

Week Seven

Know That I AM Your Healer

The Healer—this is how I was introduced to Jesus. I was an adult when I came to know Christ. I had been reared in the church, but I did not have a personal relationship with God. Just prior to receiving Christ as my Lord and Savior, I had been suffering in the pit of depression for almost a year. It crippled my mind, heart, spirit and soul and destroyed every part of me. I felt like everything had been taken from me. I tried to find help; but, I couldn't find anyone who would or could help me, so I became suicidal. It was here, at the lowest point of my life, that I cried out to a God I didn't know. Nevertheless, because of His compassion and unfailing love, when Jesus heard my desperate cry, He reached into the depths of my despair and pulled me from that pit, placing my feet on solid ground. Suddenly, Jesus became very tangible to me. From that time on, Jesus has revealed Himself as the Healer of my heart, mind, soul, and spirit. He has touched and transformed my life with wholeness.¹

Hearing other testimonies about the Lord's healing power, and His touch on people's lives, is priceless to me. My heart is moved every time I hear another precious soul share about the power of Christ's love through His healing hand upon his or her life.

For many of us, "the Healer" is how we first met Jesus. Jesus will meet us, right where we are, in the pit of our need and helplessness, and introduce Himself by healing us. So many people in the New Testament were introduced to Jesus for the first time as Healer. There were the ones who needed physical healing, such as the blind men (Mt. 9:27-34), the leper (Mt. 8:1-4), the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (Mt. 9:20-22, Mk 5:25-34), and the lame (Luke 5:17-26). Then, there were the ones who needed spiritual or emotional healing, such as the woman at the well (John 4:4-26), the demon possessed (Luke 4:31-37), and the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50). These are only a few examples of the many people Jesus healed during His earthly ministry.

As a new believer, I remember how these stories of healing touched my heart. I remember weeping over the stories as our ladies' Bible study group made their way through the

¹Learn about my story by reading; *Finally Free: Breaking the Bonds of Depression without Drugs* (Liberty in Christ Ministries, Inc.), 2011. To order, please visit www.libertyinchristministries.com

gospel of Mark. I could relate to these people of the Bible. Perhaps I had not been physically blind, but I had been spiritually blind. Perhaps I had not been bleeding for twelve years, but I knew what it felt like to be touched by Jesus and instantly healed.

Nonetheless, in all of these healings, including mine, I have come to realize that there is something else at stake. When Jesus comes to heal us, He not only comes to heal us from our infirmities, He comes to heal our soul. The goal is wholeness, spiritual maturity, and complete transformation, the very things that will reveal God's glory to the world.

This week, it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will lead us into complete healing—whatever that is, whatever the need, whatever the circumstance—so we may come to *know* Jesus more profoundly.

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and
release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor—
to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor

This week we are going to:

Witness the Lord's healing hand

"I am the LORD, who heals you"
(Exodus 15:26b).

Realize that faith makes a difference

"According to your faith will it be done to you"
(Matthew 9:29).

Anticipate finding joy in our suffering

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials"
(James 1:2).

Remember we are never alone in our suffering

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to
help those who are being tempted"
(Hebrews 2:18).

Yearn to know Christ in His suffering

"We share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory"
(Romans 8:17).

Day One

The Hand of the Healer

“Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them” (Matthew 15:30).

How can we know the Healer if we never have a need for healing? As I begin writing this week’s lesson on the Healer, I am in need of physical healing. Due to my recent contact with poison ivy, certain parts of my body are infected with an irritating, red and itchy rash that doesn’t want to go away. My mother is in the hospital battling cancer. She is desperate for physical healing and believes God with all her heart that He will heal her.

My middle child, Jessica, recently encountered the Healer this past summer during a youth conference in Orlando, Florida. Since she was 12 years old, she has suffered from panic attacks and many phobias; one in particular caused her to be fanatical about washing her hands. While we, our church youth group (which I helped to chaperon), were at the conference, Jessica cried out in prayer for healing. It was an earnest prayer filled with tears and longing. She needed the Healer, and she got the Healer. During the conference a miracle took place, and my daughter was instantly delivered from her fears and panic attacks. Today Jessica is a different person. She is confident. She stands up for what she believes in—even against those who try to convince her that doing things the world’s way is okay. She is passionate about Jesus, and one of the boldest young people I know. Jessica met the Healer.

Begin today with prayer. Let’s ask for any healing needs we currently have, and then let’s witness the Healer in the pages of His Word.

Please read Mark 5:24-34:

Who needed healing? What was the healing need? How long had she been suffering?

How did she try to get help? Did it make a difference?

Even though the woman had been treated unsuccessfully by many doctors, she still reached out to Jesus. Why? Record her thoughts from verse 28 below:

What happened when she touched Jesus? (v. 29)

In every version I have of the Bible, verse 29 begins with the word “immediately;” except the KJV which uses the word “straightaway.” Whatever your version says, I am convinced it implies that there was absolutely no hesitation in her healing. Immediately—not next week—not a year from now, or even 5 minutes later—immediately she was healed and freed from her suffering.

Have you ever experienced or witnessed an immediate healing as a result of reaching out to Jesus? If so, share your story.

In verse 30, Jesus knew instantly that someone had touched him. What question did He ask? Why do you think He asked this question?

Who did the disciples say touched Jesus? (v. 31) What logic did they use to come to this conclusion?

Why do you think Jesus did not accept their answer?

Mark 5:32 says that Jesus “kept” looking to see who had touched Him? Describe how you think Jesus might have been searching? How long do you think this search went on? Why do you think Jesus was determined to find out who she was?

Then, finally, in verse 33, the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came trembling and fell at His feet and told Him what she had done.

What was Jesus' response to her? Record His words in verse 34:

Jesus did not search for the woman because He wanted to let everyone in the crowd know she had come to Him for healing. He did not insist on finding out who she was so she could thank him for His mercy and help. No, Jesus wanted to set her free—completely (see John 8:36; Galatians 5:1). He wanted to confirm to her that her faith in Him not only released her from her affliction, but from her shame. She didn't have to hide anymore.

Think about it. Can you imagine the shame this woman must have felt for 12 years? Can you imagine the suffering and turmoil she must have gone through during that time? Scripture doesn't tell us what kind of bleeding the woman suffered, but I think we can safely assume it was a menstrual-type bleeding rather than internal bleeding. In her culture, when a woman was bleeding during her monthly cycle, she was considered unclean (see Leviticus 12:1-8; 18:19). In the culture's eyes, this woman, to some degree, was like a leper. Most likely when people passed by they ignored her, even shunned her. She was alone. No one could help her; not even the doctors. So when she heard Jesus was in town, she had to get to Him, even if she felt uncomfortable to approach Him.

This woman felt humiliated. If she was not embarrassed by her condition, and the disgrace that it brought her, then why did she come to Jesus in secret? Every other account of healing that I have read about in Scripture, the people came to Jesus and asked for healing. Some, like Bartimaeus, the blind beggar by the side of the road, shouted his need for healing at the top of his lungs (see Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). He was not ashamed to let Jesus, nor the world, know that he was in need of healing.

Read each of the following accounts and answer the questions:

Mark 1:32-34:

How many people witnessed Jesus as the Healer?

List the different kinds of healing Jesus performed.

Matthew 4:23-25:

How many people witnessed Jesus as the Healer?

Record the different kinds of healing Jesus performed.

Mathew 15:30-31:

How many people witnessed Jesus as the Healer?

Record the different kinds of healing Jesus performed.

Do you see any of these people being shy about their need or suffering? YES NO

How would you describe the people's desire to get to Jesus and be healed, or have someone close to them healed? Check all that you think apply:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> shy | <input type="checkbox"/> deliberate | <input type="checkbox"/> unwavering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> desperate | <input type="checkbox"/> demanding | <input type="checkbox"/> persistent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined | <input type="checkbox"/> ho-hum | <input type="checkbox"/> timid |

Other: _____

What explanation would you give for the people's persistence in wanting to get to Jesus?

Have you ever been tenacious in your approach to receive healing from Jesus? Explain your approach. Did you ask others to join you in your request? How did Jesus answer your prayer, or are you still waiting to receive His healing?

We do not need to be shy or embarrassed to ask for help and healing. We have a Healer, with a great multitude of witnesses, who is able to heal any sickness or disease, any affliction or

suffering. Whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual He is able to set us free and release us from the clutches of suffering.

If you are still waiting to receive the healing you asked for, do not give up. First, make sure there is no sin involved. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and reveal to you anything that might be keeping you from receiving God's healing. If He reveals something, confess your sin and turn away from it.

What does Psalm 66:18 tell us about sin and unanswered prayer?

Summarize James 5:14-16:

What happened in Matthew 9:2-7 as a result of the man's sins being forgiven?

On the other hand, recognize that not all afflictions are the result of sin.

What question did the disciples ask Jesus in John 9:1-3?

What did Jesus say was the reason for this man's blindness? (v. 3)

Most of the time I have found, through my own need and suffering, that if God does not answer right away, or the way I thought He would, it is because He has something else in mind (see Isaiah 55:8-9). Just because God seems to be silent does not mean He is uncaring, unwilling, or inactive. We may not always understand, but when God is silent, it usually means He is about to reveal another part of Himself and is preparing you to see another part of His character. God desires to reveal Himself to you through your circumstances, and then use you and your circumstances to help others who are suffering. Wait upon the Lord and watch for the miracle. God may not give you exactly what you ask for, but you can rest assured that He will give you what you need in order to bring wholeness into your life.

End today by meditating on Romans 8:28-39. How do these verses bring you comfort and hope in the midst of your present circumstances?

Day Two

When Jesus Saw Their Faith

*“Then he touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith will it be done to you’”
(Matthew 9:29).*

Faith—as believers we hear this word all the time. Scripture says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus told His disciples, “...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can move a mountain” (see Matthew 17:20). Faith is reliance upon God; a submissive trust, believing God will do what He says He will do in spite of what we see going on around us. By faith we are healed (see Mark 10:52), saved (Eph. 2:8-9; Luke 7:50); encouraged (Romans 1:12), made righteous (Romans 1:17), justified (Galatians 3:24); and protected, able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the enemy (Ephesians 6:16). Today we will look at some verses that focus on faith. As we examine these verses, we will see that faith is the power behind the hand of God.

Let’s begin by praying for our faith to increase, and then read Luke 7:1-10 and answer the following:

Who was in need of healing? What was his need?

Who was sent to Jesus to inform Him about the need for healing? (v.3) Why do you think the centurion sent the people he did to Jesus?

How did the messengers approach Jesus about the need for the servant’s healing? What did they tell Jesus about the servant? (v. 4-5)

Why did the centurion send word to Jesus, and not go himself to seek the Lord’s help? Check the correct response:

- The centurion was too busy to go
- The centurion didn’t want to leave his ill servant
- The centurion felt unworthy

How does the centurion's attitude and approach for healing differ from the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years?

What happened just before Jesus and His followers reached the centurion's home? Check all that apply:

- The centurion's friends ran out to meet Jesus
- The friends stopped Jesus from coming into the centurion's home
- The friends delivered another message from the centurion

What was the message the friends gave to Jesus? Fill in the blanks according to Luke 7:7b-8 (NIV).

“But _____ the _____, and my servant _____. For I myself am a man _____, with soldiers under me. I _____ this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I _____ to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

“When Jesus heard this...” (v. 9), what emotion did Jesus express? What did He tell the people who were following Him?

When the messengers returned to the house, what did they find? What had happened to the servant? (v. 10)

A centurion was a Roman military commander who was in charge of a division of 100 men. And this particular centurion had a servant whom he highly valued (v.2). We are told in verse 2 that the man was very sick and dying. Matthew 8:6 (another version of this story) tells us the servant was paralyzed and suffering terribly. One thing was for certain—the man was in need of healing—he needed Jesus.

The man's commanding officer, though feeling unworthy (not shy or ashamed), sent word to Jesus, asking Him to come and heal his servant. I find it interesting that the Roman centurion officer sent Jewish elders to Jesus to tell Him about his servant, and to give Jesus the added information that this servant loved the Jewish people, and even helped build the synagogue. The centurion's choice makes me wonder if he was trying to influence Jesus in any

way. Since he was a Roman soldier, did he conclude that Jesus would not come otherwise? Did he think Jesus would come more quickly if He knew that the man in need loved the Jews? I don't believe the centurion had ulterior motives, but I do think he seriously valued his servant and truly wanted Jesus to come to his aid. Nevertheless, Jesus did come. Not because this man loved the Jews, but because Jesus loved this man.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, however, the centurion sent more messengers (friends) to tell Jesus not to come into his home, again, because he felt unworthy. This breaks my heart. How many times do we do this very thing? We need Jesus; yet, do not allow Him to fully come into our lives because of feelings of unworthiness. I am getting a little off the main point here, but I want to make another point. In our human sinful nature we are unworthy of the Lord, but He doesn't look at us and call us "worthless." Jesus wants to come into our homes (our lives) and heal us. We must learn to invite Jesus in and not just cry out to Him from a distance. Jesus was headed straight for the centurion's home, but He was stopped from going in. He was prohibited access. We must never allow that to happen. Let's invite Jesus in and make Him feel welcome!

Do you ever feel unworthy of Jesus? Have you stopped Him from completely entering your home, even though you're in need of Him? Share your heart?

To the centurion's credit—Jesus said, "I tell you, I haven't seen faith like this in all the land of Israel" (v. 9, NLT). Jesus was amazed (NIV, NLT), He marveled (NAS) at the faith He saw in this man. The centurion understood the power and influence of authority. He, himself, was under authority, and had command and position over his regiment. The man understood supremacy, power, rule, and the capacity to give commands, and have those orders carried out. Because of his understanding he knew that Jesus did not even have to touch the man, but simply speak and his servant would be healed. The centurion's demonstration of faith not only brought on a miracle of healing, but a word of commendation from Jesus. He recognized that Jesus had the authority to give orders to heal, just as he could give orders to his men and have his orders carried out.

Look up the following verses. What happened when the Lord spoke?

Genesis 1:3: _____

Genesis 1:6-8: _____

Genesis 1:11: _____

Genesis 1:14-15: _____

Genesis 1:20-21: _____

Genesis 1:24: _____

Genesis 1:26-27: _____

God said...and it was so. “For He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:8). All the Lord needs to do is speak into your circumstances. He only needs to whisper one word into your life and it is done.

What healing word do you need Jesus to speak over you? Send Him a message and invite Him to come and speak over you, then have confidence, like the centurion, that He will deliver you.

It is vital that we have the faith that believes Jesus is able.

Paraphrase what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 21:21-22:

Another story of faith is found in Matthew 9:27-31 where two blind men came to Jesus and asked for healing. Jesus questioned them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” (v. 28). They responded in faith, “Yes. Lord.” (v.28). Then, based on their faith, Jesus touched them and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you” (v. 29). The New Living Translation records Jesus’ words in Matthew 9:29 as: “Because of your faith, it will happen.” (NLT)

Look up the following verses. Record what happened as a result of having faith:

Matthew 9:2: _____

Mark 5:34: _____

Luke 7:50: _____

Luke 17:19: _____

Luke 18:42-43: _____

What stands out to you the most about having faith?

When we have faith we are: saved, forgiven of our sins, healed, made well, I'd even say "made whole," and we receive sight, both physical and spiritual.

Now, look up the following verses and describe the result from a lack of faith?

Matthew 8:26: _____

Matthew 13:58: _____

Mark 4:40: _____

Mark 6:5-6: _____

Luke 12:28-29: _____

James 1:6: _____

What stands out to you the most about having a lack of faith?

"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all" (Isaiah 7:9b). Without faith we are consumed by fear and doubt. Without faith we worry and fret, even over the simplest things in our lives. Without faith we paralyze the hand of God. Did you catch the phrase: "Because of their unbelief, *he couldn't* do any mighty miracles among them?" (Mark 6:5, NLT) It wasn't that Jesus wouldn't do the miracles, or that He was powerless to perform the miracles, but He *couldn't* do the miracles. Without faith Jesus could not heal them. Not that their lack of faith made Him any less God, but their lack of faith tied His hands. The moment we forget that God is all-powerful, we stop the power of God in our lives.

Read Matthew 17:14-20:

Why couldn't the disciples drive out the demon and heal the boy?

What did Jesus tell them would be the measure of their strength if they had faith? (v. 20)

Where did Peter say faith comes from? Fill in the blanks according Acts 3:16 (NIV).

"By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the _____ that has given this complete healing to him..."

Faith comes from God through the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23), but we must make the decision to exercise trust and reliance on God. When we do not exercise the faith we have been given, we will not be able to overcome the demons (circumstances) in our lives. When we decide to accept doubt and unbelief, instead of trusting God, we will continually see a lack of power in our lives. Jesus said, "...if you have faith...nothing will be impossible for you" (see Matthew 17:20).

No matter where you are right now, whether steadfast in your faith, or struggling to hold on, diligently pray for more faith. End today by meditating on Luke 17:5: "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'" Now use the space below to implore the Lord, as the apostles did, to increase your faith. Then make the choice to submit to God through faith.

Day Three

Finding Joy in Suffering

"Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy"
(James 1:2, NLT).

Thus far, we have witnessed the hand of Jesus as He healed the multitudes from any and all afflictions. We witnessed a woman who was freed, not only from her illness, but from her shame. Then we witnessed the great faith of a man who understood faith from the standpoint of authority. And we learned that without faith we will not witness the miracles God desires to do in our lives. But what about those times when we exercise great faith and we still do not receive the healing we pray to experience? What then?

Life is full of anguish; and even though we have a Healer who is willing, ready and able to restore us, sometimes our transformation is not found in the healing, but in the pain.

Sometimes Jesus says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). So often, God, by His grace, doesn’t give us the healing we long for; rather, His grace gives us the faith we need as He carries us through the trial. Beloved, if we desire to *know* Jesus, then we cannot focus on the healing miracles. In order to truly know the Healer, we must recognize that there is great purpose in suffering; and, in order to know Christ in intimacy we must also fellowship with Him in suffering.

It’s wonderful to experience a miraculous healing from God. We want the miracles He can provide, we want to be freed from the pain, but God doesn’t want us to pursue His miracles—He wants us to pursue Him. God doesn’t want us to only know His healing, He wants us to know the Healer.

For the remainder of this week, we will center our attention on suffering. Don’t panic—through these lessons we will realize we are not alone, and that great joy can be found even in the midst of our pain.

Let’s begin today by praying for the Holy Spirit to help us understand why we suffer. Then let’s ask Christ to help us accept His finishing work in our lives, as He perfects us through trials and hardships.

Fill in the blanks according to James 1:2, NIV:

“Consider it _____, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...”

I don’t know about you, but when I think about going through trials, the last thing I want to do is celebrate. Nonetheless, the Bible clearly tells us to consider hardship and trials an “opportunity for joy” (NLT), and to “count it all joy” (KJV). The word *joy* according to *Webster’s Dictionary* means “gladness...rejoicing.”² Synonyms are “bliss, delight, pleasure.” Finding pleasure in trials? Finding delight, even bliss and gladness in hardship? Rejoicing over my circumstances? How is this possible? Sorrow, grief, mourning, burden and pain would be better adjectives to express the ache my soul feels when it is drowning in the depths of a trial.

When you are suffering in the midst of a trial or difficult situation, how do you normally react? What do you focus on when you are going through hardship?

² *Webster’s Encyclopedia of Dictionaries: New American Edition* (Ottenheimer Publishers, Inc: 1978) edited by John Gage Allee, Phd, 205

As we seek to find joy in our trials, let's consider how James, Peter, and Paul handled hardship, and how they found joy in the midst of great suffering.

Read James 1:2-4:

What does James say is the reason for trouble (NLT), trials (NIV), and temptations (KJV)?

What results when our faith is tested? (v.3)

What is the goal? (v.4)

Jump down to James 1:12. What is the reward for enduring tests and trials?

Where do you see James placing his focus in times of trial and suffering? Check the correct response:

- On the loss
- On eternal completion and reward
- On the effect the trial is having on the people

Consider James 1:4, 12 in the margin, what motivation are we given for finding hardship, trials, and trouble pure joy?

“But let endurance *and* steadfastness *and* patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing” (James 1:4, AMP). “Blessed is the man who preserves under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (v.12).

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9:

What is Peter's description of joy in suffering? What did Peter consider a joy? Does Peter's version of joy in suffering differ from James? If so, how?

Even though Peter and the people were suffering grief in all kinds of trials, where was their focus? Check the correct response:

On the setbacks the trials were causing

On their pain and suffering

On their eternal inheritance and reward

What did Peter tell the people were the purposes for their suffering? (v. 7)

What would be their reward for enduring? (v. 8-9)

Faith is vital in our journey with Jesus. We need faith to be healed *and* to be made whole. Through suffering in all kinds of trials and hardships, our faith is given an opportunity to grow and be strengthened. As our faith grows we become mature and complete (NIV), fully developed (NLT), perfect and entire (KJV).

In order to help us grasp the joy of the situation a little better, let's look up a few words. According to *Webster's Dictionary* the word *complete* means "entire; finished; perfect; with no part lacking; to bring to a state of entirety; to make perfect; to fulfill; to accomplish"³ For *perfect* we find "complete; faultless; ...excellent; of the highest quality."⁴ And for *mature* we find "fully developed; ...to ripen; to perfect"⁵

We endure now so when Christ returns we will be complete, finished, whole, lacking nothing, ripened to perfection. Our joy is found in the process of our eternal completion. And in this process, our focus must remain on Christ and the eternal work that is taking place. The key

³ *Webster's Encyclopedia of Dictionaries: New American Edition* (Ottenheimer Publishers, Inc: 1978) edited by John Gage Allee, Phd, 80

⁴ *Ibid*, 274

⁵ *Ibid*, 232

to experiencing joy in suffering is found in where we place our focus. If we keep our eyes on Jesus and eternity, instead of our present circumstances, we will find joy and the ability to rejoice in times of suffering. Therefore, let's look ahead to our completion with great joy, so we may receive the crown of life (see James 1:12).

According to Jude 1:24, who else will be rejoicing with great joy at our completion?

Christ will present us to Himself with exceeding joy (KJV), a radiant church, complete, mature, fully developed, without stain, holy and blameless (see Ephesians 5:27), finished to perfection, a lovely bride of the highest quality. Therefore, as we suffer and go through trials of many kinds, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). We have a great deal to look forward to, and what we suffer in this life is not for nothing—it is the hope of eternal reward in Christ Jesus.

Now, let's turn our attention to Paul's attitude on suffering and how he and his companion found joy in the midst of their trials.

Read Acts 16:16-34:

List the trials and suffering Paul and Silas endured?

In the midst of their circumstances and suffering, where did they place their focus?

- On their pain and suffering
- On plans to break out of the prison
- On God

How did Paul and Silas keep their focus? Who else heard them? (v. 25)

What happened as a result of their focus? Check all that apply:

- An earthquake shook the foundation of the prison
- The prison doors flew open and the chains fell off
- The jailer dropped to his knees and asked for salvation

___ The jailer took Paul and Silas to his house to feed and care for them

___ The whole house received God's saving grace

We may not realize what is happening at the time, but when we focus on God through worship, God can shake the very foundation of our circumstances. Our worship can throw the doors to our prison cells wide open and unlock the chains of bondage that have us bound. When we focus on God through worship, during our time of trials and suffering, others notice. They look at us and wonder: *Why are they joyful when they are in so much pain?* When we worship, no matter the circumstances, pain, suffering, trial or hardship others will want what we have. They won't understand it, but they will want it because they will see something different in us. As a result, our focused worship offered to God in the midst of suffering can bring about salvation for others.

Worship changes our perspective. It takes our heavy heart and makes it light. When we offer our hearts in true worship, the Holy Spirit will make our worship a strong offering to God. Then, through worship, God will lift us up in fellowship with Him, so we can see our circumstances and suffering from His perspective. When we see our suffering through God's eyes, our spirit and soul find the strength to endure the hardship and trial.

Our victory and joy comes when our eyes are focused on Jesus and our hearts are flooded with worship. Try it the next time you are sitting in the pit of despair. Muster up all you have to give, even if it is a little bit, and bring your offering to God. As you begin to worship, the Holy Spirit will take over and increase your ability to love God through the pain with incredible amounts of praise. Through the power of the Holy Spirit you will find the strength to endure, as your heart and soul come alive with hope and joy.

End today by meditating on Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." As we look forward to our eternal reward in Christ, and the joy of being His perfected bride, let us find joy today in our circumstances by focusing on Christ Jesus through worship.

Day Four

Not Alone in Our Suffering

*“Praise...the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...
(2 Corinthians 1:3-4).*

Thankfully, no one I know has experienced every tragedy there is to suffer. There are times, however, when what we experience makes us wonder how we will ever survive. I know suffering is not easy—it never will be. Yet, as we fix our eyes on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), we will find joy in the process of becoming mature and complete, a perfected bride who will one day stand before her Groom filled with unending jubilation. As we make our way through today’s lesson, I pray we will be encouraged to discover we are never alone in our suffering. Jesus, our Healer, is with us; and there is great purpose in all that we go through.

Let’s begin today by praying for the God of all comfort to comfort us in our time of need, and to show us that we are never alone in our suffering.

Read Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15-16:

What touches your heart the most about these verses?

One of the reasons Christ Jesus knows us so well, and possesses such great understanding about all that we go through, is because He is no stranger to suffering. He knows, firsthand, every heartache, pain and sorrow we endure in this life, because He Himself endured these things. He truly was a man of all sorrows.

Read Isaiah 53:

In each of the following verses, describe what Jesus suffered. Then go back over your responses and place a star next to any suffering you can relate to personally.

v. 2b: _____

v. 3: _____

v. 4: _____

v. 5: _____

v. 7: _____

v. 8: _____

v. 9: _____

v. 10: _____

v. 12b: _____

If I had my way life would be perfect. It would be a pleasant journey with no pain or sorrow. Inevitably, however, something always comes along and smashes the plans that I meticulously put together. Stuff happens, and when it does it often creates havoc by disrupting my well laid agenda. When bad things happen, and I am in the midst of suffering, I think about all Jesus endured, so that I don't become weary and give up (see Hebrews 12:3). I will never suffer as greatly as Jesus did, but Scripture promises that, in this life, I will drink from His cup (see Matthew 20:22).

We all will go through a lot in our lifetime: hardship, heartache, sorrow, pain, grief, trials, more suffering than we would like to think about, but we must always remember that we are never alone in our suffering. So, when we are going through something that is extremely difficult we need to look to Jesus, so we can find strength in our time of need.

Look again at Isaiah 53, what was Jesus' reward for enduring?

v.10: _____

v. 11: _____

v. 12a: _____

According to Hebrews 12:2, what was Jesus' reward for enduring?

During His time of suffering, Christ Jesus focused on God and the eternal promises that His Father had given Him. Jesus knew His Father would raise Him from the dead, seat Him at His right hand, give him authority over all things, and present Him with a purified bride to reign with Him forever.

How does dwelling on your eternal destiny in Christ give you hope in time of suffering?

Also, as we suffer, we can keep in mind that we do not have to wait until eternity to see good come from our afflictions. Jesus will take what we suffer now and use it to help others who

are suffering. If we let Him, He will take the ashes of our pain, and turn them into a glorious crown of beauty for His glory (see Isaiah 61:3).

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11:

Fill in the blanks according to 2 Corinthians 1:3, NIV:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of _____
and the God of _____.

According to verse 4, what will the Father of compassion give us in our time of suffering? What is the purpose of what we receive from God?

How does verse 7 confirm that we are not alone in our suffering?

What have you suffered that God used to comfort someone else? Explain how God comforted you, and then used your time of suffering to comfort another.

I am living proof God can and will redeem a harmful past in order to give hope to someone else. At the beginning of this week on the Healer, I briefly shared about a season when my soul was drowning in depression. At the time, I didn't see or understand why depression had consumed my life, nor did I see the beauty God would bring from the ashes of my pain. Yet, at my lowest point, when I was seriously considering suicide, the Healer reached into my well and healed me, giving me a miraculous and powerful testimony—a testimony of hope, of love and deliverance, of healing power and his unfathomable grace. Over the years, God has taken my testimony and shared it with others, offering hope to the hopeless. Never, in my wildest dreams, would I have guessed God would use what I had gone through as a light in dark places. Yet, from my painful past, God created a ministry dedicated to helping others find hope, healing, and freedom for their souls.

You and I won't be fully healed from our suffering until we allow God to reveal His glory through our pain. Great joy is found in serving others. Therefore, permit God to turn your

wailing into dancing and remove your sackcloth and clothe you with joy. (see Psalm 30:11). The Healer wants to infuse your pain with power, and then help you to comfort and encourage others who are suffering.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-10:

Describe the level of suffering you think Paul and the others went through? Did they think they were going to survive? Why or why not?

Where was their focus during this awful hardship? (v. 9-10). What was their hope?

Recently, I watched a Billy Graham telecast about the shooting that took place at Virginia Tech. As I watched the trauma, I was amazed at the sense of loss and despair; yet, at the same time, there were many people who professed Christ and found peace and hope in Him.

I believe that it is during the hardest times of our lives that we experience Christ more—more of His comfort, more of His peace, more of His presence. Not that we do not experience the presence of God at other times, but there is something profound that takes place when we cry out to Him in our suffering that seems to move the heart of God, drawing Him closer in our time of need.

In 2003, my husband and I went through a season where our lives were turned upside down. It was, without a doubt, the most difficult time of our marriage as we struggled through a loss of health and finances. When my husband collapsed, he became so ill that I wasn't sure if he would ever be able to work again. Yet, it was also the most wonderful time, because of the increase of the presence of God in our lives.

Like never before, as I worshiped my way through this time, I had a deeper awareness of Jesus. And from this increased awareness of His manifest presence, I was given an increase of faith and joy. Call it mercy. Call it grace. Call it whatever brings you encouragement—it was all God.

In the midst of our dark trials, the Healer will come and make Himself known. In knowing Christ and resting in His goodness, our souls can find rest and a peace that transcends

all understanding. Not the kind of peace that comes only when life is easy and circumstances are good (see John 14:27), but the kind of peace that brings quietness of heart and mind even in the midst of trouble. It's that sense of calm and gentle reassurance that no matter what happens He is with us and is working everything out for good.

As we discovered yesterday, the eternal goal is wholeness, complete spiritual maturity, so we may be presented to Christ as a perfected bride. In order to obtain this goal, however, He will often take us to the depths of suffering. From there, He will reveal Himself as Healer and meet our need. Whether, it is the miraculous healing we seek, or the grace to sustain the trial.

Fill in the blanks according to 2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV:

“My _____ is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in _____.”

So many people in this world suffer. Past and present, they have and are, suffering from every kind of affliction and disease—knowing great depths of sorrow, heartbreak, loneliness and pain. In the midst of this suffering Christ is ever present, working in us the end result, and bringing joy and comfort in the process. He is turning our lives into a drink offering, so that others may know the compassion of the Father in their time of need; even to the point of bringing them the hope of eternal salvation. We may never know how God is using us. We may not like it, or even understand why we are in the center of such a terrible time, but if we keep our focus on Jesus and the hope of eternal glory with Him, knowing that He understands our weakness, we can rest assured that we will be able to endure for the greater good.

God always has a purpose in everything He does, or allows to come into our lives. Whether it is success or suffering, God will use it for His glory and purposes, if we allow Him. It is never for nothing. During these times, God will bring beauty from the ashes as He shapes our character and reveals Himself. Don't think of these hard times as always something negative. There is great worth in times of hardship and struggle, and these times help us to *know* God.

End today by receiving the comfort of God through Psalm 10:17; Psalm 22:24; and Psalm 34:17-18. Allow His healing balm to soothe your soul. Allow His Word to ease your hurt, and increase your understanding that Jesus is with you in your time of suffering.

Day Five

I Want to Know Him

“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:13).

Today, as we continue to *know* the Healer through times of suffering, we will consider the ardent cry of a man who truly desired to know Christ in both intimacy and suffering.

Let’s begin by praying to truly know Christ, and what it means to fellowship with Him in both intimacy and suffering.

Read Philippians 3:1-12:

What did Paul claim about himself prior to knowing Christ? What was his background? (vs. 4-6) List as many claims as you can:

What statement does Paul make in verse 7? What does he now consider as loss?

What declaration did Paul make in verse 8? What did it mean to him to know Christ? Record Paul’s expressive words, according to your translation.

In what three areas of relationship did Paul pray to know Christ?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Paul was a Pharisee, a pure Hebrew Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, a people of Israel, and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul, in his own eyes was righteous, loyal to the house of David, zealous for God in his persecution of the church, and faithful in keeping with the law. He described himself as perfect, righteous, and faultless. Before knowing Christ, Paul considered himself to have everything: religious power, good standing, and righteousness before God and the people. Yet, after meeting Christ on the road to Damascus one particular day (see

Acts 9:1-19), he sings a different tune: “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness (NIV), priceless gain (NLT), surpassing value (NASB), of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” I love the depth of the *Amplified Bible* as it records Philippians 3:8: “I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

The things that Paul once thought of as successes and assets were now the very things and attitudes that he came to realize were stumbling blocks to him, and actually had kept him separated from God. Paul continually endeavored to “press on” (v.12), to know Christ. Paul wanted to know His voice, His love, His personal touch, His heart, emotions, longings and desires. He wanted to know Christ in the richness of a close personal relationship. When Paul said in Philippians 3:10 that he wanted to *know* Christ; he was using the Greek word *ginosko*, meaning “to know intimately.”⁶ And this intimate relationship was more important to him than anything else. Paul considered *knowing* Christ his ultimate asset.

How would you describe the value of knowing Christ? What do you now consider “as loss” in comparison to knowing Christ in a personal and intimate relationship?

Something I find interesting, and, at times, even hard to comprehend, is the fact that as Paul fellowshiped with Christ in a personal relationship of love and devotion, a union worth more to him than anything else, he could have stopped there and focused on the pleasure of their relationship, but he didn’t.

What does Paul proclaim in Philippians 3:10-11?

Paul considered *all* things as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of this one thing—knowing Christ. Every hardship, every failure, every success, and every act of service in ministry he counted as nothing compared to knowing Christ. Success was not Paul’s goal, and

⁶ *He Speaks to Me: Preparing to Hear from God* by Shirer, Pricilla; (2005) (LifeWay Press, Nashville, Tennessee) 91. All rights reserved.

failure was not his handicap. Paul's focus was on Christ, and the extreme privilege of knowing Him in intimacy, power, and suffering.

Something became very clear to me as I studied Paul and his attitude of considering all things as loss—knowing Christ became Paul's calling in life. Knowing Christ became his greatest purpose. The ministry, acts of service, preaching, evangelism—these were not his calling—they were the byproducts of his pursuit to know Christ. Paul witnessed, firsthand, the beauty and ecstasy of an intimate connection with Christ, and He experienced the agony of sharing in His suffering. From these experiences Paul came to know Christ. He then took what he shared with Christ and told the world.

In a similar way, I am not called to be a writer. I am called to know Christ through a personal relationship. The books, Bible studies, poems, and inspirational stories—everything that I write—is the outcome of the relationship, the fruit of knowing Christ as I press into Him in intimacy and suffering.

Our main focus, the one thing that should consume our hearts, souls, and minds is the extreme privilege of knowing Christ. From there, through the depth of our relationship with Him, He manifests Himself to the world.

Consider the following verses. What did it mean to Paul, and the other apostles, to fellowship with Christ in suffering? What was their mind-set as they drank from His cup?

Acts 5:40-42: _____

Romans 5:3-5: _____

2 Timothy 1:8: _____

They rejoiced in suffering for the sake of His name, because it verified that they knew Christ and shared in His fellowship. They rejoiced because they understood the outcome, the end result of their suffering. They rejoiced in the hope they had in Christ, the hope that would not disappoint them. They rejoiced because of the love they received from God through a personal relationship. They rejoiced because they knew that through their connection with Christ, He would manifest Himself through them in power. And because of these revelations, they invited and encouraged others to join them, to share in suffering for the gospel.

The Bible tells us that because we belong to Christ, because we share in His fellowship, we will share in His suffering. It sounds unpleasant, and not something any of us would readily jump at; unless, we, like Paul and the other apostles, receive the same revelations.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-16:

What did Peter instruction the believers to do when they faced suffering? (v. 13 and 16)

Check the correct response:

- Mourn and complain
- Be strong and stand firm
- Rejoice and praise God

Why is participating in the suffering of Christ a reason for rejoicing and a time for praise?

According to verse 14, why should we rejoice when we are insulted (NIV), reviled (NAS), or reproached (KJV) for the name of Christ? Check the correct response:

- Because it will make us feel better
- Because we will gain God's approval
- Because the Spirit of God rests on us

In my previous Bible study, *Transformed by Desire*, I made an interesting discovery. As I researched the topic of purification, and looked up the meaning for the word *bless*, I learned something I wasn't expecting. The word *bless* means "to consecrate; glorify; sanctify; set apart."⁷

When we are insulted because we are Christians, it is because we are consecrated, set apart, made holy and sanctified for the glory of God. We who belong to Christ need to understand that in order to truly know Him, we will not only enjoy the pleasure and beauty of His presence, we will also fellowship in His suffering, so we may also share in the power of His resurrection. When we fellowship in His suffering, we receive from God the power and manifestation of His Spirit of glory. The very power of God will rest on us, giving us the strength to endure, to overcome, to reveal Christ, and to rejoice. Therefore, may we boast all the more of our weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on us (see 2 Corinthians 12:9b).

Do we truly comprehend the cost involved in knowing Christ? What it really means to know Him in both joy and suffering? Do we know what it means to know Him in His death, so we may also know Him in the ecstasy of His resurrection? You and I need both experiences to be

⁷ *Webster's Encyclopedia of Dictionaries: New American Edition* (Ottenheimer Publishers, Inc: 1978) edited by John Gage Allee, Phd, 45.

whole in Christ, to be mature, complete, not lacking anything, so that the power of God may be visible in us.

As I read about Paul, the man he was, and the man Christ transformed him into, I am in awe. I don't fully understand how He did it, but through the power of love Christ motivated that man to pray for suffering beyond what he could hope to bear. Paul himself said, "For Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Christ took a man full of himself, his own righteousness and accomplishments, and humbled him into a man who pursued Christ with everything He had. Paul left behind everything he valued, and once thought important, for a life of suffering and danger, of insult and revile. Why?

Paul witnessed Jesus! He understood Christ's heart. He experienced Christ's love. As a result, he desired to go to the extreme with Jesus. Paul's heartfelt cry was to *know* Christ, both in intimacy and suffering, sharing in His death, so that he could also share in His glorious life and power.

No matter what we go through in this life. Whether, hardship, trials and trouble, or glorious gain and success, we must count it all as loss, because nothing compares with the surpassing privilege of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. There is no greater worth in life, nothing as valuable as knowing Him. Therefore, in all things, we must forget what is behind and "press on," like Paul, toward the ultimate prize—the joy of *knowing* God.

Apply the Knowledge

In my pursuit of the Healer this week, the Holy Spirit has shown me ...

The verse that spoke to me the most this week is...

In order to make this verse a reality in my life, I...

Jesus, I don't want to only know the miracles of your healing, I want to *know* the Healer.
The changes I need to make in order to *know* You more profoundly as my Healer are...
Help me to...

The hidden treasure (see Isaiah 45:3) of His Person and personality God revealed to me
this week is... This higher revelation of God's presence profoundly awakens me to...

Witnessing God as Healer this week has changed my perspective of God from... to...

Holy Spirit, help me to apply what I've learned to my everyday life, so...

Prayer for the Journey

Lord, I desire to know You the way Paul did. Yet, I do not know what I ask; therefore, I ask first for Your mercy. Paul had a great desire to know You in the extreme pleasure of intimacy. He also had the desire to know You in Your death, so that he could also know You in the power of your resurrection. I, too, pray to know You this way. I want to know You in the joy of intimate encounters, and to fellowship with You in suffering, so that I may experience...

Video Session Seven

Rebuilder of Desolate Souls

Ezekiel 36:24-38

*“Then the nations around **you** that remain **will know that I the LORD** have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it” (Ezekiel 36:36).*

- 1.) Everything God does points to _____

- 2.) Through covenant promise, God’s healing hand will _____ every wrong and _____ everything right.

- 3.) The Healer will _____ us of our sins,
_____ and _____ what was ruined, and
_____ what was destroyed.
 - a.) Healing begins when we can _____ there is a

 - b.) The Healer wants to bring _____ and
_____ to our weary souls
 - c.) Restoration means _____
 - d.) When a city is fortified it is _____, secure, sheltered and protected.