

# PHASE ONE: FACING REALITY OF BONDAGE

## LESSON FOUR:

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten.” Our coping strategies have kept us trapped in cycles of failure and unrealistic expectations. We need to accept God’s truth, not “my truth”. We identify the lies we’ve believed and choose to live in strength, not weakness. 2 Cor. 1:8-9: “We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it...we saw how powerless we were to help ourselves, but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God.” Rom. 7:15-17, Prov. 29:25

### NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 4 STOP THE CYCLE

Maybe you’ve heard the saying, “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten.” We may laugh at the obviousness of that, but how many of us have been using the same actions or beliefs to handle every situation that’s difficult? Do we procrastinate or avoid dealing with it at all, choosing some method of escape? Do we jump in to rescue another person so we can feel useful or important? Are we stuck in a cycle of beating ourselves up for not handling everything perfectly? There are so many ways to endlessly repeat destructive patterns instead of believing that we could be different, and none of them come from God. It’s like being on a hamster wheel, using a whole lot of energy to go nowhere.

Paul tells us what it’s like to live inside this maze of frustration in Galatians 5:16-17:” So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.” There’s that nature again, insisting that we should be able to manage everything ourselves, but if we’re honest, we know we aren’t really making things better. We just keep thinking that this time will be different.

It’s become popular to focus on “my truth.” That means each of us can operate on our own version of the truth, usually at odds with others. Using this as a basis for making decisions keeps us at the mercy of our own views, which are being increasingly shaped by the world and spiritual forces that aren’t working for our good. These views are changeable and can shift dramatically, leaving us unstable. We may try new things that still aren’t helpful because they remain based on our opinions. God’s solution is to give us His truth as revealed in His Word. It hasn’t changed because He doesn’t change.

Jesus describes this situation in Matthew 7:24-27. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came

down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

We may have built our lives on the mindset of “This is as good as it gets.” We don’t believe that anything can really change, so we settle for less. What we’ve been doing may not be working, but change might bring something worse. What if we try something new and mess up? More disappointment is the last thing we want. Satan is more than willing to keep us fearful and uncertain, even thinking that we don’t deserve better outcomes because of who we are or what we’ve done. Keeping us focused on the condemnation of our performance, past and present, is his goal. He wants us to ignore the power of God that’s available to make changes happen.

Many of our problems start with lies we’ve believed that have twisted how we see ourselves and our relationships. Proverbs 29:25 says, “Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety.” Why? Because only God has a pure view. Each of us sees a world shaped through input that we’ve accepted as true, either from our own ideas or those that have been put on us by someone else. When we act out of fear of what someone else may think, we’re setting their opinions above God’s. Then we’ll try to measure up to standards that can be very different than the ones God has when He looks at us. We focus on our actions instead of our identities as God’s sons and daughters.

People evaluate us on what they see, but 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us, “...The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” And He’s the only one who really knows what’s going on in our hearts. Assumptions are made every day based on an interpretation of what we see that’s colored by whatever has shaped us. How many times have you misread a situation and found out that what you thought you saw wasn’t accurate? That can lead to conflicts, avoidance and broken relationships. It can also lead to unrealistic expectations of ourselves and other people, setting us up for more disappointment, frustration and anger.

The good news is that even when we’re confused and getting far off track by following our own ideas, Paul reminds us in Hebrews 13:5-6: “for He Himself has said, ‘I will never abandon you,’ so that we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’” We may be rejected by people when the results of our assumptions and expectations blow up in our faces, but God is ready to talk it over with us so we can find His truth and see things from His perspective. We become more comfortable having these conversations when we spend more time with Him, getting to know Him at a deeper level.

If we’ve experienced abandonment, abuse or condemnation from another person, this verse may be hard to trust. There will be a lot of lies that have kept us from understanding that we can have a secure place with God. We believe that He’ll get tired of us and leave us to fend for ourselves. These lies are being used to hold us in patterns of weakness, trusting on our own resources for relief. Paul shares the tough times he endured while ministering in Asia in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9. “We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it. We saw how powerless we were to help

ourselves, but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God". Paul saw his weakness as an opportunity to recognize that his life was sustained by God, no matter what kind of intentions Satan had to destroy him. He could acknowledge his limitations without shame and look forward to accomplishing his plans with God's help.

Psalm 31:7 says, "I will rejoice and be glad in Your faithfulness, because You have seen my misery, You have known the troubles of my soul." This is where we are. We can come to God and tell Him we see how being in charge has resulted in more hurt. Ignoring the causes of the hurt has made real, lasting freedom impossible. It will take His wisdom and our openness to stop the cycle of denial. We can stop relying on other sources of direction and finally break free from creating more damage.

He is faithful to keep His promises to help us, regardless of how worthy we feel of receiving His help. He shows us how misguided our efforts have been because of faulty ideas we held as truth. He helps us understand what we've believed and why. He sees the whole view of our lives and encourages us to look at it too, not getting discouraged or sidetracked by each failure. He provides the grace to deliver and we take steps of faith to believe Him and act on what He does. This is the source of our confidence and hope in taking those new steps. It also gives us the motivation to keep going in this process. It's important to acknowledge every move we make to change, no matter how small it may seem.

#### Scripture references

Matthew 7:24-27, Proverbs 29:25, 1 Samuel 16:7, Hebrews 13:5-6, 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, Psalm 31:7