let's pray, "Father, Help us to remember what you say about us is true. Help us to keep our eyes on you. Remind us today of who we are in Christ. In Jesus name Amen."

#8 Believe God (w/c 280)

Did you know there is a difference between believing in God and believing God? Here's when faith enters. We must find out what God has said and choose to believe the truth. Whether it feels true or not, your life will be transformed. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." We are saved through faith. A real, vibrant faith is the key to success in your walk with Jesus. Faith is believing what is true.

Everyone believes in someone or something. How do we know this? Every decision we make and every action we do shows our faith in something. The difference is what or whom we believe in -- some have called it - the object of our faith. This is the key to effective faith. It is not so much that we believe, it is what we believe. In Matthew 17:20 Jesus said, " I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to

this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." It is not our faith that moves the mountain. It's the one we put our faith in. Jesus Christ is the ultimate faith object. Faith is making a choice to believe what God says is true. We don't feel our way into good behavior. We behave our way into good feelings. This happens when we choose to believe the truth. John 8:32 says "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

## #9 Faith Grows In Difficult Times

Ever been disappointed with a 'no' answer to prayer? We asked God to work in a specific way, to open a door we thought he wanted us to walk through. We assumed because we wanted our way and thought we knew the way things should go, God would answer affirmatively. We were shocked when the door remained shut and things turned out differently. God's no answer to our prayers made us feel frustrated and sad, maybe even a little confused. It's hard to admit our understanding of God and what we expect him to do often pushes against our limitations. For our faith to grow, God might put us in a circumstance to give us an opportunity to choose.

We can put our faith in something else. Or we can put our faith in God. God's part in all of this is to be truth. And our part is to believe truth. James 2:17-18, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead. But someone will say, "you have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." People live according to what they believe. No matter what we say, it's what we do that shows what we believe. To find out what you really believe, look at your actions. 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is spirit." Let's pray, "Thank you God, for hearing our prayers. Thank you for your answers. In Jesus' name, amen."

## #10 Tell Them About Jesus

"Evangelism, why bother? I sure everyone has heard of Jesus. Haven't missionaries have been sent to every country? I'm sure we've just about completed the Great Commission." Oh yes, the spread of Christianity has been incredible, but there are huge segments of the world's population that have never heard the name of Jesus. They have not heard a clear presentation of the message of salvation.

When Jesus commanded His followers to "make disciples of all the nations" in Matthew 28, He was not referring to political nations like Canada, Kenya or Russia. These countries, like the United States, did not even exist at the time. Jesus used the Greek word "ethne" for nations. It's where we get the English word "ethnic". In the Great Commission Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples from every ethnic people group. According to the Joshua Project, 3.12 billion people are still unreached with the good news of Jesus. In a world population of 7.38 billion, that's 42 %.

An unreached or least-reached people is a people group defined by the fact there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this group with no outside assistance. So when we pray for the Gospel to reach the unreached, let's pray for churches to teach and train missionaries. That the world may know! Let's pray "Dear Heavenly Father, we pray for those who need you." 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Thank you for making a way for them to hear your truth. In Jesus Name Amen.

## #11 See Through Life

I wanted to hide. I tried to avoid eye contact, but couldn't. She was the last person I wanted to run into. Our eyes met, my insides cringed. I prayed, "Lord help." I was able to show love, we had a short conversation, it was surface but it felt good that God's power gave compassionate words.

This was not being fake. In a split second I chose to behave my feelings into submission was because I had become accountable. Weekly, I met with my accountability partner, I shared my struggle, forgave my offender and trusted God for the outcome. Believers need each other. We must encourage one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not

give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the day approaching."

We must choose to trust each other. We have a responsibility to help each other grow closer to God. In accountability, I allowed a close friend to see a part of me that was wounded. At first I was afraid of being judged because I cared about what she thought. An amazing thing happened when I shared my pain with her, my clouds of depression lifted. Discernment is the ability to see through masks. Accountability invites others to see through us. We need discernment and accountability help us walk in strong faith. You and I are desperate for people who can see through our lives. In partnership with the Holy Spirit and them we can begin practicing lives of inside-out honesty. Are you living a see through life? What are you waiting for?

## #12 Who Are You In Christ

Stuck in a cycle of sin-confess, sin-confess? Are you tired of the ups and downs? Maybe you've thought, "It's not fair, my past makes me more vulnerable or I can't do anything about my past?" Psalm 130 says, "If you O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? but with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. O put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption." The blood of Jesus completely covers our sins, we are forgiven, we are cleansed. We are set free. We must trust God with every inch of our past. We must let go of our hurt, hate, shame and blame. God will never ever use the past against us. Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

I love this quote from Beth Moore: "Jesus longs to reframe our pasts and let us see them against the backdrop of His glory." In Christ, you are loved, Jesus forgives all of your sins. He has loved you with an everlasting love. His unfailing love surrounds you. You can love yourself. You are able to love others. You are safe. God declares you not guilty. You are secure in Christ's love. You are protected by God. You are free from Satan's harm. You are defended by God. You are important. You are God's masterpiece. God has a meaningful purpose for your life. You are fulfilling God's plan. You are free to approach God in confidence. God is working in your life to accomplish His will. The more you reinforce who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your beliefs about God.

## #13 Time to Get Unstuck

One of the best things about the *Lead Like Jesus Encounter* is the unique experience it brings for growth in leaders. It works because leaders take time out for positive self-care as they find new ways to get to know God better. Through solid Bible teaching and group interaction, participants are encouraged to get involved and to explore new ways to draw close to God.

Even as I led my first *Lead Like Jesus Encounter* as a new facilitator, the activity for the *Being Habits Diagram* became very meaningful to me. God gave me an unexpected blessing.

It's wonderful to be reminded how we imitate Jesus as our model for absolute love. Through Jesus' sacrifice, God loves us unconditionally. Romans 5:8 reminds us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." *The Being Habits Activity* began with the group reading aloud several verses about God's love. 1 John 4:16, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

As the activity got underway, God's sweet voice whispered truth to water my parched and dry soul. I felt a warmth of the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit come over me, as tears of joy, relief and loss fell onto my lap.

"Sheryl, I forgive you."

My mind froze on the 'I forgive you' phrase. In that moment, I slowly repeated the three words in my mind, and thanked my heavenly Father for forgiving me. Now it was my turn to forgive myself. I hadn't realized I was stuck in bitterness, hate and unforgiveness. Jesus' love has set us free.

#### #14 Just Do It

In the *Lead Like Jesus Encounter*, *The Being Habits Activity* began with the group reading aloud several verses about God's love. i John 4:16, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

As the activity got underway, God's sweet voice whispered truth to water my parched and dry soul. I felt a warmth of the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit come over me, as tears of joy, relief and loss fell onto my lap.

"Sheryl, I forgive you."

My mind froze on the 'I forgive you' phrase. In that moment, I slowly repeated the three words in my mind. I thanked my heavenly Father for forgiving me. Now it was my turn to forgive myself. I hadn't realized I was stuck.

As leaders, we will have opportunities to forgive, but some of us will have many opportunities. God gave us a way to keep the lines of communication open between Him and us. "We must forgive, so that no advantage is taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes," the Apostle Paul told us in 2 Corinthians 2:10, 11 (NIV). Forgiveness is a choice; it's a decision, a crisis of the will. Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful" (NIV). Although it is still our choice, if we want mercy, we are commanded to be merciful through forgiveness.. The Old Testament records God's requirement for the blood of a lamb to satisfy the substitutionary requirement. Our Heavenly Father has granted us substitutionary forgiveness through His Son, Jesus. He took our place. Because of the blood of Jesus, we are forever free.

#### #15 The Core of Forgiveness

In the Lead Like Jesus Encounter, I took part in *The Being Habits Activity* , I understood God's act of forgiving me. Now it was time for me to forgive myself. To fully abide in God's love, he wanted me to love myself and accept the work he wanted to do in my life. It was up to me to decide whether or not I would accept God's full forgiveness. God asked me to refuse to play the enemy's deceitful game of dodging missiles of blame, shame and unworthiness . I had to let go of the grudge I held against myself.

Hebrews 9:22 explains the concept of an innocent life in payment for the sin of a human being; "The law says that almost everything must be made clean by blood, and sins cannot be forgiven without blood to show death" (NCV). The Lord Jesus is our substitute, literally becoming sin for us. Jesus's crucifixion wounds belonged to us; He was punished in our place to satisfy God's requirement. His sacrifice provided for our righteousness.

"Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God."(2 Corinthians 5:21 [NCV]). The choice to forgive others means no one really forgives without bearing the

consequences of the other person's sin. The act of forgiveness is the substitution Christ offered to his Heavenly Father for us.

I could rest in God's love by abiding, as I choose to fully accept and claim His forgiveness and grace that day. It was encouraging, uplifting and restorative. I discovered healing for the broken and bruised places I hadn't found resolution before. Because I let God in, he loved me completely, for the first time, I could love myself.

## #16 Forgive and Forgive Again

As leaders, we will have opportunities to forgive, but some of us will have many opportunities. 2 Corinthians 2:10, 11 says "We must forgive, so that no advantage is taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." Forgiveness is a choice; it's a decision, a crisis of the will. Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful". God gives us a choice, to forgive or not. But if we want mercy, we are commanded to be merciful through forgiveness. Our Heavenly Father has granted us substitutionary forgiveness through His Son, Jesus. The Old Testament showed God's requirement for the blood of a lamb, the only thing that would satisfy the substitutionary requirement.

For us to fully abide in God's love, he wants us to love ourselves. He wants us to accept the work he wants to do in our lives. We can choose whether or not we will accept God's full forgiveness. When we do, refuse to play the enemy's deceitful game of blame, shame and unworthiness. Can you let go of the grudge you hold against yourself? Can you forgive yourself for your past mistakes? It's time. It's time to accept the work He wants to do in you. We can find healing for every broken and bruised place. When we let God in, we experience his love completely. We will be given a new view of ourselves. And the results of our belief in the thorough manner of God's complete forgiveness will affect the way we think, live and lead. What about you? Maybe it's time to forgive yourself. Give God permission to do what He wants with you and trade your bitterness for forgiveness.

## #17 Love Keeps No Lists

"Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a permanent attitude," said Martin Luther King, Jr. Forgiveness is one of the most difficult steps of faith we will take. 1 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs" We must not keep lists of anything that has hurt, angered, offended, or

wronged us. It's only through God's power this is possible. Forgiveness should actually begin at the time of the offense. Forgiveness is the only way to follow God in faith. " Forgiveness is a choice; it's a decision, a crisis of the will. Luke 6:36 says, "Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful" . If we want mercy, we are commanded to be merciful through forgiveness. Our Heavenly Father has granted us substitutionary forgiveness through His Son, Jesus.

For us to fully abide in God's love, he wants us to love ourselves and accept the work he wants to do in our lives. It was up to us to decide whether or not we will accept this truth. Abiding in the truth affects how we view our past sins. Are you overrun with blame, shame and unworthiness? Romans 8:1 reminds us, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Can you let go of the grudge you hold against yourself? Can you forgive yourself for your past mistakes? It's time to accept the work He wants to do in you. We can find healing for every broken and bruised place. When we let God in, we experience his love fully and completely, and maybe for the first time, we can love ourselves. What about you? Maybe it's time to forgive yourself.

#### #18 The Warning Light of the Soul

My feelings were hurt again. I thought I had resolved my anger but now, this one thing that happened really ticked me off. Can you relate? How do you respond when you feel this way? We must pay attention to our emotions. Now that doesn't mean we allow our emotions to control us. We must control them. This is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. You know that little warning light on the dashboard of your car? It comes on when there is something in the engine that needs attention. Our emotions serve as the warning light of our soul. The only way to wade through our unpredictable emotions is to let Jesus lead us. I Peter 5:7,8, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

God created our inner person (our soul, that is) to function in union with our outer person (our body). We all know we cannot control our emotions. So what are we to do? We can change them over time as we change what we can control. That is, what we believe and how we behave. If what we believe does not reflect truth, then what we feel will not reflect

reality. When we re-evaluate our past from the perspective of who we are in Christ, God sets us free. John 13:17 reminds us, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Are you ready? You can begin today -- ask God to help. Instead of trying to feel your way into good behavior, behave your way into good feelings.

## #19 The Great Cover Up

My mouth was dry, I was light-headed. My stomach churned and my mind raced. My family member's comments made me mad, but there was nowhere to hide and this was no time to vent. I knew this feeling of wanting to explode was a natural reaction to unhealthy conversation at a holiday event. I wanted to follow my feelings and after telling everyone off, run right out the front door. I needed to face my pain. I excused myself from the table and went into the bathroom. I grabbed a bath towel, buried my face and began to cry. I remembered Psalm 32:3,6, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found." What a relief.

Even the great King David knew it was unhealthy to ignore his feelings. I had to forgive. Forgiveness was my choice; I had to make the decision to do it, by choosing God's will. Luke 6:36 says, "Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful." I chose to deal with my feelings that day, right there with my face buried in the bath towel, I prayed a prayer I learned from Dr. Neil Anderson, "Dear Lord, I forgive (fill in the person's name) for making me feel unworthy, overlooked, unacceptable. I release them into your loving care. Lord Jesus, I choose not to hold on to my resentment. I give up my right to seek revenge and ask you to heal my damaged emotions. Thank you for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I now ask you to bless those who have hurt me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

## #20 Healing Past Trauma

Ever had a near death experience? Or watched a fatal accident? Have you lost a loved one? Or some form of abuse? All of us have experienced trauma -- things that have scarred us emotionally and left us with disturbing baggage. These experiences can be deeply buried in our memories but surface when triggered by an event in the present. These mental strongholds distort our understanding of who we are and who God

is. We remain in bondage to the past, not because of the trauma itself but because of the lies we believed. No one can fix our past but we can be free from it.

Isaiah 6:1-3 reminds of what Jesus has done for us. Stand on this promise today: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,

<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,

the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.

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

God's will for us is complete healing and wholeness. Will you accept the gift? It's a great exchange. Will you trade your ashes for His beauty? You will be a planting of the Lord, for the display of his splendor.

## #21 Forgiving from the Heart

I said I am sorry. I accepted the apology given to me by the friend who had hurt me. But deep inside me, nothing had changed. I had been wronged. She doesn't deserve to be forgiven, I rationalized. I had locked myself in a prison of my own making. I was caged behind bars of bitterness, anger and rage. I thought I had forgiven the person who hurt me. But what I had done was pressed the problem down and tried to ignore it. It wasn't until a two decades later I found out how to forgive from the heart.

Dr. Neil Anderson says, "Unless forgiveness visits the core of your emotions, it is incomplete." Hebrews 4:16 reminds us, "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." God is waiting for us to come to him, he wants to show us mercy. I had years of mental and emotional torment because I had not forgiven from the heart. 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 says, "Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, <sup>11</sup> in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." I had been deceived by Satan to think the person did not deserve to be forgiven. And when I came across the topic of mercy, pondering the mercy God has shown me, I realized I had no other choice. I must show mercy. James 2:13 says, "because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

## #22 Between Us and God

My prayer time felt cold. It seemed like God had turned his back. Had God moved to a new address and hadn't told me where I could visit him? I was detached. The separation between God and I was like a deep ravine. But it wasn't God's fault. I learned how unforgiveness and bitterness are issues that divide. I realized the separation was my fault, I had dug the ravine, putting unwanted space between me and God.

When it comes to forgiveness, the real issue is between us and God. God is the one who commands us to forgive. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Forgiveness was first offered to me by God. After I accepted it, His plan was for me to offer it to others. I forgive for my sake, because God commands me to do it. He knows it is good for me to forgive. Forgiveness is how God our relationship with God stays close and alive. Jeremiah 31:34 says, "I will remember your sins no more." When we forgive, we are trusting God with the wrongs that have been done against us. God will settle every account some day. When we forgive, we are agreeing to live with the other person's sin. We all live with the consequences of someone else's sin. The only choice we have is whether or not it is in the bondage of bitterness or the freedom of forgiveness. When I accepted God's forgiveness, I could forgive myself. What about you?

## #23 Set Free

What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you? I know -- we would rather not go back to that situation, would we? But it is important to settle the score once and for all. Letting go of our hurt and bitterness is setting the captive free and then realizing you were the captive. Forgiveness is an issue between us and God. He commands us to forgive because He loves us.

The Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-15 says, "This is how your should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."

God knows if we hold on to hurt and bitterness, it will poison us and infect others. God doesn't want us to miss out on the abundant life Jesus came to give us. Forgiveness is not about whether we are right or wrong, it is about letting God clean up the junk in our lives. And when we let God clean up our junk, we can walk away from our hurts, habits and hang-ups. Psalm 146:7, "The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners."

God's will for us is wholeness, completeness and liberty. God's plan for our lives is total freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." We can maintain this freedom through praise, worship and the power of His word and prayer. Galatians 5:1, " 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."

## #24 Moving into Purpose

There seems to be a cloud of confusion hovering over today's young people. The new generation has the greatest potential of any to make a difference in history. Yet many wander aimlessly in circles. How could this be? One reason is they are getting more input from the world than they are from God. The ways of the world bring on uncertainty. Time spent reading God's word dissolves confusion. Jeremiah 29:11 says, " 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."

We need to pray. By our authority in Christ, stand in agreement and pray for this generation. We can ask God to break down any barriers keeping them from receiving what God has for their lives. We can ask God to help them to understand His purpose and calling for them. A person who

understands their purpose is directed, desires to grow and has an inner drive to contribute to God's kingdom. Won't you pray for this generation with me?

"Dear Father, we ask you to bring direction and purpose into the lives of our young people today. we pray Ephesians 1:16-18, " I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people."

## #25 Freedom and Liberty

God takes broken people -- broken hearts, broken minds and broken spirits and makes them whole. Jesus death and resurrection bought us freedom. We are liberated, released from everything other than the power of God over us. We are no longer restricted from whatever God wants to do in our lives. Through Christ's provision with this liberation we find our complete wholeness.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our savior, we are immediately set free from slavery to sin. We become slaves of righteousness. Romans 6:18 says, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Ask God to show you any place in your life where you or your loved ones feel trapped.

John 8:31, 32 "If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jesus came to "proclaim liberty to the captives" and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

Let's pray, "Heavenly Father, we ask you would repair the broken lives, families, relationships in our cities. Bring restoration of all that has been lost. Restore lost time, opportunities, health, relationships and anything else that has been stolen. Restore the years the locusts have eaten. Deliver us from anything that hinders the flow of your spirit in us. Let our freedom be evident to those who need Jesus. Let us 'stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, let us not be entangled again by a yoke of slavery." We praise you, "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,

and your glory above all the earth; that your beloved may be delivered. In Jesus' name, amen."

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