

INTRODUCTION

Character is defined as what makes a person distinct from others. When we think of a person who has good character, we often describe them with terms like integrity, honesty, strong morals, care and concern for others. Character is demonstrated in actions but in fact character resides in the heart.

Christian character begins with faith in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Read Hebrews 11:6 _____

Faith is what separates Christian character from secular morality. There are many reasons for a person to do an outwardly good or moral act; however, it is not solely the outward act that makes behavior godly, but the motive behind the act that matters. In this study, we will be looking at what it means to respond to God in such a way that His purposes are fulfilled in us. There are three basic ways that we learn about God and His ways:

1. Through His Word
2. Through Prayer
3. Through Service (including interaction with the Spiritual gifts of others)

Scripture pictures God as the Great Refiner, carefully attending the fire that burns away the dross of our sin. This fire might take the form of disappointment, trials, temptations, or even success. Proper response to the fire produces steadfast faith resulting in praise and glory and honor at the coming of Jesus. Improper response results in being unproven and disqualified.

As we begin today, read 1 Corinthians 9:27, recording what you learn about disqualification: _____

Do a word study on "disqualified" from this verse: _____

Here Paul uses *adokimos* which, means "not approved." Adokimos is the negative of *dokimos* which is translated "testing" in James. Read James 1:2-3 for context: _____

It is possible to resist the refining process, to fail to stand the test. For our text today, carefully read the first five chapters of Jeremiah. Summarize what you learn about the southern kingdom of Judah during Jeremiah's time. Pay careful attention to the following verses: Jeremiah 2:1-8 and 2:13-25. _____

In our culture, we find many things that parallel those of Jeremiah's time. Jeremiah 3 details the ways in which Israel has "played the harlot." What was the behavior mentioned:

Jeremiah 3:1 _____

Jeremiah 3:6,13 _____

From Jeremiah 4:19-22, record the people's response to God coming judgment: _____

God's question from Jeremiah 5:7 is simple: "Why should I pardon you?"

In what ways had Judah failed to submit to God's refining process? _____

Now, list any parallels you see between Judah and the United States: _____

Also, list any parallels you see with your own life: _____

How does our definition of "disobedience" compare to God's definition?
Read James 4:17 for God's perspective: _____

Cross reference to 1 John 3:4 and Isaiah 53:6 _____

Was Judah given the opportunity to submit to the refining process? _____
Read Jeremiah 7:1-7 to confirm.

Jeremiah knew what should happen, but the people wouldn't listen to him. They chose a defeated way of life and refused to make the changes that he pointed out to them. They could have grown closer to God; but they would not repent. Read Jeremiah 7:1-7 for Jeremiah's feelings: _____

Compare with James 1:2-4 _____

Bad times are not grounds for joy, but the development of character that can result can lead us to rejoice in trials. We can rejoice because we believe God can control circumstances and is at work through them for our ultimate good.

As we close for today, read the following verses and record your thoughts:

Romans 5:3-4 _____

Philippians 1:6 _____

Hebrews 13:21

OUR RESPONSE FOR TODAY:

1. As we are able to see what God is doing, we should do whatever is necessary to make His purpose our purpose.
2. We should ask God to bring relevant passages of scripture to our attention.
3. We should pray, seeking God's will in the situation as well as God's purposes.
4. We should remember the lessons we learned from past trials
5. We should desire to grow in holiness, recognizing our inability to do anything righteous apart from God.

SOMETIMES I WILL FAIL

You don't have to be a believer very long before you realize that living for God will mean spiritual opposition! Read Luke 22:31, recording your thoughts: _____

Since we can be assured of encountering warfare, it is important to know some of the strategies that the enemy will use. All through the Bible, we are reminded that we are in a conflict with principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness. It is important to understand the tactics of the enemy so that we aren't taken by surprise

During the time of Moses and Joshua, Israel won many wars. However, the book of Judges records a period of staggering defeat. The reason is given in Judges 2:10: _____

How did God deal with this generation? Read Judges 3:1-2: _____

Why do we need to know about warfare? Because we can't defeat an enemy that we don't recognize! Satan isn't the only enemy; he controls an entire world system that is acting in opposition to God. Military tacticians gather intelligence on an enemy before engaging that enemy.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and write where our war is waged: _____

Satan attacks with distractions and deceptions. He injects thoughts that are counter to what God's truth teaches us. These thoughts are perversions, distortions, misinformation, and outright lies.

Read Philippians 4:8 and record an appropriate response: _____

Any thought that doesn't conform to full obedience to Christ's lordship should be immediately questioned. Read the following verses and record

Jesus' teachings on the thought process: Matthew 18:12; 21:28; 22:42; 17:25 _____

Read Proverbs 23:7 and record why Satan would choose the mind for a battlefield: _____

Cross reference to Romans 12:2 _____

Satan will attack, but we can refuse to allow him an entry into our mind.

Ephesians 4:27 _____

1 Peter 5:8-9 _____

Ephesians 6 tells us that we have all of the armor we need, given to us by our covenant partner. But we need to learn to take it up!

When the fire heats up, our response must be quick and biblical. If you can't trust God's sovereignty in times of trial, it is time to ask yourself what you **really know** about God, and how you can get to know Him better. God trains, educates, instructs, and teaches people He loves. Our trials (and our failures) may just be a part of this process.

Choosing God in times of adversity is difficult. Trusting God is a matter of faith. Sometimes we just don't realize that our adverse circumstances are a test.

Read Exodus 15:22-26 for an example: _____

In this context, Israel had just miraculously crossed the Red Sea. Moses and Miriam had sung the famous victory song. Now the people had encountered bitter, undrinkable water at Marah. Notice the word "test" in this account. Did Israel realize that the bitter water was a test? God wanted Israel to learn to trust Him in their times of trouble—He wanted them to learn to CHOOSE GOD!

In Jeremiah's time, false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear. Priests ruled on their own authority. And the people chose this rather than God's word brought through His prophet.

What Israel did, we still do now. We go to people of the world rather than turning to God in our time of testing. This doesn't mean that we should never go to others for help. But it does mean that we **SHOULD NEVER FAIL TO GO TO GOD!**

AM I MEEK?

Romans 12:1-2 says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Do a word study on "transformed" from the verses above. Record your result: _____

We live in a stressed-out time. If we could figure out a way to buy more time, we would do it! Sometimes we react when we should be proactive. We are busy people! And we over-commit ourselves!

God knows what we are dealing with. He knows the pressures and conflicts that we face. He has made provision for us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables us to respond correctly.

In the desert, God fed Israel with manna. The word "manna" comes from a Hebrew words meaning "what is it?" They literally had never seen anything like manna before! Hoarding it was pointless—it became wormy. Only on the day before the Sabbath did it even last for two days. Israel was learning to rely on God daily!

Read Psalm 119:67-75 and record what you learn: _____

When it comes to meekness, we have a perfect teacher. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and record your thoughts: _____

It is so important to stop trying to fix everything that comes along. We need more trust in God's sovereignty to live and act in the practical knowledge of God's purpose. In scripture, we continually see Jesus submitting to His father, and before men whom He Himself had created!

Although Jesus was accused of being the devil and rejected by some around Him, we never sense that he was harried or driven by difficulties and resistance. This doesn't mean that He expressed no emotion. We see anger in the temple and grief at the death of Lazarus. We see suffering in the Garden as He prayed so intensely that His sweat was filled with blood. But we never see Him reacting instead of acting.

Read Hebrews 5:8 and see what you learn: _____

Cross reference to Colossians 3:12 _____

The ability to "act" rather than "react" is the biblical principle of meekness. Meekness is power under control. Read the following verses and record what you learn about meekness:

1 Timothy 6:11 _____

Ephesians 4:1,2 _____

James 1:21 _____

Psalms 25:8-9 _____

Isaiah 29:19 _____

Matthew 5:5 _____

It is difficult to learn to act rather than react; but we can count on God to take care of those who torment us! Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 and write what you learn: _____

The Greek for "meekness" is "prautes." It is a word used for domesticating animals. The animals needed to come under the control of their masters so that they would be useful. This is what God is doing in us. Through affliction, He brings us under His control, transforming us as we learn to walk under His headship.

People mistakenly believe that the opposite of meekness is power. But this is not correct. The opposite of meekness is really unusable wildness. Truly meek people aren't timid or pliable people who just let everybody walk all over them. Meekness isn't a personality trait. Read Galatians 5:16-17 and record what meekness is: _____

Never forget that we are human and our flesh and the Spirit that indwells us is in warfare. If we aren't walking according to the spirit, then we are being controlled by the flesh.

As we end our study for today, read 2 Samuel 16:9-12, noting what you learn about David, particularly his circumstances: _____

Skip to 1 Kings 2:44 and write Shimei's fate: _____

Closing today, read Psalm 37, noting the characteristics of a meek person:

1. Don't worry because of evildoers
2. Trust God
3. Do good
4. Dwell
5. Delight in the Lord
6. Commit their way to God
7. Rest in the Lord
8. Wait patiently
9. Take refuge
10. Look to the future

Our personal transformation will involve learning to trust God, doing good rather than evil. We will not repay evil with evil or abandon our position when opposed. We will get our joy from God, not our circumstances.

The meek give God true ownership of their entire being, knowing that He is trustworthy.

IS GOD SOVEREIGN?

When we have accepted Christ, our value comes not from what we have done, or who we are, or what we have. We are valuable because God has chosen us.

Reading through Romans 8:28-39, write everything that God has done for us: _____

It is difficult to realize that suffering is one of the methods God uses to help us become conformed to the image of Christ.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 12:2 _____

2 Corinthians 3:18 _____

Ephesians 5:25-27 _____

Hebrews 5:8 _____

Romans 8:16-18 _____

God compares our suffering to the refining of precious metals. Gold comes as an ore that contains many impurities that must be refined before the true beauty becomes evident. Refining is not purposed to destroy, but to bring forth beauty and usefulness. It is hard to begin to see trials as part of God's refining process, but scripture tells us that this is true.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-8 _____

Cross reference to 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 _____

Whether or not refining actually occurs depends on our response to the fire. We will either become refined or become bitter. It is our choice.

Read 1 John 4:8 for insight: _____

Compare to Daniel 4:34-35 and Isaiah 45:5-7 _____

According to Romans 8:29, what the purpose of God's predestination? _____

Everything in creation continues because of the sustaining action of God. Nothing exists because of its own power or will. Nothing acts or stands independently of God's will.

The laws of nature are an expression of God's will. The best scientists only describe how God made things act; scientists don't make them act that way! Read Psalm 147:8-9 _____

Acts 17:25-28 _____

Every breath we breath is under God's control. Because we don't understand how God thinks, we question His ways. But scripture clearly tells us that God created everything, and that He actively sustains and rules over it.

Read the following verses, recording your thoughts:

Hebrews 1:3 _____

1 Timothy 6:15 _____

Matthew 10:29 _____

Colossians 1:15-17 _____

Romans 11:33 _____

Now, carefully read Matthew 10:29-31 _____

As we end our study for this week, ask yourself where you have substituted your doctrine, or a doctrine of "chance" for the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Record any areas here: _____

LIVE LIKE YOU KNOW IT!

If God is sovereign, then we need to begin living like people who know this is true! In Psalm 103:19, we learn that God's sovereignty rules over all. Looking at events in our world, believing this becomes difficult. The knowledge that believers are dying for their faith in other countries makes our momentary discomfort seem minor. The things we consider to be trials might seem like a vacation to them.

During the past century, more believers have been martyred than during any other time. Besides these, other believers are persecuted and precluded from gathering to worship God. People who have no fear of God have no fear of persecuting His people.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1, recording Solomon's thoughts on this subject: _____

Sometimes our physical or emotional pain becomes the point at which we can minister to others in the same situation. Sometimes we feel completely abandoned in our pain. In our times, the pain of loneliness is one of the most common complaints in counseling situations.

Read Proverbs 14:13 to get a perspective on pain: _____

If we are going to learn to respond to pain appropriately—if we are going to act rather than react—then we are going to have to trust God. Either we really believe that God's sovereignty rules, or we don't.

You have either learned enough about God's heart, character, and attributes to believe He is sovereign—or you have not.

It is truly a blessing to be able to rest in the sovereignty of God. We can find joy *not in the heat of the flame*, but in the sure knowledge that the Refiner is *watching over the fire, controlling it*. Kay Arthur

God's refining fire isn't purposeless and it isn't intended to destroy us. It is designed for our sanctification. Therefore, it is important that we not focus on the flames or the fuel, but rather on the Refiner. We can make it through because He will never leave us alone. We can trust God!

Looking back at Psalm 103:19, write everything you learn about those who serve God: _____

Who are the hosts: _____

Are they good or fallen angels? _____

Now, read Isaiah 14:24-27 and write what you learn about God's will: _____

God is in control. Write here character traits of God that cause you to know that He is in control: _____

An absolutely incredible story is recorded in Daniel 4:24-35. Read the story, recording what you learn here: _____

God can do anything He wants at anytime He wants to. Many people get very upset when this thought is followed to completion. Bad things happen. God doesn't stop them. Why not! If God didn't stop bad things, then he must not be good, right?

If we say that God didn't know about the bad thing that was about to happen, then we are really saying that God isn't omniscient.

If we say that God knew the bad thing that was about to happen but was powerless to stop it, then we are saying that God isn't omnipotent.

Many people believe that God just set His creation in order and then left. But scripture clearly says that this isn't true. We haven't been abandoned to the ruler of this world.

Read Deuteronomy 32:39: _____

Cross reference to 1 Thessalonians 5:18 _____

If God isn't in control, we are in REALLY BIG TROUBLE! We should panic right now! If God isn't sovereign, Satan can do whatever he wants to us anytime he wants to do it. Reflect on this, and write your thoughts about what it means to have God be the one who is in control: _____

It is interesting to read about events in the early church as it processed the truths of God's sovereignty. Read Acts 2:23 and 4:28 and write your thought process: _____

In addition to understanding our problems, God also knows our grief. Read Psalm 56:8-11 _____

Over a hundred years prior to Cyrus' birth, Isaiah called Cyrus by name. Read Isaiah 45:6-7 and consider issues of God's omniscience: _____

Cross reference to Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 _____

Because God knows everything and can do anything, and because He is with us at all times—we don't need to try to manipulate things in our own strength.

Does this mean that when adversity strikes, we pull the covers over our heads and just become a victim? NO! We keep talking to God, learning to move forward. We aren't victims.

As we close for today, read Romans 8:37 and write our real position: _____

THERE WILL BE PAIN

This week, our study will focus on the book of Habakkuk. But before turning there, read the following verses to begin your thinking process:

1 Peter 2:9 _____

Romans 12:1-2 _____

Now, we can see these principles in action. Read through the book of Habakkuk. (You can do it! It's really small!) Answer these questions:

1. What did God tell Habakkuk that He was going to do? _____

2. How did Habakkuk respond initially? _____

3. After rereading 1:12, write what you think Habakkuk understood about God's character: _____

4. Looking at 2:1, think through what you see in Habakkuk's actions; then looking at the next three verses, look at God's response: _____

If the righteous live by faith, (and they do) where does this faith come from?

Read Romans 10:17 _____

Cross reference to Hebrews 11:1 _____

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is called the "hall of faith." God wants us to live by faith. It is the only way we can live through the pain and trials of

life on earth. Living by faith keeps us trusting God. Studying God's word keeps us knowing that God is completely trustworthy. The answers we need for our problems are always in the Book.

Our response to trials is critical in our walk of faith. Sometimes people ask for something and they don't receive it. They blame God for not acting appropriately. They walk out on God. And when they do, they have walked out on the very source of the answers they need. But, this wasn't Habakkuk's response.

Reread 3:17-19 _____

Whose high places should you be walking? _____

What if your high place looks better than mine? Do you ever look at other people and think that they really have it made? They seem to have everything so together. Often we just don't know their trials. God helps us each to walk in our own high places—the ones that He has prepared for us.

Romans 9:20-21 address this subject. After reading, write your thoughts:

As we end our study today, cross reference to 2 Corinthians 10:1-6: _____

Now answer this question: Does this sound like a passive victim of events? There is great responsibility on our part because of the sovereignty on God's part. This is where we will begin our thinking next week.

HOW RENEWAL BEGINS

This week, we will be considering our responsibility in the renewal of our minds. After reading Philippians 4:6-8, write the order of events in these verses: _____

In the midst of trials, we are NOT supposed to be anxious, but we ARE supposed to be doing something. This requires learning to think differently.

Read through Acts 4:24-29. In this chapter, Jewish leaders had told John and Peter not to speak of Jesus. When other believers learned about this, it was their call to prayer. Write what you learn about their attitude of prayer here: _____

Believing that God was sovereign, these circumstances were a call to prayer. In fact, prayer itself assumes the sovereignty of God. If God isn't in control, why pray to Him?

As prayer without faith is just beating the air, so trust without prayer is only presumptuous bravado. God, who promises to give, tells us to trust his promises. He commands us to pray, and expects obedience to his commands.

Trusting God's sovereignty really involves thinking differently to such an extent that we believe and act differently. Satan wants us to focus on what we were, or the trouble we are in, or the thoughts he plants. God wants us to believe Him and press on.

Continue your reading with 2 Corinthians 10:3-7, writing what you learn, especially about warfare and weaponry, here: _____

In the above verses, notice what the Corinthian church was doing wrong. They were focusing on circumstances. Compare with 2 Corinthians 5:16: ____

We know that Paul had a number of critics in addition to the physical trials he underwent. The Greek culture, that worshiped beautiful bodies, worldly wisdom, and eloquent speech didn't see much beauty, wisdom or eloquence in Paul. Read 2 Corinthians 10 writing what you learn: _____

Paul is traditionally described as short, bow-legged, having a hooked nose, and an eye problem that caused a repulsive crusty secretion. Through people, Satan wanted to tear Paul down. If Satan could have made Paul focus on the accusations, or his physical appearance, Paul's ministry could have been destroyed.

But Paul had done his homework, gathering intelligence on the enemy. Therefore, Paul reminded the Corinthians that we walk in fleshly bodies, but we don't war with fleshly weapons. Satan wants to establish strongholds in our minds and our responsibility is to stop him. When we dwell on things that are negative toward God or fantasize evil, we are giving the enemy ground on which he can erect a stronghold.

This is why we must destroy speculations (things we imagine) and everything else that is raised up against what is really true about God. If Paul had not done this, the enemy could have used the circumstances to destroy his ministry.

Satan is clever. He is subtle. He is sneaky. He doesn't just show up in a little red suit with a tail and a pitchfork. He can appear as an angel of light—meaning he can initially say and do things that look pretty good. He drops suggestions and hints; he casts doubt on the good things of God and the truth of the Word.

God's sovereignty does not invalidate our responsibility to pray and think with a renewed mind.

God's sovereignty does not invalidate our responsibility to act according to our renewed mindset. This means we can use any legitimate, biblical means at our disposal to avoid harm to ourselves or others.

Although we may not know God's sovereign purpose in all circumstances, this isn't an excuse to shirk responsibilities that God has clearly commanded.

It is also no excuse to fail to carry out specific things that God has already shown us or told us.

Continue this thinking by reading Nehemiah 4:7-20. Record your results here: _____

Did Nehemiah believe God? Yet, he used everything at his disposal believing that God would honor his effort.

In Joshua chapter 9, we read about a confrontation between Israel and the Gibeonites. Here Israel entered into a treaty without first seeking God in prayer. Write what you learn about this confrontation here: _____

Prudence requires that we be willing to pray and seek counsel from God so that we can see a situation for what it actually is. We can also seek counsel from godly people.

Continue your reading in Proverbs 15:22. Cross reference to Proverbs 16:9 and record your thoughts here: _____

Sometimes God uses wise counsel from others to bring our thinking into line with His will. In the process of mind renewal, we must always remember that prayer acknowledges our belief in God's sovereignty and our dependence on Him to act for our best interest. Prudence acknowledges our responsibility to use all means that God has provided for us. We must remember to keep these ideas both at the forefront.

As you complete your study for this week, read 1 Chronicles 5:18-20. Note how trained warriors trusted in their ability and training. Cross reference to Psalm 127:1 _____

GOD'S PART; MY PART

Personal responsibility is almost a foreign concept to our culture today. It is important in our study to keep personal responsibility at the forefront.

Begin today by reading Psalm 127:1: _____

There is a sense in which this verse sums up all of the responsibilities that we have as believers. Whether it is mental, spiritual, or physical, we should always be building and watching. Notice that the psalmist speaks of God actually working. This doesn't negate the fact that humans are working, but shows us how dependent we are on God to enable us.

Continue your thinking by reading Deuteronomy 8:17-18: _____

It is important to know that God doesn't let our dependence on Him be an excuse for our laziness! Read Ecclesiastes 10:18 and Proverbs 20:4 and record what you learn: _____

Our duty is to do what God has shown us is His will.

Our faith is placed in the belief that God's sovereign will is for our benefit.

This is no conflict between trusting God and accepting personal responsibility. We can clearly see God's sovereignty does not do away with our duty to act responsibly.

This leads us to a corollary thought: Does our failure to act responsibly impact the sovereign plan of God? Read Esther 4:10-14 for insight: _____

We are herein this time and place to do what God wants us to do. We have been bought with a price. It is possible to renew our thinking and reorder our priorities so that our will is in line with God's will for us. Read Ephesians 5:15-16 _____

Satan works hard to prevent our mind renewal. When we have been saved, he can't take back our salvation. But he can and does try to destroy the life that we live. Read Ephesians 5:17-18 to continue your thinking: _____

God's Spirit within us helps us determine what God's will is for us. Our time is redeemed when we are Spirit-controlled. If we do not walk under the Spirit's control, we can't tap into God's purpose for us. Read Romans 11:33 and write your thoughts: _____

Wisdom is commonly defined as good judgment. We consider someone to be wise if they can respond appropriately or develop a good course of action. But the best human wisdom is fallible; even the wisest humans don't have all of the facts that God has. We may agonize over important decisions...but God never has to do this! He doesn't have consultants. His wisdom is infallible.

Read Psalm 147:5, recording what you learn: _____

God's actions bring glory to Him ultimately. Cross reference to John 15:8; Ephesians 1:12; Romans 1:21; Romans 11:36: _____

God works in our lives to refine us. He desires us to come into conformity to Him. Read Hebrews 12:10 and write what you learn about God's wisdom: _____

Often our learning is experiential. Our responsibility also includes learning from our circumstances and experiences. We might admire the trait of patience, but how do we learn patience? This usually involves trials.

If fact, if we consider the fruit of the Spirit, most of the characteristics have a "natural:" counterpart. But the fruit is spiritual when it is learned at a deeper level as a result of experience. Read Psalm 119:71: _____

God's wisdom is fathomless and his decisions are unsearchable. Read
Romans 11:33-34 to end your work for this section: _____

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WAR

When Romans 12 tells us that we are to renew our minds, it's because our minds are the battlefield. This is the reason we have armor to protect our heads! Read Ephesians 6, writing various parts of our armor: _____

Satan uses many tactics to attack our thinking. But one of his most common is to cause us to feel rejection. Satan uses it because it is effective. Rejection causes us to feel isolated and is a very destructive emotion. All of us will feel rejection at some point. Sometimes rejection is only in our thinking; but sometimes it is real and a part of the life of those who belong to God.

Read the following verses, recording your thoughts:

John 1:11 _____

Isaiah 53:3 _____

Jesus understands our feelings of rejection because He experienced them as well. In the process of conformance to God's image, we often do wrong things. We repent, we mourn, and all the while we are making choices about continuing to serve God—or about choosing to live in defeat. We must learn to bring our thoughts captive in obedience to Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 15:10 _____

When we make mistakes (and we will!) we must learn from them, allowing the fire to burn away everything that is not Christlike in our behavior and character. Read Philippians 3:13-14 _____

Here are some helpful things to remember:

1. Jesus was perfect and still rejected
2. Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him—essentially they rejected Him
3. Some of those who Paul led to a relationship with the Lord later said bad things about him and rejected him
4. Many prophets were rejected by the people, priests, and kings

In times of rejection, we must remember that we belong to God, and serve only Him. Read Galatians 1:10: _____

When we are rejected, or feel rejected, we must cling to God's Word. Write the main idea from each of these references:

Matthew 10:34-37 _____

John 15:18-21 _____

Psalms 27:7-10 _____

Hebrews 13:5-6 _____

People may leave us, but God never will! Read Ephesians 1:5-6: _____

God never promises that other people won't reject us; in fact they may reject us because we belong to Christ. But God will never forsake us.

Read the following verses and reflect on God's qualities:

Isaiah 49:14-16 _____

Romans 8:1 _____

Romans 8:35-39 _____

Another strategy of the enemy, stemming from uncontrolled thoughts, is depression. If the cause of the depression is not physical or biochemical, it could be that dwelling on the past or thinking continually of wrong thoughts is causing depression. Sometimes depression is caused by anger with God or with people. Depression can set in when we allow circumstances to overwhelm us, sending us into a state of mental or physical inertia. Sometimes depression can be a symptom of unbelief.

It helps us to remember that our past was part of our "old self." Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 _____

Now, read Romans 6:6, noting what happened to our "old self:" _____

As we close for this session, read Psalms 42 and 43. Look for references to rejection, despair, and hope. Write your findings here: _____

Remember, any true help is going to come from God!

STRATEGY FOR BATTLE

What should we do when we have behaviors that we know aren't pleasing to God? How do we handle thoughts that just won't go away? Remember, it's a war!

Satan besieges our minds just like the Romans besieged cities. He wears down our resistance and captures our thoughts. We call this barrage that erodes our defenses "spiritual warfare." We need to know how to practically resist the devil. We can find some real ammunition when we look at the way Jesus responded to Satan when He was tempted.

Read Matthew 4:1-11, doing the following:

1. Name Satan's tactics: _____
2. Name the areas where Jesus was tempted: _____

3. What are parallels between Jesus' temptation and the ways you are tempted? _____

4. How did Jesus handle the temptation? _____

It is hard for us to imagine how badly Satan wanted Jesus to fail the temptation. Why was it so important to the enemy? _____

Everything Satan tells us must be checked against what the Word of God says. Satan is very good at perverting or twisting the Word, quoting it out of context, or leaving out key parts.

Read John 4:4 _____

Continue your reading in Ephesians 6:10-20, answering these questions:

1. With whom is our struggle: _____

2. What does God tell us to do? _____

3. Write out the name of each part of our armor, discussing how you put it on: _____

4. How does the armor relate to warfare in the mind of a believer? _____

Satan would like you to focus on your hurts. He wants you to be consumed by pain. He never wants you to remember that the sovereign Lord of your life might be burning away things that don't belong to Him.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 _____

God's Word comes to bear in everything about our lives. Write ways in which the armor God provides is connected with His Word: _____

The devil has some obvious tactics:

1. Cause us to doubt God's Word
2. Cause us to disobey God's Word
3. Cause us to ignore God's Word
4. Cause us to doubt God's love
5. Cause us to doubt God's character

If Satan is successful in these areas, he has cut us off from the only true place of refuge and healing. To stand in this war, we must know God and we must know His Word, and live accordingly.

WHAT HE CREATED, HE RULES

Sometimes, people mistakenly think that God's sovereignty is only over Christians. But scripture clearly teaches otherwise! Read Proverbs 21:1, writing your thoughts: _____

Cross reference to 2 Chronicles 20:6 _____

Consider also Jeremiah 14:22 _____

From these references, it is clear that God is sovereign over areas that we typically don't want to turn over to Him! To continue this thinking, read Exodus 3:21-22 _____

Now, read the actual events: Exodus 12:35-36 _____

The Egyptians did something that wasn't normal for those who enslaved other people. They gave their slaves so much that we can hardly believe it! Sometimes we think that other people control our future. What does this scripture teach you? _____

Continue your reading in Ezra 1:1 _____

Continue your reading in Isaiah 45:4-5, answering this question: Is it required that a person know/love God in order for God to use that person?

Sometimes we don't realize God's sovereignty over our officials because we see their actions on a human plane.

Consider what happened leading up to the birth of Jesus. Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census. That required Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem—at just the right timing to fulfil Micah 5:2.

Several scriptures mention times in Jesus' life where governmental action played a role in fulfilling prophecy. If this was true in Bible times, can it also be true that our daily cable news broadcasts are revealing the sovereignty of God?

Read Matthew 2:14-23: _____

Confirm by reading Acts 4:27-28 _____

Those experiencing the events described by scripture may not have been any more aware of God's hand guiding them than we are today!

In addition to sovereignty over nations, God also determines those who rule in governments. Read Romans 13:1-4 _____

Cross reference to 1 Timothy 2:1-2 _____

Are there ways that we can thwart God's choices? _____

Much of the truth we are considering can only be understood from God's eternal perspective. We struggle with some of the immoral men and evil dictators that we see in public office. But we must remember what God's Word says:

Daniel 4:17,32 _____

God's sovereignty extends beyond who rules. It also includes when they rule. Read Isaiah 40:23-24 _____

Read Proverbs 21:31, asking yourself who decides the outcome of wars: ____

After reading the following passages, record your thoughts:

Judges 7:2-22 _____

1 Samuel 14:6,15,20 _____

<p>Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. Psalm 20:7</p> <p>Do a word study on "name"</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Does this mean that Christians should never use military strength of any sort? Does this mean we should tell our army to go home and destroy our weapons? In scripture, we see that people don't discard their weaponry, but neither do they put their trust in them. Armies fight, but God gives the victory.

Besides being sovereign over people and nations, God also rules over nature. Read Jeremiah 14:22 _____

God set up the laws of nature, and they continue to operate because He tells them to!

Read Job 37:3-13 _____

Psalms 147:8-18 _____

Jeremiah 10:13 _____

Amos 4:7 _____

Read Hebrews 1:3 and note how God "upholds" things: _____

Sometimes we struggle with disaster coming from the hand of God. Read Isaiah 45:7 _____

Thousands of years ago, Habakkuk struggled with God's sovereignty. He finally concluded that, although he didn't understand what God was doing, he would trust Him. As you complete your thoughts for this week, read these verses and write what you learn:

Habakkuk 3:17-18 _____

WHEN FORGIVENESS IS A PROBLEM

When we begin to realize that God is sovereign over people, nations, and nature, we sometimes begin to struggle with the reason that God didn't "fix" bad events in our lives. Keeping a proper attitude is difficult, especially when we realize that God didn't do things that He could have done.

As we begin today, read John 5:1-9 _____

This is a very interesting story. For thirty-eight years, this man had been ill, spending his time with others like himself. He couldn't work; people provided him with what little he had. His circumstances were pitied by passersby. And, along comes Jesus...asking him if he wanted to be well!

Is this a valid question? Is it possible to revel in our "victimhood?" Do we draw our identity from our problems? Do we actually begin to define ourselves by our hurts, sicknesses, and wounds?

- Our pain brings attention and pity from others. We are sometimes comforted by seeing others standing up for us.
- Our wounds are an excuse for shortcomings and failure. "I'm like this because something happened to me."
- We are angry with God—if God heals us, we would have some obligation to become what God wants us to be
- We fear change. We are comfortable in our victimhood.

So, Jesus asked the question. To be healed almost inevitably means that some forgiveness must occur. Wounds don't heal if they aren't cleaned. Healing won't come by putting a bandage over a hemorrhage.

This doesn't mean that we dredge up things that we have already confessed or dealt with. It also doesn't mean that we resort to unbiblical methodology. Read Philippians 3:13 _____

But things that have been denied or buried need to be exposed. God can call this to our minds as we pray according to Psalm 139:23-24 _____

If there is anyone in scripture who demonstrates forgiveness, it is Joseph. Read Genesis 37:1-36 and summarize what you learn about Joseph's rejection by His brothers: _____

Reading in Genesis 39:1-23, what temptation did Joseph suffer? _____

What injustice did he endure? _____

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 for more insight: _____

Joseph ended at an enviable attitude. Read Genesis 50:20 and write it here: _____

Read Matthew 6:14-15 and Matthew 18:21-35 carefully noting Jesus' response. What do you learn? _____

A guilty conscience can ruin relationships, dull emotions, and even cause physical illness. But there is no guilt that cannot be handled at the mercy seat of Christ. Read Hebrews 10:19-22 and reflect on what you learn:

Whether our sin is blatant or covert, the only way to receive forgiveness is through the blood of Christ. God's forgiveness is an act of grace that is appropriated to us when we acknowledge sin and receive pardon.

Read through 1 Timothy 1:15, writing your thoughts: _____

If we are going to walk in the reality of forgiveness, here are some practical steps:

1. Agree with God that you have sinned. Read 1 John 1:9 and do a word study on "confess." _____

2. Accept responsibility for the sin. James 4:17 _____

3. Tell God that you are willing to make restitution if necessary. Matthew 5:23-24: _____

4. Thank God for the blood of Christ that cleanses us of sin. Romans 5:20:

5. Believe what God says. Romans 8:1 _____

6. Thank God for the Holy Spirit that helps us with the struggle with fleshly lust. Galatians 5:16 _____

How should we then respond to those who sin against us? Read these verses and record appropriate behavior:

Ephesians 4:31-32 _____

Colossians 3:12-15 _____

Matthews 6:8-15 _____

When we have suffered unjustly at the hands of others, it is hard to forgive. This is especially true if the other person isn't sorry for what they have done! What can we do when we just really don't want to forgive?

1. Realize that forgiveness is a matter of the will, not the emotions. To forgive is a matter of choice.
2. Realize that forgiving another person doesn't let that person "off the hook" with God. Read Hebrews 10:26-27 _____

After reading Luke 7:36-50, discuss the point of the story that Jesus told to Simon the Pharisee. Contrast the love of the Pharisee and the love of the woman. Were they both sinners? What made the difference in their responses to Jesus? _____

To refuse to forgive is sin. To obey and forgive shows our love for God and His Word. As we close for this week, take some time to review what you have learned about forgiveness, recording any areas where you need to exercise forgiveness toward those who have wronged you: _____

Conclude by reading the following verses, taking them to heart.

Ephesians 5:1-2 _____

1 John 4:20-21 _____

YOUR RACE, YOUR CROSS

God has created each of us uniquely. This is really hard to fathom. There are so many of us! And we are all different! Read Psalm 139:13-16 _____

In this Psalm, we learn that God not only created us physically, but also gave us our personalities, emotions, and moral sensitivity. Job expresses the same thoughts. Read the following verses and record your thoughts:

Job 10:8-11 _____

Psalm 119:73 _____

Jeremiah 1:5 _____

When we realize that God knows us from our mother's womb, it helps us understand why a God that involved would have a plan for each of our lives. We are designed uniquely to fulfill the plan that He has for us. Our abilities and disabilities all fit into that plan. The plan involves more than circumstances. It includes what He wants us to be and do. It determines our function within the body of Christ and the corresponding spiritual gifts that we receive to help us function there. Read the following verses:

Romans 12:4-6 _____

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 _____

It is usually true that our giftings are consistent with our mental, physical, and personality traits. Read Jeremiah 1:5 and record what you learn:

This in no way denies that the curse of sin on our world exists. Becoming a believer does not take us out from under the curse on our earth. But, it does give us a new perspective on our work. Read Colossians 3:23, record what you learn: _____

Each of our days is important because God ordained them. But a fatalistic approach is never warranted. Read 1 Corinthians 7:19-21 _____

There must be a godly balance between our efforts to improve our situation and acceptance of the situations that cannot be changed. It is comforting to read Psalm 23, realizing that God leads and guides. As the good shepherd, God commits Himself to sovereignly guide our lives.

This naturally leads us to consideration of discovering God's will for our lives. We struggle with right choices when we have two that seem good or appropriate. We worry that we have chosen the wrong road. If we have chosen wrongly, can we still trust God's sovereignty?

God's guidance usually comes bit by bit. Our life plan doesn't come as an already-bound volume.

J. I. Packer described the process this way: "God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence."

An often repeated story involves a Cecropia moth emerging from its cocoon. A small boy, trying to help the moth, snipped away part of the cocoon so it could emerge more easily. But the struggle was essential to build the moth's body and getting fluids into the wings to expand them. Emerging too rapidly, the moth couldn't fly and died.

Like the cocoon, God uses the trials of our lives as a testing ground that builds up our spiritual muscle. Can peace and patience be developed without adversity? Paul and James speak of joy in the middle of suffering.

Read the following and write your response: Romans 5:3-4: _____

James 1:2-4 _____

Remember that the adversity itself is not the cause for joy. But, the expectation of the results cause us to rejoice in adversity. We rejoice because we believe that God is in control and working for our ultimate good.

Hebrews 12:2 _____

Psalms 94:12 _____

We can be assured, in the midst of trouble, that God is still working to carry to completion what He has planned for us. Read the following verses and write your thoughts:

Philippians 1:6 _____

Hebrews 13:21 _____

In their study, Experiencing God, Blackaby and King advise believers to find out what God is doing and discover how you can join Him. This is great advice. God's sovereign work never negates our responsibility. Just as God teaches through adversity, we must try to learn from it.

Here is some helpful advice from that study:

1. SUBMIT TO WHAT GOD IS DOING Insofar as you can see what God is doing, make His purpose your purpose.

2. APPLY PERTINENT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE TO YOUR SITUATION
By doing this, we can profit from the circumstances and learn new truth from scripture. Adversity can even help scriptures become "heart" knowledge rather than only "head knowledge."
3. REMEMBER THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM ADVERSITY Rather than just enduring trials, we can use them as a means for growth in godliness.

As we close this study, we have one final observation. Pruning leads to increased fruit production. Our tendency is to rely on success, reputation and natural talents. God uses adversity to prune away things that aren't really important. Fruit production and holiness are God's end goals.

Read Hebrews 12:10 _____

John 15:5 _____

When we have internalized these truths, we can identify with James 1:2-4:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.