

Ezer Facilitator Guide

A WOMAN'S WORDS



Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate an Ezer Study. We hope that this study guide will enrich the group experience and make it easier for you to navigate the material and guide the discussion.

For each chapter you will find:

- *A Big Idea* that summarizes the chapter
- *Points to cover* for each chapter
- Specific questions to ask.
- An activity from time to time that reinforces a truth in the material
- Reminders about homework, if needed
- Some chapters include a specific ice-breaker question related to the material

Included for each study:

- Study related diagrams that you can copy and distribute
- Snapshot to be completed at the end of study to help apply materials to their specific context
- Ezer Applied pages to reference for further application of principles
- Ezer teaching videos on the study specific page. These videos help summarize the study, or dive deeper into important concepts. It may be helpful to send these links out to members of your group for further clarity if there is confusion or to guide discussion.

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

Begin each week by asking someone to summarize the big idea. This is where you can provide further clarity if needed.

Before you dive into discussing the chapter you may want to ask what impacted, resonated or challenged them.

The questions embedded in the chapter are to help them reflect on and apply what they are learning as they read. If there is a specific question you want to discuss together, send the group a text or email highlighting the question. This helps women who are more timid or slower processors to feel prepared.

As you read through the material to prepare each week, additional questions might come to mind, write them down so you can include them in your discussion.

If participants are not prepared or having difficulty remembering a specific section they read earlier in the week, give them a minute or two to skim and review before discussing.

If the flow of conversation has slowed or gotten off track, sometimes having a member read a specific paragraph or quote from the material can help redirect the conversation.

If you have any questions don't hesitate to reach out to the Ezer Lead, or Group Life Women's Minister at your campus.

A Woman's Words

OVERVIEW

Words are powerful, and Scripture reminds us that out of the heart, the mouth speaks. Our words impact all of our relationships, so it is vital that we take a deep, honest look into what is going on in our hearts in order to understand the nature of our speech. In this study, we explore the power of words, the temptations we face, the idols that corrupt our speech, and the conversational tendencies that harm our relationships. This study also gives us a biblical grid for redemptive, life-giving speech and helps us use our words to speak both truth and love in a way that establishes true peace.

As you prepare to lead this study, we encourage you to check out the resources on the A Woman's Words leader page. It may be helpful to send some of these resources to the women in your group as you progress through the study.

Chapter 1: Words Matter

BIG IDEA

We fulfill our calling as an ezer in the context of relationships. You can't be strong for another without there being a person on the receiving end. That seems obvious, but it is a crucial piece in why we are studying the nature of our words. Our ability to be strong for others will be influenced by our speech more than anything else.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THE CHAPTER

As everyone introduces themselves, have them describe:

- Their season of life
- What's challenging
- What they are enjoying in this season

This chapter reviews the idea of what it means to be an ezer and provides helpful definitions and summaries of the big ideas from Biblical Femininity. If these ideas are new to your group, they may need some additional clarification. As a group, use the descriptions from this chapter to write definitions for each of the following words:

- Ezer
- Inviting
- Nurturing
- Partnering
- Autonomy
- Self-Protection
- Self-Promotion

Share with your group an example of how autonomy looks in your life with specific examples of self-protection and self-promotion. Invite them to share which one is more their tendency.

If time allows, ask them how they are living out being strong for others in their context and season of life.

Words matter because our words impact our relationships. In order for this study to be effective, each participant is going to have to make an effort to be aware of the nature of their speech. Almost every week, there is at least one question that asks them to reflect on the words they have spoken the previous week. They are going to have to learn to listen to themselves talk. This will not be easy. Encourage them to begin this practice and to write down examples of their speech on a blank page in the book or in a separate notebook.

HOMEWORK

Distribute copies of the blank face to complete the exercise in Chapter 2 for next week. Remind them to bring it back with them next week

Make copies of the document "Empathy—Caring for Others" included at the end of this guide for your group. Ask them to read it for next week along with Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Words Shape Us

BIG IDEA

This chapter takes an important look at how we have been shaped by others' words. It asks hard questions about the past. It is important to answer these questions in order to understand the ways we have been wounded by others and the impact those words still have on us.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THE CHAPTER

Look at the graphic of words landing on the face and allow them to react to it.

Take time to do question 2 on [page 24](#). *Have each woman share what she wrote on the face.* Be prepared to share your answer first to encourage others to be vulnerable as well. Follow up with questions 3 and 4.

Understanding what has shaped and impacted them is going to be important as we move forward. On a sheet of paper, have them list descriptions of past experiences, present reality, relationships, wounds, and fears that have shaped the story of their life. Later, we will refer to this as the *soil that shaped me*.

Read the middle two paragraphs on [page 26](#) out loud. Have them identify which of their current relationships are currently most impacted by the idea that everything we hear is coming through a filter of our own story. What are some practical takeaways for both the listener and the speaker?

Chapter 3: Origins of Words

BIG IDEA

Words have the power to cultivate life or death in our relationships. Our words will produce fruit—it's just a matter of what kind.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THIS CHAPTER

Ask members to share what adjectives they used in the chart to describe their words. If they have not completed it, allow a few minutes for everyone to reflect back on interactions they had this week and fill in the chart. What observations do they have about their speech and interactions with others?

Be sure to communicate that on this side of heaven our words ARE going to be a mixture of life and death. But there is hope because if we are his children, God IS working in us to redeem and transform our speech.

Chapter 4: The Fruit of our Words

BIG IDEA

By examining key passages in James and the portraits of Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in Proverbs, we will compare the difference between the impact of life-giving versus destructive words and gain a clear picture of the fruit of our own words.

POINTS TO CONSIDER AS YOU DISCUSS THIS CHAPTER

Discussion for Lady Wisdom

- Read the Proverbs passage out loud. Identify and circle all the descriptions that demonstrate how these traits are a reflection of the ezer nature (strength).
- If your group knows each other well, have group members pick a word from the Words of the Wise list that describes how they experience each other. Follow up with having everyone share the descriptions they feel best describe themselves. Do how others view them match with how they view themselves?
- If your group is just getting to know each other, simply have them identify the words they feel describe themselves most accurately.
- In addition, have each person identify one area where she would like to grow and/or one area where she has seen growth.
- Identify what relationship (who) is benefiting the most from your words of wisdom.

Discussion for Lady Folly

- Share with your group the two or three words that best describe your sin patterns under the Words of the Foolish list. Invite others to do the same.
- Ask participants if there is a word on this list that describes a tendency they used to have, but they have seen God work and redeem.
- Identify what relationship (who) is being impacted the most by these foolish words. What would repentance look like for you in this relationship?

Read the last paragraph on [page 47](#). This is where we want to land so that we aren't filled with despair or contempt. There is work to do, but we are not without hope. Which is why we need to get to the root of what is driving our speech.

REMINDER FOR NEXT WEEK

Chapter 5 is longer than previous chapters and will take some time to digest and evaluate. There is a guided exercise that they should complete before next week that will take them deeper into understanding the heart of their speech. In Chapter 2, we examined the *Soil of Our Story* and looked at the way in which our past has shaped us. Chapter 5 looks at the *Diseased Roots* that are governing our speech by addressing both our weakness and our idolatry. Our idolatry is fueled by the lies we believe about God. So we will also try to identify the lies that we believe that cause a *Seed of Unbelief* to grow. Finally, we will see how all of these work together to produce the *Rotten Fruit* that shows up in our lives.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Give them a copy of the tree diagram to create their own for the exercise in Chapter 5.
- Cultivate: Tree of Unbelief video teaching found on the study webpage.

Chapter 5: The Root of Our Words

BIG IDEA

The type of fruit we produce is determined by the root. Scriptures say that what comes out of our mouth is a reflection of what is already in our heart. The fruit is native to the tree—it matches.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THIS CHAPTER

To emphasize the big idea, read the passage from Luke on [page 50](#).

Clarify the difference between weakness and idolatry.

- *Weakness* is defined by physical weakness. We all have limits, and when we are emotionally or physically weak, we will be vulnerable to temptation, sin, and sloppy speech. Answer question 1 on page 56 and share with one another when you are the most vulnerable. How can that knowledge be a benefit to your relationships?
- *Idolatry* in its simplest form is misplaced affection. God gives us desires for many good things which we are meant to enjoy. An idol forms “when those desires go awry—when they displace your love for God and others- that they become evil.” (p.56)

The following is a list of the idols discussed in this chapter. Review them as a group and let members share what insights were particularly helpful. Point out that at the center of each type of IDOL is self. Our devotion to our idols is really about getting our needs met. An idol is often an attempt to sidestep God and rely on myself to get my needs met rather than relying on him. (Autonomy at its finest!)

Comfort
Glory
Justice
Approval
Control
Power
Gratification

After reviewing them, have participants identify which two they feel most closely reflect the idols they struggle with. If someone is struggling to understand and identify their idol, offer these diagnostic questions to help bring clarity:

- *What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about the most?*
- *When I go to bed, what is my consuming thought? When I wake up, what is my consuming thought?*
- *When I feel isolated, lonely, or out of control, how do I comfort myself?*

Before moving on to this next section, check your time. Depending on how much time is left, you might need to just introduce the tree exercise, make sure everyone understands and/or is able to do it. If you have enough time, model the process by sharing your own tree diagram. Let them know that each person will eventually share their tree. You may have time to do a few this week and a few next week.

Here is a summary of the process you are asking them to complete.

1. **Rotten Fruit:** Write the fruit of your speech on the tree (the specific sins of speech you personally struggle with on a fairly regular basis). Here are some examples found in Scripture: Gossip, Slander, Scorn, Mock, Scoff, Quarrelsome, Strife, Lying, Manipulate, Boast, Curse, Insult/criticize, Harsh, Abusive, Grumbling, Flattery, Meddle, Stir up division, Nag, Careless, Withhold truth, Distance oneself..
2. **Soil that Shaped You:** Write 2-4 experiences that significantly shaped your life in the soil that shaped you.
3. **Diseased Roots:** Reflect on the above two activities. What idols may be at the root of those sin struggles (ex. comfort, glory, justice, approval, control, power, gratification, other)? Write your idols in the diseased roots of the tree.
4. **Identify your seed of unbelief.** What lie do you believe about God that is governing your speech?
For example:
 - “I don’t believe God will take care of me; therefore, I must control the situation and take care of myself.”
 - “The lie I believe about God is that he will not provide for me; therefore, I am always over-functioning and refuse to delegate or ask for help”.
5. **Truth Statement:** Although self-awareness and insight are helpful, it is not the fuel for change. The most important piece that will help us move forward and rely on God is to identify the TRUTH we need to believe. This truth helps us do battle with the seed of unbelief that tempts us to rely on idols over Christ. Go ahead and give an example of how you would turn your Seed of Unbelief statement into a Truth Statement. For example,
 - God will provide for me; therefore, I don’t have to do everything and I can trust and rest in him.
 - God is good, big, and in control, so I am free to be at peace and rest in him.
 - I am loved, and I am not alone. In Christ, I find my worth and identity.

This TRUTH statement is important because it transforms our hearts and minds and reorients us towards God and his great love for us. Make sure you ask question 2 on page 81. Help each other find Scriptures to rely on and memorize that reinforces the truth they need to believe about God.

Most likely, you will not have time to hear everyone's tree of unbelief or truth statement, so *assign it for homework and have everyone share their statements next week.* It is also okay to continue refining these statements for the remainder of the study so that by then end, everyone has one that applies directly to their area of unbelief.

Chapter 6: Gossip

BIG IDEA

This chapter examines the subtle but destructive nature of gossip—how it damages our relationships and reveals what is really going on in our hearts.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THIS CHAPTER

Before covering the new material in this chapter, begin this week by reviewing the parts of the tree. If not everyone was able to share their tree last week, take time to do that now. Make sure that everyone can identify the *specific lies* in their seed of unbelief as well as the *specific truth* they need to believe. The truth needs to correlate to the lie. It needs to be personal for them so that they will cling to it. You may need to continue refining these statements for the remainder of the study so that by then end, everyone has one that applies directly to their area of unbelief.

Introduce the chapter by reading the quote aloud on [page 90](#) by Ray Ortlund. This quote lays the groundwork for the discussion on gossip. After defining what it is, it identifies several motives that incline us towards gossip:

- It makes us feel important.
- It makes us feel needed.
- It makes us feel included.
- It makes us feel powerful.
- It makes us feel righteous.

Share which of these motives best describes your reasons to gossip and invite them to do the same.

Ask which of their relationships are most damaged by their tendency to gossip or vent inappropriately.

Now that they are aware of what gossip is, encourage them to pay attention during the week to how gossip is impacting them, either as a listener or as a speaker.

REMINDER FOR NEXT WEEK

Chapter 7 requires some work and reflection on examining their Responsibility and Concerns as well as Energy. It will take some time to complete the corresponding exercises, but they should come prepared to share what they learned. Hand out the Responsibility and Concern document on page 23 and ask them to fill out for next week.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Links to Ezer Video Teaching on Energy and Responsibility, Concern and Responsibility for next week
- Ezer Applied: Individuality and Season sections for further clarity

Chapter 7: Meddling

BIG IDEA

This chapter takes a deep dive into meddling and the ways in which confusion around our energy and responsibilities can lead to meddling and a myriad of other unhealthy choices and investments.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THE CHAPTER

Ask if anyone wants to share what they learned about themselves this past week as it relates to meddling.

Begin your discussion of this chapter by reading the definition in italics on [page 99](#). *Meddling is interfering or inserting yourself in someone's life without an invitation, or involving yourself in something that you are not responsible for with the goal of achieving a certain outcome.*

What is usually the “certain outcome” we are aiming for when we are meddling?

The middle paragraph on [page 102](#) is worth reading aloud as it highlights some outcomes we may be aiming for: assuages our own discomfort, prevents suffering, makes us indispensable, gives us an over-inflated view of self.

On [page 101-102](#), which descriptions did they identify with the most?

CONCERN VS. RESPONSIBILITY

Before sharing their Responsibility and Concern circles, point out that what we have placed in the *concern circle requires trust*. What we place in the *responsibility circle requires obedience*.

Entrusting our concerns to God is not easy—mainly because we have a white-knuckle grip on them and don't want to relinquish control. Brainstorm together some practical ideas for entrusting our concerns to God.

Point out that a regular examination of our responsibility and concerns will cultivate a healthy habit of both adjusting as needed and embracing what God has put in front of us.

For example,

- We do this at a micro-level when the stomach flu runs through the family.
- We do it at a macro-level when we suddenly find ourselves the primary caregiver for an elderly parent or are starting our first job.

Additional discernment is needed when we have a relationship or situation where we need to determine what aspect of this is my responsibility and what is my concern. This is where our Ezer Applied discipleship tool may be helpful—specifically the diagram on [page 76](#).

ENERGY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Each person should identify what their current bar graph of energy and responsibility looks like.

The most important thing is that there needs to be a GAP between our energy and responsibility. A gap big enough to force you to rely on God and others. As long as there is no gap, you will rely on yourself. You may even need to create a gap if your life circumstances and season have not created one for you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Ezer Video Teaching on Energy and Responsibility, Concern and Responsibility for next week
- Ezer Applied: Individuality and Season sections for further clarity

Chapter 8: Peacebreaker, Peacekeepers, and Peacemakers

BIG IDEA

There are three ways that we try to attain peace in our relationships: peacebreaking, peacekeeping, and peacemaking. We need to know which methods are toxic and have a vision of what Christ calls us to as his disciples. The goal is to know our own tendencies in this area and the ways in which our relationships have been damaged by it.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THE CHAPTER

Look at the diagram on [page 120](#) and the corresponding definitions of peacekeeper, peacebreaker, and peacemaker. Have each person identify which one most often describes them.

Read the quote by Timothy Keller on [page 127](#). The heart of peacemaking is being able to communicate and extend *both* truth *and* grace. As you discuss the section on peacemaking, remember that truth and grace are demonstrated over time, in numerous conversations and interactions. One conversation may lean more towards listening, being empathetic, and extending grace. Another conversation may lean more towards speaking truth. In order for either of these to happen, there must be a foundation of love for the other person.

For each list on [pages 130, 134 and 139](#), share two characteristics from each category that describe you and one area you need to grow in. Invite others to do the same.

How does being a peacekeeper or peacebreaker hurt your relationships?

What relationship has been most damaged by this tendency?

What might your next steps be beyond just acknowledgment?

HOMEWORK

If next week is your last week together, distribute copies of the Woman's Words Snapshot as a way to review and apply all that they have learned. Ask each participant to come next week prepared to share hers.

Chapter 9: Clean Lips

BIG IDEA

This chapter challenges us to acknowledge that we are women with unclean lips. It then moves to how worshipping God and trusting in him can transform our speech and make it *hospitable, charitable, and restorative*. As God redeems our speech, we are able to more effectively invest in others and help them grow as we apply the process of *Love, Know, Speak, Do* in our relationships.

POINTS TO COVER AS YOU DISCUSS THIS CHAPTER

The questions on [page 147](#) and [150](#) are important, but you may want to do these at the end rather than at the beginning of your time together.

Point out the definitions for *hospitable, charitable, and restorative* so that members are clear on their meanings and what transformed speech can look like. For each, use the lists provided and ask them to:

- pick one characteristic that they feel is true of them
- one characteristic that they need to grow in

Flattery is different from these other types of transformed speech. It may sound the same on the surface, but at the root, flattery is a need to be liked and fear of man. For further clarification on fear of man, refer to the Fear of Man article that is located on the Ezer leader webpage.

Read the portion of the paragraph describing flattery on page 164. Then, look at the list on the preceding page and try to brainstorm some examples of those so that everyone is clear on what flattery looks like in real life.

Love, Know, Speak, Do is a model of discipleship that we use in our church. Although these are not linear and are often done simultaneously within a conversation or relationship, it is important to make sure that the person we are speaking to feels that we truly know them and love them before speaking truth to them. Relationships are severed when we speak the truth without love and knowledge of the individual.

Questions to respond to as you close:

- What specific areas of sin and unbelief has this study exposed?
- In what relationship do you experience the most conflict? What have you learned that may help rebuild that relationship?
- What are some reminders that you need about who God is and what he has done for you that can reorient your heart to worship and trust him?

- Pass out a new printout of the face. The first time we did this exercise, we wrote words that had been spoken over us that have shaped and defined us. Do this exercise again and write Words of Life that God speaks over each of us as a reminder to let our lives and speech be shaped by our identity in him. It is the only thing stable enough to hold us.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Face Printout
- Love, Know, Speak, Do video from Cultivate 2019

GUIDE THEM THROUGH THE NEXT STEP PROCESS

As you close out your time together, be sure to help them identify any next steps they need to take in response to what they have learned and how God has been revealing himself to them. It may be steps of confession and repentance. It may be they need to sit down with a pastor or counselor. Or perhaps they need to take a step toward asking someone for forgiveness. Just make sure that they are clear on what a possible next step for them might look like.

Have them fill out their connect cards. Be sure to review things like the membership process (Discovery and Foundations), baptism, and other discipleship opportunities (re:engagement, re:generation, other Ezer studies) and help them decide how they might take another step toward growth in spiritual maturity.

Finally, have them complete their surveys so that we can learn how to continue to grow and develop into a more effective discipleship ministry.

A Woman's Words Snapshot

SPECIFIC WAYS I STRUGGLE WITH MY SPEECH:

RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE MOST IMPACTED BY MY WORDS

IDOLS I HAVE IDENTIFIED THAT MAY BE IMPACTING MY SPEECH

ADJUSTMENTS I NEED TO MAKE IN MY RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONCERNS IN ORDER TO FAITHFULLY STEWARD MY ENERGY IN THIS SEASON

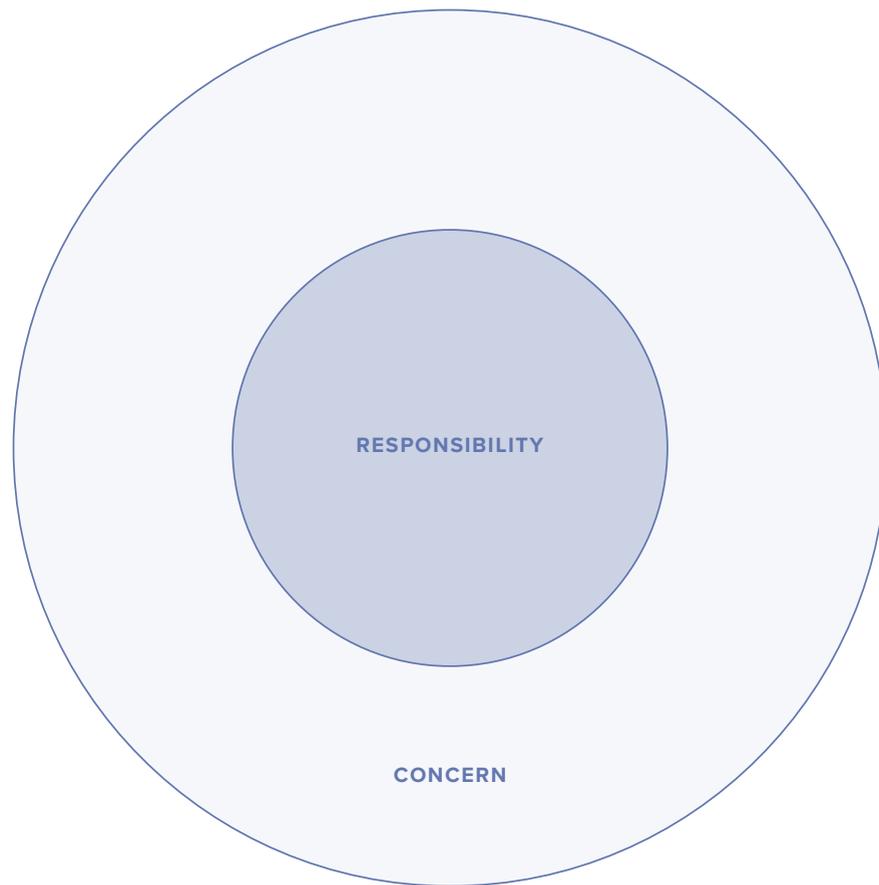
SPECIFIC WAYS I CAN GROW AS A PEACEMAKER IN DEMONSTRATING BOTH TRUTH AND GRACE?

WRITE DOWN THE STATEMENT OF TRUTH THAT YOU WILL USE TO BATTLE YOUR UNBELIEF.

Words That Shape Us



Responsibility v. Concern



Tree of Unbelief

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

—Colossians 2:6-7

TREE OF UNBELIEF

The Fruit of the Spirit is produced by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control are all evidence that God is making us more like himself. As believers, we want our lives to be marked by this fruit. And this fruit is produced in us as the result of the faith that is at work within us.

In Luke 6, Jesus reminds us that, “A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit.” If our faith is identified by its fruit, then it makes sense that when our heart is tangled with unbelief, it is going to yield fruit that has been corrupted by that unbelief.

This guide will help you examine not only the rotten fruit produced by your unbelief, but also the root system and the soil that causes it to grow. It may be helpful to watch this [video](#) explanation before you get started.

Use the graphic provided on the last page to label your own tree, or draw your own as you work through the prompts below.

ROTTEN FRUIT: MY SIN STRUGGLES

Even though Christ has given us a new nature, we still struggle with sin.

► IDENTIFY A FEW MAJOR SINFUL BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES THAT HAVE AFFECTED YOUR LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS.

Clarifying Questions: How do I act? What sin do I struggle with? What frustrates or disappoints the people closest to me?

Examples: anger, control, fear, addiction, critical spirit, materialism, meddling, exaggerating, manipulation, hiding, boasting, nagging, divisiveness, escape, demanding, arrogance.

Dig Deeper:

- What do others see in me?
- How do these struggles impact my relationships?

- What sin has been a lifelong struggle?
- What causes me to have an intense, emotional response?

DISEASED ROOTS: DESIRES THAT INFLUENCE MY BEHAVIOR

It's not just our evil desires that corrupt us; our good desires can too. When good desires become ultimate desires, we call them idols. When our idols are threatened, it creates conflict, but when they are fed, we are temporarily comforted and satisfied. Unfortunately, all idols eventually disappoint.

► IDENTIFY IDOLS IN YOUR LIFE THAT ARE DRIVING YOUR BEHAVIOR.

Clarifying Questions: What do I want? What do I fight for? What do I love? What can I not live without?

Examples: power, status, intimacy, comfort, approval, accomplishment, possessions, order, connection, justice, gratification.

Dig Deeper:

- What is my greatest nightmare?
- What do I worry about most?
- When I feel lonely or out of control, what do I reach for?
- What makes me angry?
- What is weighing on me when I close my eyes to go to sleep or when I first wake up?

SEED OF UNBELIEF: LIE THAT I BELIEVE ABOUT GOD

Our sinful nature is bent on being suspicious of God's character. Distorted beliefs about God lead us to try to meet our needs apart from him.

► IDENTIFY A LIE THAT MAY BE FUELING YOUR IDOLATRY AND DRIVING YOUR BEHAVIOR.

Clarifying Questions: When life doesn't go my way, what am I tempted to believe about God? What attribute(s) of God do I find difficult to believe or embrace?

Examples: I don't believe God is good, so I need to provide for myself. I don't believe he is in control, so I need to protect myself. I don't believe he loves me, so I need the love and approval of others.

Dig Deeper:

Pay attention to when you feel strong emotions, become controlling, or seek the approval of others, etc. In those moments ask yourself:

- What is it that I really want?
- What is it that I am afraid of?
- What do I really believe about God in this moment?

SOIL THAT SHAPED ME: HELPS ME UNDERSTAND MYSELF

Our pain, past, and current circumstances often become the fertile ground in which a lie takes root and distorts our view of God. Our past and our story—both good and bad—shapes our view of God and others.

► IDENTIFY MAJOR LIFE EVENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS THAT HAVE SHAPED HOW YOU VIEW YOURSELF AND GOD.

Clarifying Questions: Why am I this way? What has influenced me? What happened to me?

Examples: significant relationships and experiences, including harms to me, harms by me, and ways I experienced the brokenness of this world. Also, ways that I have been successful and achieved goals that influenced how I view the world.

Dig Deeper:

Consider these categories to uncover parts of your story that may be contributing to your inaccurate view of God:

- Significant losses and hardships
- Family relationships
- Sexual experiences
- Times of neglect or abuse
- Gifts, talents, achievements
- Economic status

TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMS: REPLACING THE LIE WITH THE TRUTH

Unless I repent of the seed of unbelief that is causing the fruit to grow, there will be no lasting change. Willpower and self-control might change my behavior for a while, but since actions spring from the heart, lasting spiritual transformation only comes when we replace the lies we believe with the truth.

► IDENTIFY THE TRUTH YOU NEED TO TELL YOURSELF IN ORDER TO SILENCE THE LIES AND DO BATTLE WITH YOUR UNBELIEF.

Clarifying Questions: What truth can directly take aim at the lie you are believing?

Examples: God is good; therefore, I can trust him to provide for me. God is in control; therefore, I can entrust difficult situations to him. God says he loves me; therefore, I am secure in him.

Dig Deeper:

- When I am struggling, how will I use this truth to help me combat the lie?
- What means of grace could I engage to aid me in my fight for faith (ex. prayer, memorizing Scripture, biblical community, worship, Sabbath)?
- How can I lead myself spiritually in order to root myself more deeply in Christ?
- How have I neglected feeding myself spiritually?

ABIDING IN CHRIST: STAYING CONNECTED TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Hopefully you identified a core lie that you believe about God and the truth that you need to combat that lie. This is where we cannot be complacent and think that our passive belief in Christ is a one time event. As we are reminded in Colossians, our faith requires an ongoing, active believing. Through that process, the Spirit produces Christ's nature in us. Our job is to stay connected to Christ; his job is to produce the fruit.

► FIND AND MEMORIZE A SCRIPTURE PASSAGE THAT REINFORCES THE TRUTH YOU NEED TO BELIEVE.

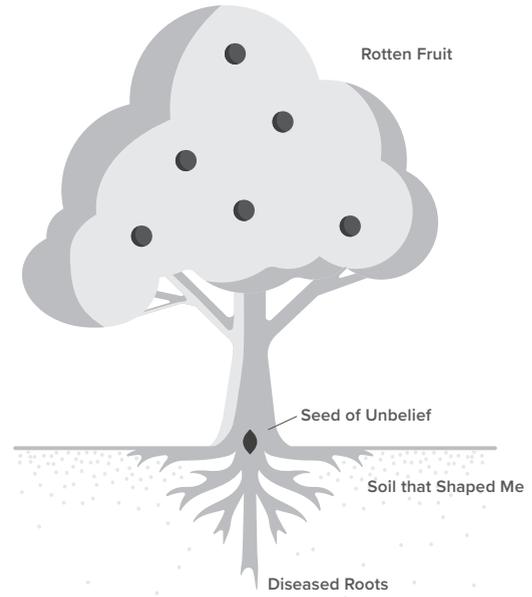
Spiritual power and true transformation come when we humbly abandon ourselves to the truths of the gospel and allow them to transform our hearts and minds. By continually turning to Christ, remembering his work on our behalf, and abiding with him, we can grow more and more into the mature image-bearers he designed us to be.

ROTTEN FRUIT

How do I think and act?

DISEASED ROOTS

What do I want?



SEED OF UNBELIEF

What lie do I believe about God?

SOIL THAT SHAPED ME

What's my story?

GOSPEL TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMS

What truth do I need to believe?

God is _____.

Therefore I can _____

Scripture _____

ABIDING IN CHRIST

What are my next steps of repentance and faith?

Empathy—Caring for Others

When we are willing to be a little more vulnerable, and others handle our hearts with care, we discover that knowing and being known are part of our design. —Ed Welch

One of the discipleship distinctives at Grace is that we desire to be authentic. We see this demonstrated in our teaching and we experience it within our various types of biblical community. Being authentic requires vulnerability. We have all been in situations where someone shares something deeply personal. It catches us off guard. We feel awkward. We want to grow in our ability to be empathetic so we can love one another well.

EMPATHY: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS.

Empathy is the ability to *understand and identify with the feelings of another without being judgmental*. One of the most powerful ways that we can demonstrate love—and be relationally connected—is to be empathetic.

When someone is exposing their true self, whether in the form of sharing a painful experience, remembering a past trauma, confessing sin, or expressing strong emotion about a difficult situation, they are putting themselves at risk of being wounded by how others might respond to their vulnerability. How we respond matters.

During these intense moments, our brains actually stop functioning in the interconnected way in which they are designed. Our ability to listen to reason or be analytical is impaired when strong emotion takes over. Research has shown that in those intense moments, empathy has that capacity to settle, soothe, and reset our minds. We offer empathy first, followed up later with further conversations that provide clarity and offer direction.

For some of us, this is easy. Our natural bent is to respond empathetically when someone shares something with us. For others, it is more difficult. Our tendency might be to withhold empathy.

Some of the reasons we withhold empathy:

- We don't have all the facts.
- The story doesn't make sense.
- We don't agree with their assessment of the situation.
- We think they are overreacting.
- We don't want to give the impression that we are giving a 'stamp of approval.'
- We wouldn't be feeling or reacting this way if we were in the same situation.
- We question whether or not their emotions are valid.
- We equate empathy with enabling.

- We believe that giving direction is more beneficial than offering empathy.
- We are uncomfortable—listening to their story may stir something in us we have not yet dealt with.
- We think someone is acting like a victim.

NON-EMPATHETIC RESPONSES:

In order to help us become more empathetic, we need to identify some non-empathetic ways in which we may normally respond to others.

- Minimizing: “It could be worse” or “At least _____.”
- Over-spiritualizing/using Bible verses as spiritual Band-Aids: “God uses all things for our good.”
- Quick problem solving: “I know what you can do, try_____.”
- Blaming: “You brought this on yourself, if you had only_____.”
- Making it about you: “That’s nothing! Let me tell you about when I_____.”
- Silence or changing the subject: Ignoring or not acknowledging what the person shared.
- Enabling: Being sympathetic and/or over-identifying without eventually pointing them to truth.

EMPATHETIC RESPONSES

Remember you don’t have to agree with their assessment of the situation, how they are reacting or feel what they are feeling in order to be empathetic- you simply need to acknowledge what they are experiencing and communicate that you understand. Here are some helpful phrases:

- I don’t know what to say, but I am really glad you told me.
- Thank you for sharing that with us. I know that took a lot of courage.
- It sounds like you are in a really hard place.
- I know that hurts.
- I am really sorry you were treated this way.
- This is really painful. I want you to know I am here for you and you are not alone.

JESUS— THE GREAT EMPATHIZER

When it comes to caring for others, Jesus is our tutor. A quick scan of the gospels gives us glimpses into the ways Jesus responds to those who are in pain. He empathizes, listens, asks questions, and gives direction. As we grow in each of these areas, we will be offering to others what Christ has offered us. We comfort others, with the comfort we have received. In Mark 7 we read the account of Jesus healing a deaf and mute man. As he pulls him away from the crowd to perform the miracle, Jesus sighs. The same word is used in Romans 8:18-25 as it describes all creation groaning. In this simple gesture Jesus seems to be acknowledging the weight of this fallen broken world. When we offer empathy to others we groan with them- agreeing that it is not supposed to be this way.

A Woman's Words Case Studies

Here are some examples of perspectives or reactions that may arise as you are leading this study. These case studies can be used to facilitate discussion with your co-leader in preparation for leading. Please take some time to review these scenarios and think through how you would respond to the different situations. Talk to your coach if you have any questions about how to handle any particular issue.

SITUATION 1

My words have hurt people that I love, and I don't know how to undo the damage I've caused. I have created a negative environment in my home and my relationships. How can I reverse this? I can't seem to get past it. I'm afraid I'll always be someone who wounds others with her words.

SITUATION 2

I often use flattery to win people over or get what I want. It's a harmless way to make friends and get things done. I'm just saying what people want to hear. What's the harm in that?

SITUATION 3

I'm a "tell-it-like-it-is" kind of person. What you see is what you get. I don't sugarcoat the truth. I have strong opinions and beliefs, and I don't apologize for it. That's the way God made me, and at least I'm being real and honest with people.

SITUATION 4

I have a hard time relating to (my spouse, friend, coworker, mother-in-law, etc.) because their words have hurt me so often. I don't know how to have a relationship when I'm constantly wounded by their mean-spiritedness. I can't exclude this person from my life—what can I do?

SITUATION 5

I can't trust (the church, Christians, community groups, etc.) because of how I've been hurt by gossip and slander in the past. I don't want to open myself up to others again.

SITUATION 6

Gossiping with other women is a way to let off steam and stay in the loop. I like to know what's going on with friends and at work. It's entrenched in the culture of my friends and coworkers. Is it harmful as long as what I'm sharing is true? If I'm not supposed to gossip, how can I get out of this pattern?

SITUATION 7

I enjoy debating others on social media. If you're willing to put opinions out there, you should be able to accept criticism and engage in debate. It's not personal; we're just discussing issues.

SITUATION 8

When I'm upset about something, I vent to others. I call my mom, a friend, or my sister, and blow off steam; or I post something online to get affirmation about the frustration or injustice I've experienced. It makes me feel better when other people take my side.

SITUATION 9

I like to keep the peace and avoid confrontation. "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." I'd rather keep quiet than say the wrong thing or be misunderstood. If someone really wants to know what I think, they'll ask.

SITUATION 10

I'm frequently guilty of committing to things and then breaking my commitments. I know people might see me as unreliable, but it's easier to say no later than disappointing people when I'm put on the spot.

SITUATION 11

I know I nag my husband and kids, but they won't do things unless I remind them! If I didn't, nothing would ever get done. I'm resentful that they keep putting me in this position.

SITUATION 12

I'm a talker! I think out loud and often process things while I'm talking. Sometimes, I say things I don't really mean after I've had time to think about it.

SITUATION 13

I am an introvert. I hate speaking up in a group. It drains me to have to engage in small talk. I'd really rather just stay home.

SITUATION 14

My daughter raises my grandbaby so differently than we raised our kids. She says her way is "doctor recommended," but they turned out just fine the old way. She won't even listen to my advice anymore.

SITUATION 15

My son just started his freshman year at college. I helped him figure out his class schedule and register for classes. I try to entice him to come home on the weekends by offering to do laundry and fix him his favorite meals. He did bring home a girlfriend last weekend, but I told him that he could do better.

SITUATION 16

I carry so much shame because of how angry I get at my kids and how I treat them. My anger usually starts when my kids interfere with me getting my “to do” list accomplished. I lash out at them with harsh words and blame them for making my life chaotic. I just want to get some things done—is that so bad?

SITUATION 17

I love my husband, but if only he would _____, I’d be happy. He never seems to say the right thing, help with the kids, or do housework. I wish he was more of a spiritual leader.

SITUATION 18

I am completely depleted, sleeping a lot, and have lost interest in my husband. I let the kids watch TV a good portion of the day just to get through it. I am just out of energy.

SITUATION 19

Several weeks into the study, you notice that whenever someone opens up and is vulnerable, one of the women in your group responds by either rushing to cheer her up or minimizes the situation with a humorous comment.

SITUATION 20

I have a very strained relationship with my mom. She is constantly calling me, asking questions about my day, and critiquing my decisions. Whenever I am not able to fulfill one of her requests, I feel guilty and manipulated. I need to have a conversation with my mom but would rather just tolerate it than have to deal with the conflict it would create.