

WALKING IN THE LIGHT: SHINING HIS LIGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Leader Guide

youth  RESOURCE

LESSON 1: WALKING IN THE DARKNESS

In 2019, I remember joking around with my family saying, "I can SEE 2020 being a great year!" You know, like perfect, 20/20 vision. Wow, was I wrong! At this point 2020 isn't even in the running for a great year, and for many, it has been one of the most difficult and stressful years of their lives.

There seems to be a heaviness, a darkness looming in the air over the events of this year. Here's a recap, in case you've missed it, this year has brought a deadly virus that caused great fear, overwhelmed our medical communities, it shut down businesses and schools bringing about lockdowns with physical and social isolation, created job loss and a scarcity of finances, food and, of course at one point, even toilet paper! To add to the uniqueness of this year, many cities have experienced violence, rioting, and civil unrest in response to injustice in race relations which intensified fear, hate, and division. And, like these challenges and trials are not enough, what about the darkness of fear, anxiety and depression clouding our own minds.

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and His life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." John 1:4-5

Oh, how dark is the darkness of our thoughts, sometimes. That dark cave of our minds where the enemy, the world and our flesh hold us hostage with lies of all those things that Jesus and His great love already conquered. We become enveloped with fear, depression, and hopelessness like a wet blanket. Many times, we feel too exhausted to move. We can't see up ahead or around the corner. We wonder, "what if that new blanket is just as soggy?" We may try to muster up the strength we need all by ourselves, feeling alone, unloved, or desperate. We want so badly to feel the strength of our Savior who is the only one who delivers the light, hope, and power for a life full of abundance. We even start to question, is His love strong enough to bring enough comfort, warmth, and light to brighten the dark recesses of our mind? Is God powerful enough to help me?

Yes, we wrestle with the darkness of fear, anxiety and depression in our minds, and of course, the darkness in this world. Jesus, Himself, told us that in this world we will have trouble. The fact that Jesus shared this with us is another great example of His honesty and that we can trust Him. Jesus knows that with these troubles come all these natural, big emotions and He is here to help us.

This sounds much better than trouble..."Peace" (*meaning: a stress-free state of security or calm*)..."take heart" (*meaning: to stay positive and confident; encouraged; to get comfort; made to feel optimistic*)..."overcome the world" (*meaning: not being controlled by the things of this world, but moved by what God says to you through His Word and His Spirit*). This is the really good news for all of us in this dark world. In fact, this news is totally out of this world, well actually, **not of this world!**

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." - John 17:16

I love that Jesus is telling us clues about who we are. Wow, to be "not of this world" like Jesus puts us in a very special category...we are His! In this study, we will focus on walking in the light of His LOVE, His PROMISES, and His SPIRIT! We will allow the truth of God's Word and the Holy Spirit to light up our path as we journey together exploring the murky caverns of our mind where fear, anxiety and depression often lurk.

Read these four scriptures then discuss this question. What is the good news for us as we contend with the darkness of this world, especially the darkness of fear, anxiety and depression?

"This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." - 1 John 1:5

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." - John 1:4-5

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

"Even the darkness is not dark to You. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to You." - Psalm 139:12

- Based on these verses, how does Jesus affect the darkness in our lives?
- How do these truths give us hope?

That's right, the darkness of this world and in our minds is no match for our REAL, PRESENT God! Jesus is the ONE and ONLY source of eternal light. He is ETERNALLY LIT! He has already paid the price for our lives through the death and resurrection of Christ, and placed within us the Holy Spirit, who leads and guides us. With Jesus leading us, we can see where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going! Why would we choose to walk through the darkness of this crazy life without His AWESOME LIGHT?

2 Timothy 1:7 says,

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind."

- What gets in our way of experiencing power, love and a sound mind?

On this adventure, we have the opportunity to PRACTICE walking in His light until it becomes a new habit. Once we learn to walk in His light, we will recognize the darkness of trying to rely on our own strength rather than His supernatural strength. And once we experience the difference of the power of His light, we won't want to do it any other way! Let's get started!

We are going to start with a visualization that would be more effective if you are able to close your eyes. This may evoke some negative emotions, so if you need to open your eyes at any time and remind yourself you are safe, please do! You may also choose to keep your eyes open, if you prefer.

Leader: Everyone close your eyes and imagine standing in a completely blacked-out cave, all alone. It is deep within a mountain, pitch black, musty, and even the ground you're standing on is rocky, treacherous and uneven. The air seems dense and cold, and you've lost your sense of direction. You hesitate to move. Fear and uncertainty come over you, as your sense of hearing is heightened, waiting for a familiar sound. You can feel your heart beating out of your chest and panic is setting in. (Pause a few minutes) What lurks in its depths?

(Pause) What smell emanates in the damp and heavy air?

(Pause) What pitfalls may be waiting for you?

(Pause) What roots have grown so thick that they entangle together ready to trip you?

(Pause) What are some thoughts you might have? (Pause) What might you be feeling?

(Pause a few more minutes) You may open your eyes.

- Share what you experienced as you imagined this dark cave.

Now think of this cave, as if it is your mind. Sometimes we feel like we are in total darkness with no direction, no security, no protection and almost too scared to move! Aren't there times we **feel** this way? Every one of us walks through this life contending with these shadows of darkness and it is impossible to do it on our own. Fortunately, we don't have to do it alone. We have access to the brightest light that ever was or ever will be!

So, before we see how His light brightens our cave, let's face some of the darkness we contend with in our minds. Take a few minutes to answer these questions individually, then discuss as a group.

- What fears were you aware of when you imagined yourself in the cave?
- What real life fears do you currently experience?
- What experiences of shame or guilt are haunting you?
- What pitfalls of hopelessness always seem to be waiting for you?
- What roots has the devil established with his lies that have grown thick to entangle and trip you?
- What are some of your negative thoughts that continuously echo in your mind?
- What emotions seem to make themselves gigantic in the shadows ahead?
- What experience in life feels difficult to navigate your way through?

So even though there are times we may feel like we are alone in the darkness of our mind, the truth is, God is always available to us when we ask and let Him lead. Sometimes it is difficult to allow ourselves to be vulnerable like that. Even if we know His lead is better, it can be difficult for us to give up that control. We will address this vulnerability a bit more in the weeks to come.

Read these scriptures as a group. How do they encourage you?

"For You will light my lamp; The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by You I can run against a troop; By my God I can leap over a wall. As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield for all who trust in Him." -Psalm 18:28-30

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." -Psalm 23:4

Head and Heart

Take a few minutes to answer these questions then please share with the group.

- How were some of your thoughts of God challenged today in light of some new scriptural knowledge?
- How has God spoken to your heart?
- What stood out to you in this study?

LESSON 2: WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF HIS LOVE

The first time I watched the movie *The Passion of Christ* directed by Mel Gibson, besides soaking my shirt with my tears, I was in complete shock over what Christ Jesus went through for me. I grew up going to church and Sunday school, but the reality of His choice to take the torture, pain, and death for me had never really sunk in. Why would He suffer like that for me? I try to be thoughtful and loving, but I could never be "good enough" to deserve someone paying that price for me.

Have you ever experienced a time when you were loved by someone when you felt your actions didn't merit it? I remember one of the many times I experienced this in my life. Although it was not a life or death situation, it illustrates this idea.

In middle school and high school, there were plenty of opportunities for this because somehow, I thought I was entitled to do anything I thought was acceptable, by **my** own standards, not the standards of my parents or of God's.

It was a Friday night and my best friend was over to spend the night. We were having a great time together when we remembered that our friends, who happened to be boys, were having a camp out at our school for a boy scout badge. Since the school was just down the street, we got so excited about the possibility of camping out with our friends. We ran downstairs to tell my mom this great news!

Needless to say, she did not share in our excitement and proceeded to describe very politely why the camp over was not going to be happening that night. I could not believe my ears! How could this situation that had aligned so perfectly, not happen? Well, as respectful as I attempted to be with my parents, I lost it! I argued with my mom until she gave me an ultimatum. It was either my friend continuing to stay and order pizza, or my friend going home and, of course, no pizza. Fortunately, that was a no brainer...friend and pizza, of course! I didn't see it at the time, but looking back now, I can see the love and mercy my mom showed me even though, based on my disrespect of her, I didn't deserve it. This is such a minor example of this love, grace and mercy that God's love.

- Share a time you gave or received this kind of love where you didn't do anything to receive it.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." -John 15:13

There I was complaining about not getting to do what I wanted to do, not seeing the big picture about the possible consequences of this choice, and yet, my mom still held to what was best for us while giving me other alternatives, even if it was different from the way I imagined it. This is like our Heavenly Father, He sees the bigger picture. He sees how our choices to agree with the enemy through rebellion, fear, and pride can hurt us and assist in leading us away from those choices, even when we do not listen. Sometimes we just don't see it. He reminds us that He sees all when we can't. He invites us to trust Him with our choices, our path, and our future.

When Christ laid down His life for us, we were and still are sinners. We can't earn perfect righteousness on our own. He is the only one who could do it, and He DID do it. His victory is our reward. We have access to that perfect love. How much more will He do for us if He is willing to lay down His own life for us this perfect love.

Read 1 John 4:9-10.

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

- Why did God lay down His life for us?

1 John 4:18-19 states: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us."

We can see that the ultimate, perfect love is what Jesus already did for us through His death and resurrection, paying the price for our lives. What context do we have for understanding this perfect love? Who among us can relate to being loved perfectly or loving perfectly? It is very hard to even imagine. Even if we have people in our life who love us and care for us, they will never do it PERFECTLY. What allows God to love us so perfectly? And, what does love have anything to do with not being afraid? Let's see if we can grow in some understanding of how walking in the light of His perfect love conquers our fears.

All of us can relate to the experience of fear. This fear could have been a real threat to our lives, or many times, just as terrifying, it could be a

Romans 5:8 says: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this While we were still sinners Christ died for us."*

perceived threat in our minds. Either way, fear is a powerful emotion that is meant to heighten our awareness and protect us. This initial fear response is natural, it's actually our response to it that God wants to teach us through His Word which provides strength, hope and peace to our mind.

- Share a time when fear got the better of you. How did you find comfort?

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, *"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."*

- What has God given us to comfort our hearts?

Read Psalm 36:7, *"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings."*

- What does it mean to "put our trust under the shadow of His wings?"
- What does this tell us about His love?

Read Romans 5:5, *"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

- What does this scripture say is the reason that God gives us the Holy Spirit?
- How could the love of God through the Holy Spirit inspire our loving others?

Read James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (NKJV)*

Read Hebrews 13:8, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

- How do these scriptures speak to the consistency and security of God's love?

- How is knowing God will never change comforting for us?

Part of this security is knowing that God will always be there for us and will never change His mind. As we read Romans 8:34-39, we recognize that nothing could ever separate us or take us away from the love of Christ Jesus.

"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." - Romans 8:34-39

- How does it feel to know that nothing can separate us from the love of God?
- When we are feeling fearful or worried, what can we remember in God's Word to provide immediate comfort?

Ephesians 2 reminds us of again of what God did for us because of His GREAT love for us:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." -Ephesians 2:4-10

- God's love, grace, and salvation is a free gift. What makes it difficult to accept this free gift sometimes?
- Does it feel vulnerable to put your trust in God?
- How does this fear of feeling vulnerable get in our way of our faith in God?

Knowing His love is perfect and we can trust Him, we have the opportunity to reach out to Him and rest in the confidence of His loving grip. No matter how many times we let go and try to do this life by ourselves, His unchanging love for us remains. Whether we turn toward Him or away, He is always there, ready to love us. Once we profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, His love for us remains perfect, even when our love for Him is not.

Isn't great to know that God's love is so perfect and it has absolutely nothing to do with us! It is solely based on how He loves us, not on how we love Him. We have no ability to mess it up, lose it, or be separated from it. He IS love and there is no way we can change that! We are covered in righteousness by the blood of Christ Jesus. You can't earn it. It is a free gift...all you need to do is accept it, bask in it, grow strong in it, and practice walking in it!

So could it be that when we know and believe that God's love is unconditional, trustworthy, everlasting, present, and never changing towards us, we feel safe and we are not afraid to live. I can do this life with peace as I walk confidently with my perfect, loving Savior, Jesus.

Head and Heart

Take a few minutes to answer these questions then please share with the group.

- How were some of your thoughts of God challenged today in light of some new scriptural knowledge?
- How has God spoken to your heart?
- What stood out to you in this study?

LESSON 3: WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF HIS PROMISES

Last week we learned that the love of our God is perfect and eternally safe. God is REAL and PRESENT and we know we are fully loved, so we have nothing to fear. This doesn't mean we won't feel afraid or anxious, but it does mean we can turn to Him and count on His strength to help us. So now that we know that He is trustworthy, what is it we are counting on? When we walk in the light of His promises, we are reminded that being in relationship with the one true God of the universe is the most powerful source of peace for our mind and soul!

On July 8, 2017, the Daily Commercial published an article called *Reflections: how many promises there are in the Bible?* The article describes a Canadian school teacher named Everet Storms who took a year and a half to count all the promises in the bible. His list of promises by God to man totalled a whopping 7,487! That is a whole lot of promises!

The promises of the Bible are truths that can change our lives, but it's not the truth that changes us, it is trusting the truths. And that is our biggest obstacle -trusting those truths. When people talk about a "leap of faith" where is the leap? It is like the "Trust Fall" game. In this game, someone stands on a slight ledge with a number of people behind them with their arms out ready to catch them. Without looking behind them, the "leap of faith" is actually allowing themselves to fall back into the arms of those behind them, staying straight and trusting they will catch them. Our spiritual leap is in putting our faith in God that His Word is true and that He keeps his promises!

Here is a list of 15 of the thousands of promises in God's Word. Read through the list of scriptures first to see which ones stand out to you. Choose a few of these promises and answer the questions individually, then take some time to share your answers with the group.

1. What promise(s) do you hear?
2. Knowing He is trustworthy, what causes you to have a differing perspective at times?
3. Note a time when remembering these promises would have or did make a difference in your situation.
4. What is our biggest challenge in trusting these promises?

WALKING IN THE LIGHT BIBLE STUDY

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1 Chronicles 16:34 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Jeremiah 29:11 '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.'

Deuteronomy 31:8 The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

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

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

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 10:9-10 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

1. What promise(s) do you hear?
2. Knowing He is trustworthy, what causes you to have a differing perspective at times?
3. Note a time when remembering these promises would have or did make a difference in your situation.
4. What is our biggest challenge in trusting these promises?

Sometimes our fears get in the way of trusting these promises, especially when our journey is difficult. What a wonderful gift that God gives us access to these promises, like wisdom, eternal life, a heavenly home, strength, protection, peace, power, confidence, wireless communication with the Creator of the universe...just to name a few! These promises are like walking through our cave with our tools and gadgets, food and water, first aid kit and all that we need for our journey.

I love this quote about God's promises by Cornelia "Corrie" ten Boom. Corrie was a Dutch Christian watchmaker who helped save many Jewish people escape the Nazis during World War II. She was caught, arrested and sent to a concentration camp. She survived and shared her testimony with the world until she passed away in 1983.

"I've experienced His Presence in the deepest darkest hell
that men can create...I have tested the promises of the
Bible, and believe me, you can count on them."
-Corrie Ten Boom

So when we walk with the light of His love we hold His hand and are fearless. When we walk in the light of His promises, we learn we can trust that He has given us everything we need to take our journey. Next week, we discover the power within us as we are walking in the light of His Spirit!

Head and Heart

Take a few minutes to answer these questions then please share with the group.

- How were some of your thoughts of God challenged today in light of some new scriptural knowledge?
- How has God spoken to your heart?
- What stood out to you in this study?

LESSON 4: WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF HIS SPIRIT

When we are walking in the light of His love, we have access to peace. When we walk in the light of His promises, we recognize we can trust He has given us everything we need for our journey. And now, as we walk in the light of His Spirit, we come to understand the power of the internal light given to us through the Holy Spirit!

What do we imagine God's own Spirit in us looks like in that dark cave? Do you think it would be like a headlamp focusing us on the smoothest route? Or a beam of light refocusing and directing us when we get distracted? Or is it like an internal GPS system, leading and guiding us to our final destination with moment to moment directions? "In 10 feet, turn right at the next narrow, jagged crevasse, being careful to step on the left side."

Read John 14:16-18; 26-27 together.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you." - John 14:16-18

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." - John 14:26-27

- Based on the description Jesus provides, what can we learn about the Holy Spirit?

Read the next three scriptures. How do these scriptures grow your understanding of what it means to have God's Spirit within you?

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." -1 John 4:4 ESV

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." -Galatians 2:20

"Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God." -Ephesians 3:17-19

God's Word describes the Holy Spirit as actually living inside us and Christ in us making a home in our Hearts. We have personal, internal, direct access to the one and only Spirit of God. We are literally never alone. Not only are we never alone, we have God in us and it is greater than anything, and able to overcome our flesh, the world and Satan!

"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." -Romans 5:5

- How does this change our daily lives when we remember this truth?

Paul gives us more understanding in Romans. Besides what we learned earlier from Romans 8 about God's eternal love, it is so full of beautiful truths about the power of God in us through the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 8:3-11. As you read, consider what it means to "walk in the Spirit".

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in

you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

- What are some examples of living according to the flesh?
- What does it mean to live according to the Spirit?

Now read Romans 8:12-17.

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Id Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

- How might the knowledge that we are children of God keep us out of the bondage of fear?

With God's Spirit inside us, we no longer need to be controlled by our flesh, instead, we can be led by His Spirit! Our minds can focus on many different things. Emotions like fear, anxiety and depression are part of our human experience and are natural. Part of our flesh is our mind, body and emotions which give us information about our experience. It is not the emotions that are harmful. It is the **focusing** on these negative emotions that tend to darken our mind. Through His Word and God's Spirit within us, we let His Spirit refocus our thoughts, rewire our unhelpful thinking habits, and establish His truth to strengthen us.

- What thinking habits or things we focus on tend to move us into anxiety and depression?

Let's see what scripture says about how to be spiritually minded (Romans 8:6). The Holy Spirit leads us to shine our headlamp on things of the spirit, but many times our focus is on those things of the flesh. Our flesh is usually tempted by the world and the devil. The Holy Spirit is there to help us refocus and guide us in everyday life through prayer and studying His Word.

Read Philippians 4:5-9.

"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

- In this scripture, what does Paul suggest we focus on to help move from anxiety to peace?

Read Romans 12:2.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

- How does the Holy Spirit and God's Word "renew our minds"?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..."

- What are some ways we can "bring our thoughts into captivity"?

Filling ourselves with the truth of God's Word and letting His light focus our thoughts helps us shine from the inside out! The Spirit of God within us provides us focus from the dark thoughts of fear, anxiety, and depression in our flesh to His love, promises and celebrations of what God is doing within us and in our lives.

Head and Heart

Take a few minutes to answer these questions then please share with the group.

- How were some of your thoughts of God challenged today in light of some new scriptural knowledge?
- How has God spoken to your heart?
- What stood out to you in this study?

LESSON 5: WALKING IN HIS LIGHT...TOGETHER

This week, I am going to share my personal story of struggling with fear, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide as a teen. The importance of shining God's light in the darkness of our minds is so powerful that it can save lives. We can also learn to help care and support others who may be contemplating ending their lives. We will have the opportunity to make an action plan and learn specific ways to support and encourage each other during times of emotional crisis.

When we are feeling overwhelmed, fearful, or lonely, it is easy to continue to isolate and try to get through it with our own strength. This is not God's plan. He not **only** gives us His unconditional love, His trustworthy promises and His Spirit within us, but He gives us the gift of people, too! He has wired us to need others, as vulnerable as that may be at times, connections with others is vital.

This scripture shows God's intention:

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." - Hebrews 10:24-25

We were meant to be in fellowship with each other to support and encourage one another. It helps to know that we can always reach out to friends, pastors, teachers, coaches, counselors, parents, and other family members to walk beside us. Consider writing down names of five people that you could contact if you needed support, a listening ear, or just someone to remind you that you are not alone. It is important to keep in mind that we all do the best we can to be there for others. Sometimes we or others may not say the perfect thing, or be available just the way we need, but understand, most people have the best intentions for others. Don't give up if you don't get what you need right away.

So, keep this list to reach out for extra support and make sure you have their contact information:

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." - Matthew 18:20

As a teen, I know I would have felt **so** much better if I had shared all my sad, fearful and depressing thoughts and feelings with someone. I understand now that I would not have gotten to the point of having serious thoughts of ending my life. Many teens have thoughts of not wanting to deal with the pain of this world. These thoughts are usually a response to overwhelming feelings of unexpressed negative emotions.

Since our feelings are constantly changing, it is important to remember we won't always feel "bad". Many times, we don't want to die, we just can't figure out how to LIVE! It is vital that we get support in learning how to express our emotions in healthy ways and recognize the lies of the enemy so we can receive the power of God's truths: His love, promises, and Spirit! Statistics show that talking about suicide does not increase the likelihood of it happening. Remember that if you suspect someone else is feeling that way.

This is my story that I am VERY HAPPY to be able to share with you!

As an 8th grader, I came face to face with that decision, one I never imagined I would be contemplating. Just a year prior, I was on top of the world. I was happy, thriving, and confident. I was going to be student body president, I had an amazing best friend since Kindergarten, and life was good! But that all changed the summer between my 7th and 8th grade years. My dad took a job in a different city and I was devastated. In a new city and a large middle school, leaving my comfortable life behind, I experienced fear, depression, and felt utterly alone for the first time. I didn't talk with anyone about how I was feeling or ask for help. I don't think I thought anyone could help me. Although I was acting very differently, my parents assumed that it was to be expected after such a big life change. I isolated myself at school and at home, spending most of my time in my room. I had finally decided that I couldn't cry another tear. I was ready to end this deep depression by ending my life.

As I looked into the bathroom mirror at my swollen, tear-stained face, my heart was crying out to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It was in that moment and totally by the grace of God, that when I saw myself in the mirror, I began to laugh at myself. I literally laughed out loud looking at myself like, "what in the world are you doing?!" As my laughing calmed, I heard my family laughing together downstairs. For the first time since we had moved, I went down to join them. Believe me, God was very REAL and very PRESENT for me in that pivotal moment.

Statistics show that talking about suicide does not increase the likelihood of it happening.

If I had taken my own life, I would never have experienced the exciting rollercoaster of joys and growth pains and I would never have recognized that God was big enough to get me through anything in this life! Another crazy realization is I wouldn't have had the pure JOY of knowing my own children (who wouldn't even be here)!

And now, as a therapist I get to help others when they need someone to remind them who they are in Christ Jesus and how to live well. God is good and God is BIG! He is REAL and He is PRESENT!

I can relate to King David's process in Psalm 69, as his trust in mighty God moves him from a place of utter despair to anger, and then to hope.

Read Psalm 69 out loud. Listen for the shifts in his emotional states as he moves through his knowledge of God being a REAL and PRESENT help.

- What emotions do you hear throughout this Psalm?
- How can you relate to these shifts in emotions?
- How did King David end this Psalm with hope?

Emotions are constantly changing. Why is it important to remember to look beyond our emotions to the truth in God's Word?

God is our help in times of despair. Having tools and support during those times, also helps reduce the risk of getting to the point of thinking about suicide. By implementing a plan to reduce anxiety and depression, we start to learn that we can have more influence than we ever imagined.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT BIBLE STUDY

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Personal Action Plan

When you are feeling down, stressed, or in a tough place, what are the things you do to help your mental state? Create a plan using some of these ideas or coming up with some of your own.

- Reading God's promises for us in His Word
- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Increase support of friends and family
- Nurture-self
- Good time management skills
- Relax
- *Thinking well- Philippians 4:5-9
- *Prayer/ Spiritual Refueling/Time with God
- Other

Action Plan to Help Others

Discuss this list of some ways we can be helpful as a support for others. Which ones seem the most challenging to you?

- Listen without judging!
- Offer reassurance that you're there and that you care!
- Stay with them, listen to them, and take them seriously.
- Help them get help.
- Tell a responsible adult!
- Find help from a family member, teacher, friend or pastor!
- Call the Hotline! 800-273-8255

Resources

- Crisis Text Line -Text 'HELLO' to 741741 (24/7)
- www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255
- Project SafePlace 888-290-7233
- Safe Place for Runaway and Homeless Youth-Text 'SAFE' to 44357
- 'Suicide Safety Plan' App

WALKING IN THE LIGHT BIBLE STUDY

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"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." - 1 John 4:7

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - John 8:12

Remember, we are walking in the light of His love, accessing peace. We walk in the light of His promises, recognizing we can trust He has given us everything we need for our journey. We walk in the light of His Spirit, understanding the power of the internal light given to us through the Holy Spirit. And, we walk together, reminding each other we are connected to the one true God, forever!

Head and Heart

Take a few minutes to answer these questions then please share with the group.

- How were some of your thoughts of God challenged today in light of some new scriptural knowledge?
- How has God spoken to your heart?
- Truths spoken in the Word today: