



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 13 Overcoming Emotional Suffering

Day One ***Anxiety and Trust***

In Lesson 12, *Why the Bible is Trustworthy*, we explored the reasons we can rely on and live by the Bible's words and message. As divinely inspired, the Bible provides not only a firm foundation for our faith, but a source of joy and hope. Now, as we begin Lesson 13 focusing on suffering, the Bible will continue to play a vital role in our healing and strength.

Unlike physical pain, emotional suffering impacts a person's mental and emotional well-being, often affecting their ability to cope with daily life and maintain healthy relationships. It can lead to a range of emotional responses, including depression, anger, guilt, and a sense of isolation. Sometimes, the source of the pain can be identified and sometimes it cannot. In either case, with severe depression we encourage you to seek professional help and assistance. The brain is a physical part of our body, and like other parts of our body, it may need medical attention.

Definition: *Emotional suffering* refers to the intense psychological pain and anguish that a person experiences due to various factors such as loss, trauma, disappointment, prolonged stress, or spiritual warfare. This form of suffering can manifest in feelings of sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, and a sense of being overwhelmed.

Emotional suffering is a significant issue affecting people, including Christians, worldwide. In 2022, approximately 41% of adults reported experiencing a lot of worry, while 40% felt a high level of stress. Additionally, more than 25% experienced sadness, and just under 25% reported feeling anger.¹

Each of the various forms of emotional suffering can have distinct characteristics and effects on one's well-being and happiness. For instance, women might be more expressive about their feelings, while men may be less open and sometimes manage their stress through anger. Each individual may handle the source of their pain and the pain itself in unique ways.

Why *is* there suffering in the world? Previously, we studied how sin and suffering entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Unit 1: *Who Is God?*,

¹ <[https://news.gallup.com/poll/507725/global-rise-unhappinessstalls.aspx#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20about%20four%20in,fewer%20experienced%20anger%20\(23%25\)>](https://news.gallup.com/poll/507725/global-rise-unhappinessstalls.aspx#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20about%20four%20in,fewer%20experienced%20anger%20(23%25)>)>(accessed 7/29/2024).

Lesson 1: *God Is Good*). Their sin brought brokenness into all aspects of creation including hurtful emotions and poor mental health.

The good news is that Jesus is the solution to pain and suffering—he paid the penalty for sin by dying on the cross. One day, those who belong to Jesus will have all their suffering—including emotional suffering—removed. In the meantime, Christians still live in a fallen world and are vulnerable to its evil effects. Plus, the Bible makes it clear that believers will face all kinds of trials, testing, and spiritual warfare.

During times of suffering there are strategies available to help believers in overcoming emotional suffering. Some of these strategies may be familiar to you, but we can open our hearts to experience them in a new and deeper way. If you have never experienced emotional suffering, please use this lesson to understand others' pain and how you might be of help to them.

In discussing emotional suffering, we will review the life of the prophet Jeremiah, known as “the weeping prophet.” The exact origin of who first coined this title is unclear, but it became a common way to refer to Jeremiah because of his poignant laments and expressions of sorrow found throughout the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations (Jeremiah 9:1, 13:17, 14:17; Lamentations 1:16, 3:48–49). Jeremiah's range of suffering can help us navigate our own feelings and explore ways to heal, thrive, and flourish.

Notice that Jeremiah was called by God and was walking in His will when he endured much of his suffering. This serves as a powerful reminder that we can be faithfully following God's call and still encounter hardship. Experiencing pain while in God's will does not mean we should give up or let suffering defeat us. Instead, our suffering should drive us to a deeper, more fervent pursuit of God through Jesus Christ.

Now that we have defined emotional suffering, let us explore its various forms, starting with anxiety. We will also discuss five strategies for overcoming emotional suffering, the first of which is placing our faith and trust in God.

Types of Emotional Suffering: (1) Anxiety

Definition: *Anxiety* is a state of excessive worry, fear, and apprehension about future events or uncertain situations.

Read Jeremiah 1:4–7 and answer questions 1–3:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” ⁶ “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.” Jeremiah 1:4–7

1. For what reason did the Lord set Jeremiah apart from others (v. 5)?

2. How did Jereimah answer the Lord's call (v. 6)?

3. What was God's reply to Jeremiah's anxiety—the underlying cause of his excuse?

Jeremiah was given a significant job—to be a prophet to the nations. God called him to be His spokesperson to the world. However, Jeremiah was worried that he was not up for the job. Jeremiah felt inadequate because he struggled with speaking and was concerned that people would not listen to him due to his youth. The uncertainty of how he would be received and the enormity of his calling frightened him.

Uncertainty is a source of anxiety. We can be anxious about a great many things whether directly involved in ministry or in the course of our daily lives: *Will I be able to pay my bills this month? Will my child turn from drugs? What is God's will for my life? Will that bully ever leave me alone? Will people like and accept me? Will my loved one survive cancer?*

4. Would you consider yourself a person who suffers from anxiety? Yes No (Underline One)

5. What do you do to alleviate and overcome your anxiety?

For various reasons, individuals may experience anxiety without a clear, identifiable source. As previously mentioned, medical and counseling professionals are trained to address emotional suffering. We recommend seeking referrals from trusted believers and consulting Christian professionals. Keep this guidance in mind as we explore emotional suffering, and consider adopting the following strategies for overcoming it.

Strategies to Overcome Emotional Suffering: (1) Faith and Trust in God

Jeremiah's approach in addressing God as "Sovereign Lord" in Jeremiah 1:6 highlights a crucial aspect of overcoming emotional suffering: recognizing and affirming God's supreme authority. Despite his anxiety about his own abilities, Jeremiah acknowledged that God had the ultimate right to appoint him for His purposes.

No matter what we're facing, God remains in control. As Job 1:21 reminds us, He has the power to give and to take away. Our role is to place our unwavering faith and trust in Him, regardless of our circumstances. Jeremiah's challenge was not just to trust God's authority but also His ability to equip him. In Jeremiah 1:7, God instructed him to set aside his doubts and simply trust in His command. In other words—*no excuses, trust Me and say whatever I command you.*

Read Proverbs 3:5–6 and answer questions 6–9:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5–6

Definition: *Lean on* means to rest or support oneself against something, using it to maintain balance or reduce physical strain. For example, you might lean on a wall to steady yourself or lean on a cane for support while walking. In a figurative sense, *lean on* means to rely on or depend upon someone or something for strength, support, comfort, or assistance.

6. How are we commanded to trust in the Lord (v. 5)?
7. What does it mean to *not* lean on your own understanding (v. 6)?
8. How are we supposed to submit to the Lord (v. 6)?
9. When we trust in the Lord and submit to Him, what does He promise to do (v. 6)?

There are times in life when we do not understand what is happening to us or why the Lord is leading in a certain direction. If we depend solely on our own insight, we may struggle to find clear and accurate answers, as our capacity to comprehend life is limited. Leaning on our own understanding is like depending on a sapling—fragile and inadequate—to support our weight.

This does not mean we should disregard the wisdom God has given us. Rather, we are called to seek God’s guidance first, living life through His plans. True submission to God requires an intimate knowledge of Him and a commitment to obey His will in every aspect of our lives.

God taught Jeremiah this vital lesson—knowing Him is the foundation of wisdom. For thousands of years, this truth has been passed down, and now it comes to us. This understanding leads to a life of righteousness and alignment with God’s will, fulfilling the promise of Proverbs 3:6 that He will “make our paths straight.”

Read Jeremiah 9:23–24 and answer questions 10–11:

This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches,²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23–24

10. How does knowing and understanding God help in overcoming anxiety (v. 24)?
11. How can *you* boast that you have understanding to know God (v. 24)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #1–11 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

Day Two

Betrayal and Identity

Types of Emotional Suffering: (2) Betrayal

Definition: *Betrayal* refers to the act of being disloyal or unfaithful to someone who trusts or depends on you. It often involves breaking trust or confidence, usually by revealing secrets, violating agreements, or failing to support or stand by someone when expected.

Betrayal is a deep form of emotional suffering that strikes directly at our sense of self-worth and identity. It occurs in various contexts, such as professional associations and personal relationships, including friends and family. The emotional toll of betrayal is often significant, as it destroys trust and leads to feelings of hurt, disappointment, and loss.

The greatest betrayal is humanity's disloyalty to God. Although God does not depend on us, our lack of faith and obedience are profound acts of betrayal. The Israelites not only betrayed God through their lack of faith and obedience, but they also engaged in idolatry and sin, breaking the covenant God had established with them when He brought them out of Egypt.

12. How does placing anything above God in our lives betray our relationship with Him?

13. Why is spiritual apathy often seen as a subtle form of betrayal?

In Jeremiah 12:4, the prophet laments the devastating effects of the Israelites breaking their covenant with God, resulting in severe drought and barren fields. This consequence aligns with the covenant curses outlined in Leviticus 26:19–20, where God warns that disobedience will cause the heavens to become like iron and the earth like bronze, leaving the land parched and unproductive. Even the animals and birds suffered because of the Israelites' sins, dying from lack of food and water.

Despite Jeremiah's dutiful preaching against the people's evil ways, they refused to listen. Jeremiah recognized that the people did not believe his warnings—they thought his prophecies were either illusions or that they would outlive Jeremiah and his words. Perhaps, they even planned to kill him. In despair, Jeremiah called out to the Lord asking how long the wicked will prosper while the righteous suffer.

Read Jeremiah 12:4-6 and answer questions 14–17:

How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, "He [Jeremiah] will not see what happens to us." [God's answer] ⁵ "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?" ⁶ Your relatives, members of your

own family—even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.” Jeremiah 12:4-6

14. Does God answer Jeremiah in the way *you* would have expected? Yes No (Underline One)

15. Explain what God is saying to Jeremiah through this proverbial phrase (v. 5a): *“If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?”*

16. Explain what God is saying to Jeremiah through this this proverbial phrase (v. 5b): *“If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?”*

17. Who betrayed Jeremiah (v. 6)?

18. Reflecting on your own life, have you experienced betrayal? How have you managed the pain from that betrayal, and are you still in the process of healing?

Instead of reassuring Jeremiah, God challenges him with a metaphor about a race. God points out that if Jeremiah is already worn out by a small task, like racing against men on foot, he will struggle even more with the greater challenges ahead, symbolized by racing against horses. This stark message emphasizes that Jeremiah needs to build greater endurance and strength to face the more difficult trials that are coming.

The second proverbial saying, about stumbling in a safe country, parallels the first. If Jeremiah is struggling with opposition in his hometown of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, how will he endure when facing even greater dangers? The “thickets by the Jordan” were known for concealing lions, symbolizing the greater threats posed by those in power in Jerusalem. Through this metaphor, God is warning Jeremiah that the challenges ahead will be far more formidable.

This warning serves as a reminder to all of us that no matter the torment or betrayal we endure, we must take God’s advice to prepare our hearts for even greater trials. Life’s difficulties often escalate, and we must build the endurance and faith necessary to withstand the trials that lie ahead. As Hebrews 12:12 exhorts us, *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.*

In Jeremiah 12:6, God reveals to Jeremiah that even his own relatives, members of his own family, have betrayed him. This betrayal is particularly painful because it comes from those who are supposed to be closest to him and the most trustworthy.

The phrase “they have raised a loud cry against you” suggests that Jeremiah’s family members were actively opposing him, possibly by speaking out against him publicly or plotting against him. This “loud cry” could imply accusations, denunciations, or even attempts to undermine his

prophetic ministry. It highlights the intensity of their betrayal—it is not a passive or hidden disloyalty but an aggressive and forceful opposition.

God's warning, "Do not trust them, though they speak well of you," emphasizes the deceitful nature of their actions. Although some may appear to be supportive or kind on the surface, their true intentions are harmful. God is cautioning Jeremiah to be wary of even those who seem to be on his side, as their outward expressions do not match their inward motives.

This verse underscores the theme of betrayal and the pain it causes, especially when it comes from those who should be allies. It also reflects the difficult and isolating path that Jeremiah, as a prophet, must walk, facing opposition not only from strangers but also from his own family.

Jesus understands betrayal intimately. He was not only betrayed by Judas, one of His closest disciples, but also by many of the very people He came to save. Judas's betrayal was particularly painful because it came from someone within His inner circle, a trusted friend. Yet, the pain of betrayal did not end there. At the cross, almost all His disciples abandoned Him, leaving Him alone in His darkest hour.

In these moments of deep betrayal, Jesus remained rooted in His identity as the Son of God. He knew who He was and what He had been sent to accomplish. This profound understanding of His identity allowed Jesus to endure unimaginable suffering and still fulfill His mission.

For us, understanding our identity in Christ is a powerful strategy for overcoming emotional suffering. When we face betrayal, rejection, or abandonment, we can draw strength from knowing who we are in Christ. We are loved, chosen, and redeemed by God. Our value and worth are secure in Him, no matter how others may treat us.

By embracing our identity in Christ, we can navigate the pain of betrayal with grace and resilience, just as Jesus did. In fact, this understanding empowers us to overcome any type of emotional suffering. Having explored faith and trust in God as our first strategy for overcoming emotional suffering, we now turn to our second strategy: embracing our identity in Christ.

Strategies for Overcoming Emotional Suffering: (2) Identity in Christ

(See Unit 4: Disciple of Christ, Lesson 3: Identity in Christ.)

Understanding our identity in Christ empowers us to move forward from disappointments, exclusions, and betrayals. Our peace and joy stem from who we are in Christ, not from how others perceive us. We have the fullness of Christ within us—we share in His divine nature. Jesus provides everything we need to identify with Him, including atonement and forgiveness of sin, resurrection to new life, wisdom, grace, and the powerful help of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we find the strength to forgive and resist the urge to isolate ourselves in response to our hurts. For disciples, our identity is deeply rooted in Christ. He shapes our character and personality as we are continually transformed into His image day by day (Romans 8:29).

This truth is beautifully foreshadowed in the new covenant described in Jeremiah 31:33: *“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

Jeremiah’s prophetic vision of a transformed relationship with God, where His law is written on our hearts, finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The new covenant he foretold ushers in a radical change—no longer centered on external observances but on a deep, internal transformation through the Holy Spirit. This profound shift is further explored in the New Testament, especially in the life and teachings of the apostle Paul.

Paul’s life offers a powerful example of how our identity in Christ can help us endure and rise above betrayals and personal hurts. Despite being abandoned by others (2 Timothy 4:10, 4–16; 2 Corinthians 11:24–26), Paul remained steadfast because his identity and worth were anchored in Christ, not in the approval or support of others.

Being united with the living Christ is the wellspring of our endurance and strength. Paul’s perseverance is a testimony to the power of this union. His trials and sufferings, including betrayals, were overcome by his unwavering faith in Christ. This was a man who understood the blessings believers have in Christ as he expressed in Galatians below.

Read Galatians 4:7 and answer questions 19–20:

“So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” Galatians 4:7

19. What does it mean to you personally to be called a child of God? How does this identity, having God as your Father, influence your understanding of your worth and value?

20. In what ways can the knowledge that you are an heir of God influence how you respond to feelings of betrayal or exclusion?

Action Step

21. Ask Jesus to reveal your true identity and guide you to live fully in Christ.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #12–21 with your discipleship team.

Focus on your eternal identity in Christ rather than on temporary earthly struggles. Shift your focus from present sufferings to the future glory we will share with Christ (Romans 8:18).

—End Day Two—

Day Three

Rejection and Prayer, Peace, Joy

In our study of emotional suffering, we have covered anxiety and betrayal, and now we turn to rejection. Jeremiah endured deep rejection, insults, and shame as he faithfully fulfilled his calling as a prophet. Whether facing rejection for following Christ or for personal reasons, it is never easy.

Types of Emotional Suffering: (3) Rejection

When the priest Pashhur heard Jeremiah prophesy about God's coming judgment due to the people's sins, he responded by having Jeremiah beaten and placed in the stocks near the temple (Jeremiah 20:1–2). The "stocks" refer to a device used in ancient times for punishment and restraint, typically a wooden frame with holes for securing a person's feet, hands, and sometimes neck, forcing them into an uncomfortable and immobilized position. It was a method of public humiliation and physical punishment. Victims might be insulted, kicked, spat upon or subjected to other inhumane acts.

The prophet's obedience to God's word led to rejection, insults, shame, and even physical pain. In Jeremiah 20:7, he accuses the Lord of deceiving him in his calling. The Hebrew word translated as "deceive" can also mean "persuade." Jeremiah did not expect to be prophesying against his own people, nor did he anticipate their hostile reactions or the seemingly lack of divine protection. Had Jeremiah understood all this from the beginning, he might not have been persuaded to take on the prophetic office.

Read Jeremiah 20:7–10 and answer questions 22–25:

You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. ⁸ Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. ⁹ But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore 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 20:7–9

22. What does Jeremiah mean when he says he was "deceived" by the Lord? How might this reflect his inner struggle with his prophetic calling?

23. How does Jeremiah describe the consequences of proclaiming God's message in verse 8? What emotions might he be experiencing as a result?

24. Why was it impossible for Jeremiah to walk away from his responsibility to proclaim God's word (v. 9)?

25. How do you think Jeremiah's experiences of rejection and suffering impacted his relationship with God? Can you relate to a time when following God's will was difficult for you?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #22–25 with your discipleship team.

Whether you face rejection, insults, or shame for sharing God's Word or simply for who you are, these experiences can be deeply traumatic. To overcome this emotional suffering, embrace the two powerful strategies we've studied: trusting in God and embracing our identity in Christ. Additionally, calling out to God in prayer is the third strategy we'll explore together.

Strategies for Overcoming Emotional Suffering: (3) Prayer, Peace, and Joy

(See Unit 3: Christian Leadership, Lesson 12: The Praying Leader)

After bringing his complaints to the Lord—feeling deceived into prophesying, being ridiculed, and finding himself unable to stop prophesying—Jeremiah affirms his confidence in God. His openness in crying out to the Lord underscores his deep commitment to Him.

When we struggle to find words to express our own anguish, we can turn to Jeremiah's prayers. They serve as a powerful pattern for us, much like the Psalms. Both the prophets and the psalmists cried out in their troubles, trusted God, and praised Him for answers they had yet to receive.

Read Jeremiah 20:10–13 and answer questions 26–28:

I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Denounce him! Let's denounce him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him." ¹¹ But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. ¹² LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked. Jeremiah 20:10–13

26. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how severe do you think Jeremiah's emotional suffering was from his description of his circumstances (v. 10)?

27. After describing his fearful circumstances, Jeremiah acknowledges the Lord as being with him like a mighty warrior. How does recognizing God's presence as a protector and defender influence your approach to prayer during times of rejection, insults, and shame?

28. Despite not yet seeing his prayers answered, Jeremiah bursts out in praise to the Lord for rescuing the life of the needy (v. 13). How can this serve as a pattern for your own prayer life?

Jeremiah did not take revenge on his enemies but entrusted justice to the Lord, praying to see God's righteousness prevail. In the New Covenant, Jesus radically redefines how believers are to treat their enemies. We are called to love, bless, and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14, 17–19). Instead of repaying evil with evil or seeking revenge, we are to care for our enemies and respond to wrongdoing with blessing (Romans 12:20–21; 1 Peter 3:9).

Jeremiah prophesied about the coming of Christ, who would ultimately fulfill God's promise of a righteous Savior (Jeremiah 23:5–6). This prophecy points to the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, highlighting the unfolding of God's redemptive plan that brings both salvation and justice to His people.

Jesus not only brings salvation and justice, but He is also the primary way God communicates with us today. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in various ways, but in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2).

How does God speak to us through Jesus today?

- **Through Scripture:** The teachings of Jesus are recorded in the Bible for us to read, learn, and apply in our lives (Matthew 7:24–27). His words are living and active, guiding us in truth (Hebrews 4:12).
- **Through the Holy Spirit:** When we receive Jesus as our Savior, His Spirit dwells within us. He leads, teaches, reminds, speaks, and reveals God's will and truth to our hearts (John 14:26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13; Ephesians 1:17–18).
- **Through Prayer:** We have direct access to God through prayer. Jesus intercedes for us, and through prayer, we can hear God's voice and receive His guidance (Hebrews 4:14–16, Romans 8:34).

Moreover, Jesus deeply understands our emotions because He experienced emotional suffering firsthand. He walked the earth in a human body, feeling the full range of human emotions. He invites us to bring our hurts and heartaches to Him, offering comfort and compassion as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37).

Action Step

29. Read John 14:27. What is Jesus saying to *you* and what is *your* reply?

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

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #26–29 with your discipleship team.

The world offers a form of peace that is often temporary, conditional, and dependent on external circumstances. It might come through material comfort, favorable conditions, or superficial tranquility. However, Jesus contrasts His peace with the world's, indicating that what He offers is enduring and not tied to external situations.

Jesus offers a peace that is uniquely His. This peace is not merely the absence of conflict or trouble—it is a deep, abiding sense of well-being and security that comes from being in relationship with Him. It is the kind of peace that sustains through rejection, insults, and shame.

Inner peace is also a promise for us to appropriate or seize in Christ Jesus. Previously in Unit 4, we studied the New Covenant and how Jesus' death on the cross activated God's promises to believers (*New Covenant*, Lesson 6). Reverently remind God of His promises for peace, no matter what the circumstances. Prayer is the pathway to God's promise for peace

30. Read Philippians 4:6–7. What is God's promise regarding any and all situations?

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6–7

The Bible tells us that Jesus Himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). Our part to play as Jesus' disciple is to keep our focus on Him and concentrate on right thinking. It takes practice and help from the Holy Spirit—do not give up. It is the same with joy. Even in rejection and insults, we can be joyful. Why? Because *the joy of the Lord is my strength* (Nehemiah 8:10).

Joy is not in the way we are treated or not treated, it is within us. It is God within us. Even in the Old Testament, God's people were to derive their happiness in His presence.

31. Read Psalm 16:11. What is the path of life and where does joy come from?

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11

32. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Who takes great delight in you and rejoices over you with singing?

The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17

Rejection, shame, feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness are satanic tactics. Demons want us to take our eyes off the Lord and look at our ourselves or our human antagonists. They know that as God's creation—*the joy of the Lord is our strength*.

However, this is where we can take a wrong turn. We let the devil's tactics work and allow others to steal our joy by placing our thoughts on ourselves or others. Do not place your happiness into another's hand. Whether it is for two minutes or two years—delayed joy is lost joy. It is lost forever—we cannot return to the past to reclaim happiness. Be strong in joy today.

Read Hebrews 12:1–3 and answer questions 33–38:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1–3 (The Greek word translated scorn means to disregard, be unafraid, take no account of, and have disdain or contempt for personal hazard.)

Definition: *Great cloud of witnesses* are previously mentioned individuals in Hebrews 11 who bear testimony to the life of faith. The author of Hebrews is encouraging believers to look to the examples of those who have gone before them, drawing strength from their faithful endurance. This *great cloud of witnesses* inspire disciples to cast off sin and distractions and to run our race of faith with perseverance, knowing others have done the same.

33. Does the “great cloud of witnesses” encourage us to persevere in our faith despite suffering? (v. 1)? Yes | No (Underline One)

34. What was set before Jesus as He endured the cross (v. 2)?

35. What did Jesus do about the shame of being crucified as a criminal, spit upon, and cursed publicly (v. 2)?

36. How can we persevere and run the race marked out for us, even when we undergo emotional suffering (v. 1b–2)?

God does not promise believers protection from physical harm or suffering in this life. Instead, He promises spiritual protection, the safeguarding of our souls, and the assurance of eternal life. Suffering and trials are part of living in a fallen world, but through Jesus Christ, believers are guaranteed ultimate victory and eternal security in God’s kingdom. God’s concern is not primarily our physical safety but our eternal salvation and sanctification. In this we rejoice.

37. Read 1 Peter 4:12–13. Why can we rejoice in every situation?

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12–13

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #30–37 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

Day Four
Depression and Hope

Types of Emotional Suffering: (4) Depression

Definition: *Depression* is a mental health condition characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest or pleasure in activities, often accompanied by physical symptoms such as changes in sleep, appetite, and energy levels. There are degrees of *depression*, from mild to severe, and it can happen to anyone.

After praising the Lord for rescuing his life and feeling a moment of optimism, Jeremiah quickly spirals into a deep depression. He curses the day of his birth and wishes he had never been born. His despair reflects a profound sense of hopelessness, sorrow, and emotional pain. This sudden shift from joy to despair highlights the unpredictable nature of emotional suffering, where moments of relief can be fleeting, and we can find ourselves stumbling back into a prison of grief.

Jeremiah is an example of being in God's will, yet still experiencing depression and other kinds of emotional suffering. However, there are other biblical examples like David, whose depression came from his trying to conceal his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 32:3–4). Therefore, examine your heart and make sure you are not concealing sin. If you are in sin—confess, repent, and find mercy in Christ Jesus.

Jeremiah's experience mirrors our own struggles with emotional suffering. Just when we think we are on the mend, the weight of grief can overwhelm us again, making us feel trapped in despair. His lament below in Jeremiah 20 reminds us of the deep and often cyclical nature of depression, where even after glimpses of relief and even strength, the battle with sorrow returns.

Definition: *Laments* in the Bible are a form of literary expression found in both poetry and prose, characterized by a deep and sorrowful cry to God in the midst of suffering, distress, or grief. Biblical *laments* can be found in the Psalms, the Book of Lamentations, and the prophetic writings, such as those of Jeremiah. They serve as a way for the faithful to express their pain honestly and openly to God while still holding onto their faith in His ultimate goodness and justice.

Read Jeremiah 20:10–13 and answer questions 38–40:

Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! ¹⁵ Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, "A child is born to you—a son!" ¹⁶ May that man be like the towns the LORD overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning, a battle cry at noon. ¹⁷ For he did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave, her womb enlarged forever. ¹⁸ Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame? Jeremiah 20:14–18

38. Why can Jeremiah 20:14–18 be described as a lament?

39. Reflect on a time when you have felt overwhelmed by grief, despair, or a sense of hopelessness. How did those feelings compare to Jeremiah's lament and what helped you navigate through it?

40. Consider how Jeremiah's raw and honest outpouring of emotion demonstrates the depth of human suffering and the importance of bringing our deepest struggles to God. How did Jeremiah keep his relationship with God central in his life?

By keeping God central in his life, Jeremiah was rewarded with His words that offer hope to all generations. While God's promise in Jeremiah 29:11 was originally given to the exiled Israelites and Jeremiah, its truth continues to this day providing hope to believers everywhere. As we examine these verses, remember that seeking help from a Christian counselor or other professionals may be appropriate and even necessary.

However, even when working with a professional to overcome emotional suffering, continue to practice the three strategies we have discussed: trust in God, embrace your identity in Christ, and pray. Additionally, learn and apply the fourth strategy: hope.

Strategies for Overcoming Emotional Suffering: (4) Hope

What do we mean by hope? We do not mean a desire or wish for something to happen but a confident expectation and trust in God's promises and faithfulness. It is a firm assurance that God will fulfill His promises and that His plans for us are good.

Christian hope is rooted in the character of God—His unchanging nature and His commitment to His people through His covenant. It involves looking forward to future fulfillment with certainty, based on the reliability of God's Word and past faithfulness. This hope provides encouragement and strength in the face of trials and uncertainties, trusting that God is working for our ultimate good and His glory.

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14 and answer questions 41–45:

"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."¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." Jeremiah 29:11-14

41. What kind of plans did the Lord have for the exiled Israelites and for you (v. 11)?

42. When we call on God and pray to Him, what does He promise to do (v. 12)?

43. What is our part in seeking and finding the Lord (v. 13)?
44. If the Israelites sought the Lord with all their hearts, what did He promise to do (vv. 13–14)?
45. When you have been held captive by depression and sought the Lord with all your heart what does He promise to do for you (v. 14)?

Jeremiah's experience of finding hope in God's promises reminds us that even in our darkest times, God is near. Just as He was close to Jeremiah, He is close to us during our struggles. Psalm 34:18 shows us that God is always with the brokenhearted, offering hope and salvation when we feel crushed in spirit. This connection reminds us that God's promise to be with us is constant, no matter what we face.

46. Read Psalm 34:18. How does the Lord stay close to the brokenhearted, and in what ways does this bring us hope?

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
Psalm 34:18

God is omnipresent, meaning He is everywhere and always with us. When David says the Lord is close to the brokenhearted, he is highlighting that God manifests Himself in a special way during our times of deepest need. For those who are crushed or humble in spirit, He is ready to listen and graciously help them overcome their suffering. In His love, God walks with us through our pain and guides us toward healing.

Just as God gave hope to His people through the old covenant, He continues to offer hope to His children through the new covenant. God does not change and He is still our source of hope. This hope is not rooted in human wisdom, plans, or agendas, but in God Himself, as Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 1:9–10. So when we succeed in overcoming our depression or challenges, we should never attribute it to our own abilities, skills or wisdom, but to the provision, goodness, and deliverance of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:9–10 and answer questions 47–50:

Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us . . .
2 Corinthians 1:9–10

47. Why did Paul say he and his companions felt they had received the sentence of death (v. 9)?

48. What does Paul say about God's deliverance (v. 10a)?

49. On whom does Paul and his companions set their hope (v. 10b)?

Action Steps

50. How can *you* help other believers regain their hope in God during their trials?

51. Pray with and for each of your discipleship team members, asking God to fill their lives with hope, trusting that He is always working for our ultimate good and His glory. I have prayed with my team. Yes No (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #47–50 and pray with your team #51.

After exploring anxiety, betrayal, rejection, and depression, we recognize that emotional suffering also manifests through grief and loss. This deep sorrow follows the death of a loved one, a significant life change, or the loss of something valuable. Symptoms may include intense sadness, longing, disbelief, and yearning for what has been lost.

Types of Emotional Suffering: (5) Grief and Loss

Jeremiah experienced deep grief and loss as he mourned his people being taken into exile. In Jeremiah 8:18–22, God reveals to Jeremiah the future cries of the Jews in captivity, as they and Jeremiah wonder why the Lord is not coming to their aid.

God answers Jeremiah and the Jew's future cries of loss. They had sinned against God by worshiping foreign gods and idols—this was the reason they were being exiled. Despite being innocent of these sins, Jeremiah still felt profound anguish over their fate. Jeremiah's anguish reflects the pain that can arise without personal guilt.

Read Jeremiah 8:18–22 and answer questions 52–54:

You who are my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. ¹⁹ Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they aroused my anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?" ²⁰ "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved." ²¹ Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. ²² Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Jeremiah 8:18–22

Definitions: *Oil or Balm of Gilead* is a healing ointment made from the resin of a plant found in the region of Gilead, renowned for its soothing and medicinal properties in ancient times. In

Jeremiah 8:22, the “*balm in Gilead*” symbolizes the hope for healing and restoration, questioning whether there is any remedy left for the people’s sufferings.

52. Even in Jeremiah’s lament, to whom does he always turn (v. 18)?

53. Why is Jeremiah crushed, mourning, and gripped by horror (v. 21)?

54. When have you asked God, *Why is there no healing and peace for me?*

When grief cuts into your heart so deeply that you can hardly breath, cry out to the Lord for His grace—His divine favor and mercy. This is the fifth strategy for overcoming emotional suffering. Plead for God’s grace and remind Him of His gracious nature.

Strategies for Overcoming Emotional Suffering: (5) Grace

Definition: *Grace* is God’s divine power and love in action to undeserving people (Hebrews 12:15). It is also part of God’s character and includes His favor and mercy. The height (pinnacle) of God’s *grace* is Jesus Christ.

55. Read Jeremiah 33:6. God promises to rescue His people from captivity. How does He describe it?

“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.” Jeremiah 33:6

56. Read Matthew 5:4. How is God gracious to those who mourn?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4

God’s grace is present and powerful in times of grief and loss, offering comfort, healing, and hope. Through His grace, God sent us Jesus, the Great Healer and Physician. Jesus embodies the comfort and grace that God provides to those who are grieving. In fact, Jesus’ blood could be considered the balm of Gilead, bringing God’s people spiritual and emotional healing. Cry out to the Lord for grace, grace, and more grace in times of loss, grief and any other kind of suffering.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #52–56 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Loneliness and Relationships

In Day Four, we learned through Jeremiah that even during judgment and suffering, God's grace is present, offering hope, healing, and a future for His people. Not only did Jeremiah pour out his heart in lament, but he also praised God because of His grace, mercy, and faithfulness. In fact, the words of Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:22–23 was the inspiration for one of Christianity's best known and most enduring hymns, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

The hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," was written by Thomas Obadiah Chisholm in 1923 and set to music by William M. Runyan. Thomas was born in a log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky, in 1866 and led a humble life as a schoolteacher, journalist, and later as a pastor. Throughout his life, Thomas experienced periods of illness and financial difficulties, yet he always maintained a deep trust in God's faithfulness. His personal experience with God's constant provision and care, even during hard times, inspired him to write this hymn.

Thomas was not a prolific hymn writer by profession, but he wrote over a thousand poems, some of which were set to music. In writing the hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," Chisholm wanted to convey the unchanging, dependable nature of God's care, which he had witnessed firsthand in his own life. It is a hymn of gratitude and trust, celebrating God's daily mercies and His enduring faithfulness, a message rooted in the verses of Lamentations.²

Action Step

Read Lamentations 3:22–23 and answer questions 57–59:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22–23 (Consumed is to be destroyed, perish, waste away, or become weak.)

57. Why are we not consumed (v. 22)?

58. How do these verses help to shine forth God's grace for you each morning?

59. Memorize Lamentations 3:22–23.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #57–58 and memory verse #59.

Grief and loss can often lead to another type of emotional suffering—loneliness. Life transitions such as a new job, relocation, or divorce can also cause periods of isolation. However, sometimes our sense of aloneness feels inexplicable, as if we are disconnected and unloved, even when surrounded by others.

² <<https://www.hymncharts.com/2022/08/15/the-story-behind-great-is-thy-faithfulness/>>(accessed 9/7/2024).

Types of Emotional Suffering: (6) Loneliness and Relationships

Loneliness is a complex emotional state marked by a profound sense of isolation, even in the presence of others. It often arises from a perceived lack of meaningful connection or companionship, though it can also result from a genuine absence of relationships. Loneliness may be temporary, tied to specific life events, or chronic, persisting over extended periods.

For example, read the following post from an unnamed individual:

I've been suffering from chronic loneliness all my life and I haven't been able to break out of it. It's starting to feel like a curse of some kind. No one wants to be my friend or be affiliated with me because then others will start avoiding them. I'm 27 years old and still can't turn this issue around. How do I lift this curse and if I can't, how do I continue to live life all alone? It's extremely painful to know no one cares about me and that I'll never have a family. What does the Bible say about loneliness that just won't go away?³

Although some caring and helpful responses were offered on Reddit, the young man never replied. The above example is included in this lesson because his heartfelt words might resonate with you or someone you know. We do not know whether he truly has no one in his life or if he simply feels that way, but the pain is real either way.

When experiencing loneliness or a lack of healthy relationships, it is important to consider our own role in it. Are we unknowingly pushing people away? Often, we may not realize how we affect others, which is why it can be helpful to ask others for feedback. Try to choose people who are kind and can offer truth with grace, without being hurtful or harsh.

60. Have you ever experienced an unhealthy relationship that you needed to end? What led you to make that decision, and how did it impact your life afterward?

Many men and women in the Bible faced loneliness—Elijah (1 Kings 19:1–14), David (Psalm 25, 42, 69), Paul (2 Timothy 4:16), Leah (Genesis 29:31–35), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1–20), and Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18), including Jeremiah. What did they do about it? They found comfort and strength in their relationship with God during their time of loneliness.

Read Jeremiah 15:16–18 and answer questions 61–59:

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, LORD God Almighty. ¹⁷ I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸ Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails. Jeremiah 15:16–18 (Revelers engage in loud and unrestrained behavior.)

³<https://www.reddit.com/r/Christianity/comments/12c7dby/what_does_the_bible_say_about_overcoming_being/<(accessed 9/9/2024).

- 61.** What does it mean to “eat” the Lord’s words and to bear God’s name (v. 16)?
- 62.** How is Jeremiah’s “eating” the Lord’s words similar or different from the teaching “not live on bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)?
- 63.** Why did Jeremiah not spend time with the revelers or attend merry festivals (v.17)?
- 64.** How does Jeremiah describe the pain of his loneliness (v. 18)?

Action Step

- 65.** Meditate on Jeremiah 15:16–18, asking God to speak to you through His word. Record what you feel God impressed upon your heart.

When Jeremiah was called by God, he took God’s words to heart, absorbing them like food into his life. They brought him joy, and he delighted in serving the Lord. Yet, serving God came with hardship. Jeremiah faced persecution, rejection, and loneliness. He faithfully stood apart from those who reveled in sin and was filled with righteous indignation at their behavior.

Jeremiah also struggled with feelings of abandonment. Though God promised to rescue him (Jeremiah 1:8), the rescue did not come in the way Jeremiah expected. He expressed his frustration, comparing God to a deceptive brook or a spring that fails—like a thirsty traveler who finds no water in a dried-up stream.

God had not abandoned Jeremiah—His words are always true. The prophet needed to trust in God, aligning with our first strategy for overcoming emotional suffering: trusting in His character and promises. Along with trust, we have explored other key strategies: embracing your identity in Christ, prayer that incorporates peace and joy, hope, and grace. Now, we turn to the final strategy—relationships.

Strategies for Overcoming Emotional Suffering: (6) Relationships

Jeremiah was never truly abandoned—God was always with him, just as He is with us. Our most important relationship is with God. While we naturally long for the presence of others we can see, hear, and touch, God often calls us to first deepen our relationship with Him before we can fully engage in meaningful earthly relationships.

When Jeremiah cried out in distress, God responded, but not in the way Jeremiah might have expected. Instead of offering immediate relief, God called Jeremiah to repent of his distrust and

reminded him of his purpose. God reassured him of His presence and strength, but also challenged Jeremiah to stand firm in his faith.

Read Jeremiah 15:19–21 and answer questions 66–67:

Therefore this is what the LORD says: “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.”²⁰ I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you,” declares the LORD.²¹ “I will save you from the hands of the wicked and deliver you from the grasp of the cruel.” Jeremiah 15:19–21

66. How does the Lord respond to Jeremiah’s complaint (v. 19)?

67. Had Jeremiah spoken irreverently to the Lord? Yes No (Underline One)

God promised Jeremiah restoration, guiding him back to a right relationship with Himself. Jeremiah’s strength and purpose would be renewed as he continued to serve God. Likewise, our relationship with God, strengthened through His Word, directs our path and keeps us grounded..

The Bible also reminds us that we are not alone—we have a relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15), and the Holy Spirit lives within us (1 Corinthians 6:19). We honor these divine relationships by seeking godly friendships with people who also reflect our connection to God. Pray and ask God for help in forming and keeping godly and joyful friendships.

Jesus Himself experienced deep loneliness and emotional suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46), He faced His darkest hour alone, as His disciples slept. On the cross, Jesus endured the ultimate isolation, crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

Cling to Jesus in your moments of loneliness. Even in your pain, nothing is wasted. Your experience may open the door to new relationships, allow you to comfort others who are also struggling with isolation and loneliness, and most important to deepen your friendship with God.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #60–67 with your discipleship team.

We decided to include an additional section addressing another important aspect of emotional suffering—addictions. This topic often intersects with physical suffering and deserves thoughtful attention. While our Bible lessons are typically divided into five days, we are adding a sixth day to briefly explore this significant issue.

—End of Day Five —

Day Six

Addictions and Bad Habits

The enticements of drugs, food, alcohol, sex, gambling, or co-dependency can feel impossible to overcome. Perhaps you or someone you know struggles with one of these snares. Addiction vividly illustrates the danger of a hardened heart, where sin becomes so entrenched in a person's life that their entire being becomes resistant to God.

Definitions: *Co-dependency* is a psychological condition in which a person is controlled or manipulated by another who is affected by an addiction (e.g., alcohol or drugs). Broadly, it is dependence on another's needs or control. *Addiction* on the other hand, occurs when someone's body or mind becomes dependent on a substance or behavior, leading to withdrawal symptoms if deprived. Over time, tolerance develops, forcing the person to seek increasingly larger doses to achieve the same effect.⁴

“Addiction is a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (alcohol, cocaine, nicotine) or engages in an activity (gambling) that can be pleasurable but the continued use of which becomes compulsive and interferes with ordinary life responsibilities, such as work or relationships, even health. Users may not be aware that their behavior is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others.”⁵

There may be horrible circumstances that have contributed to a person's becoming addicted to drugs, food, alcohol, sex, gambling, or co-dependency. We live in a fallen world and the satanic crew may have enticed your parents or those close to you to harm you in some way.

For example, a study from the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that among 196 individuals being treated for alcohol dependence, 24% of men and 33% of women reported childhood physical abuse, while 12% of men and 49% of women experienced sexual abuse.⁶

Abuse is a painful tragedy that causes real heartache. Perhaps you experienced abuse as a child and wonder why God allowed it. While He is sovereign and could have stopped it, God also allows humanity the freedom to choose between right and wrong, between Jesus and Satan. The person who harmed you chose to sin against you and God. Unless they repent and turn to Jesus, they face eternal judgment. Yet, as disciples of Christ, we are called to pray for our enemies, desiring their repentance as God does (2 Peter 3:9).

God has a plan for your life, even amid suffering. He can use your pain to bring healing and hope to others. Embracing both good and bad circumstances glorifies God, which is our ultimate purpose (1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 10:31). However, accepting past trials does not mean God wants them to define your future. Pray and seek His will—He desires to heal and soften your heart.

⁴ American Physiological Association website: <http://www.apa.org/topics/addiction/index.aspx>

⁵ Psychology Today website: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/addiction>

⁶ Roan, Shari, Los Angeles Times, For the Booster Shots blog, 2012.

Jesus loves *you*! He bore your sins and mine on the cross, proving His deep care for every aspect of your life. Today, ask Him to reveal how much He loves and values you.

Perhaps you are not battling addiction but struggle with bad habits. Remember, bad habits are often sins. For instance, while reading the Bible daily is a good habit, indulging in media that dishonors God through greed, violence, or profanity is a bad one.

Avoiding people and relationships can also be a harmful habit. If you have suffered abuse, trusting others may be hard. Or, you may lack social skills or struggle to connect. It is easy to think, *Give me Jesus, but keep His people* or *Ministry is great, except for the people*. Yet relationships matter deeply to God and are part of His design for growth and healing.

Whatever your struggle, whether addiction or a “small” habit, change requires a willing heart. We might think, *Well it’s just a little thing and it doesn’t really matter*. But it really does matter: *You and I must love Jesus more than our sinful habits, addictions or deeds*.

68. What do addictions or bad habits reveal about one’s relationship with Jesus?

When we cling to sinful habits, no matter how small they seem, we are choosing self or sin over Jesus. We ignore God’s voice and turn away from the joy and power of His presence. This choice leads to an unfulfilled, ineffective life that misses God’s best for us.

Breaking free from bad habits or addictions is never easy. Sin is a strong enemy, even when we genuinely desire to put Jesus first. Divine power is essential to breaking the chains of addiction.

There is also a physical aspect to addiction that makes it particularly challenging. According to Dr. Nora Volkow, *Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse*, drugs alter the brain, and these changes can persist long after someone stops using them.

The key player is dopamine, a chemical that regulates the brain’s pleasure center. Dopamine sends signals to receptors, producing feelings of pleasure. For example, cocaine addicts shown images of nature experienced no dopamine changes, but pictures of cocaine use caused a sharp dopamine increase. This surge motivates behavior, driving the addict toward substances or actions they believe will bring pleasure—whether drugs, alcohol, food, or gambling.⁷

God created our bodies to experience pleasure and joy in Him. However, habitual sin confuses our dopamine signals, deceiving us about what brings true happiness. Dr. Volkow’s research also shows that dopamine receptors diminish in addicts, whether their substance of choice is heroin, cocaine, alcohol, or nicotine. As receptors shut down, the brain struggles to feel pleasure, and addicts eventually use substances just to feel “normal.”

⁷ “Hooked: Why bad habits are hard to break”, script aired on CBS April 29, 2012. Morley Safer, correspondent. http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57423321/hooked-why-bad-habits-are-hard-to-break/

Addiction can also damage the brain's frontal cortex—the region responsible for decision-making and exercising free will. When impaired, it becomes harder to make wise choices.

Yet, God's power to heal and restore knows no limits. He may heal instantly, through medical intervention, or over time. God equips doctors, counselors, and therapists to help in these situations, and seeking their assistance is a wise and God-honoring choice.

God's methods and timing are unique for each person. Some may find freedom through years of struggle, while others experience miraculous healing. Regardless, we can trust that God will guide us perfectly in His love and wisdom.

If you or someone you know is struggling with additions, review the strategies we discussed earlier for overcoming emotional suffering: faith and trust in God, identity in Christ, prayer, hope, grace, and relationships. Ultimately, true freedom comes from Christ. Scripture reminds us that through Him, we are no longer slaves to sin but have been set free to live in righteousness.

Read Romans 6:18–19 and answer questions 69–71:

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. ¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. Romans 6:18–19

69. What does the apostle Paul tell Christians they have been set free from (v. 18a)?

70. What are Christians now slaves to (v. 18b)?

71. How are we to offer ourselves and what does it lead to (v. 19c)?

Believers are set free from sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. This freedom includes victory over bad habits, addictions, and any form of evil that seeks to enslave us. As disciples of Christ, we must consciously decide each day to offer our bodies to Jesus and live in His righteousness.

Righteousness comes through the blood of the New Covenant. We studied its terms and benefits earlier in *Lesson 6: The New Covenant*. These promises equip us to overcome deadly addictions and sinful habits.

However, claiming God's promises does not always mean an instant fix. God may work through physicians, counselors, or others to bring healing and sanctification. Be open to the Spirit's leading and His unique plan for your life.

This principle is evident in the Old Testament. When King Hezekiah became gravely ill, the prophet Isaiah told him to prepare for death. In response, Hezekiah prayed earnestly to the Lord, who used Isaiah in the healing process and extended his life by fifteen years.

Read 2 Kings 20:2–5 and answer questions 44–46:

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ “Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴ Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: ⁵ “Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. ⁶ I will add fifteen years to your life . . . 2 Kings 20:2–6a

72. What does Hezekiah ask God to remember (v. 3)?

73. When we pray for God to act through the promises of the New Covenant, what should we ask God to remember?

74. Why did God decide to heal Hezekiah (v. 5)?

While God’s decision to heal Hezekiah was based on His mercy and hearing his prayer, the process of healing involved a practical step of obedience.

75. Read 2 Kings 20:7. What was the process for Hezekiah to be healed?

Then Isaiah said, “Prepare a poultice of figs.” They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered. 2 Kings 20:7 (A poultice is a moist substance applied to the skin to relieve pain or draw out infection.

God may heal immediately or through a process, or He may choose not to heal. However, Hezekiah’s story shows that prayer can influence God’s decisions, as He extended Hezekiah’s life. Be open to God’s healing and transformation, trusting in His faithfulness and sovereign rule in every area of life.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #68–75 with your discipleship team.

—End of Day Six and Lesson 13—

Next—Lesson 14: Fear the Lord, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

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