

PHASE TWO: TAKING ACTION TO GET FREE

LESSON EIGHT:

We ask God to reveal the things we've hidden or ignored and prepare our hearts and minds to change, confronting any internal responses that attempt to hold us back. We seek prayer support to strengthen us for this process.

Lamentations 3:40 "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Job 33:33, Job 7:11, Rom. 8:1, John 1:9

NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 8

We're going to ask God to reveal the things we've stuffed down in our hearts and for His help in pulling them out into the light. We're ready to admit to the attitudes and actions that have kept us from living in honesty. We're going to apply Lamentations 3:40, which says, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord." This examination may reveal some ugly truths, but the good news is that we don't have to keep them. Once they're out in the open, we can choose to trade them in for different truths based on what God has been showing us in His word.

Taking this step can unleash a lot of emotions that can make us uncomfortable. Most of us have been good at avoiding them by going to our coping strategies instead. We've been afraid of all of the guilt we would feel if we owned up to how we've handled our pain and the way it's hurt us and the other people in our lives. Satan loves to magnify this guilt and watch us beat ourselves up with it. We call ourselves worthless, hopeless and all kinds of other names that keep us from believing we can change.

But God takes a different approach. Instead of using a guilty conscience as a trap, He shows us that it can be the push that we need to repent and go a different way, like the prodigal son did in Luke 15. He doesn't want guilt to be a permanent part of our lives. In Romans 8:1, we are assured, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Our acceptance of Jesus as Savior means we believe He has paid fully for all of our sins and doesn't hold them against us anymore. When Satan comes back with the garbage of your past, you should remind him that it's covered and his weapon is useless.

We're going into new territory now that isn't familiar and may even seem threatening. That's how the Israelites looked at the land God had promised them. He told them to go in and claim it, but all they could see were the dangers ahead. Joshua was chosen to take Moses' place and he needed to confirm his trust God so he could be a successful leader. With God's assurance of remaining and helping them fight their battles, he could encourage the people in chapter 1:9, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." This is another great example

of seeing how God took people right where they were in their disobedience and proved Himself faithful to them.

Preparation for this process will involve getting quiet before God so we can recognize His voice. In the book of Job, we see a man bombarded with all kinds of attacks and how he reacted to all of them. We also see his so-called friends who started off well by sitting with him in silence, but then couldn't resist the temptation to give their opinions about his situation. One of them said to Job in chapter 33:33, "... listen to me; be silent; I will teach you wisdom." You may have listened to people like this yourself and found that their so-called wisdom didn't help and often made things worse. It's important to remember that God has the wisdom we need, and when we're really listening, we'll receive it and learn to use it.

Job spoke to God in chapter 7:11, "Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." God welcomes this kind of honesty. He already knows about the bitterness, resentment, grudges, fear, dishonesty and self-pity we've tried to cover up. They've been blocking our ability to get past the pain. This is what He wants us to examine: what we feel and where those feelings came from, how they've shown up in our reactions to our hurts and in the consequences of our responses. These are the things we'd never want to admit having and that we've done our best to disguise. They're also necessary to face if we want to get to the roots of our issues, then expose and fully remove them.

Psalms 40:1-2 expresses how God is involved in this process. "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." That's a pretty accurate picture of what it's like dealing with the messes we're in: sliding back down into the hole when we try to get ourselves out, just getting dirtier and more frustrated. God takes us out and gives us His steady foundation to build on so we can start from a place of strength. The purpose of all of this effort is to move forward, learning from the things of the past without getting stuck there. We can recognize the path to the pit and take steps to avoid falling into it in the future.

Last week we talked about the benefit of accountability partners and other believers in our healing. Prayer cover is one important thing they can provide as we start to confront our past experiences. Paul writes about this several times in his letters to new churches. First, he reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new has come." We get a fresh start and new information so we won't repeat the same damaging cycles. Paul told the members of the Colossian church in chapter 1:9, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." Your prayer partners can do this for you, and you can also pray for them. We may not think of the power of prayer, but it's one of our greatest weapons. Ephesians 6:18 says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."

We need all of the prayer we can get in this fight for freedom, especially when we're focused on how much needs to change. Sometimes it may seem impossible to repair the damage that's been done to us or that we've done ourselves. Our enemy wants to keep our eyes right there. Isaiah 40:29 says this about God's work in our lives: "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." We need to keep reminding ourselves that He's never expected us to do this by ourselves. Besides the constant help He's giving us, we can also work together with others in this community to motivate each other to keep going.

We're building a team of prayer support here, but we have two crucial partners that we may not have considered: Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who are both intercessors working on our behalf. Paul explains about this in Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with wordless groans." That should give us real hope. Even if all we can say is "Help", God knows exactly what we need and how to answer.

We've laid out a plan for getting out of damage control and into using what God has provided for so we can enjoy becoming new creations. Remember to give yourself time alone with Him to search for what's been hidden, to prepare your heart and mind to process what you're learning and to honestly confront anything that's been holding you back. Find prayer partners and commit to praying for them too. Doing all of this preparation will help you start dealing with the specifics one at a time without getting overwhelmed.

Scripture references

Lamentations 3:40, Romans 8:1 and 26, Joshua 1:9, Job 33:33 and 7:11, Psalm 40:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 1:9, Ephesians 6:18, Isaiah 40:29