

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

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HELLO & WELCOME

Thank you so much for being here. For embarking on a brand new journey with me. For being brave and open and hungering for more of Him.

The words on these pages are the result of a dish cloth of faith being wrung dry. They are straight out of my prayer journal. Real. Raw. Honest. More honest and vulnerable than I have been outside of conversations with Him ... ever. Which is scary for me. But glory for Him.

I wrote this study in 2011. It's nine weeks long, with five days of homework for each week. A God-breathed, Holy-Spirit-inspired, I-could-never-have-done-this-if-it-wasn't-for-Him type of study. We were five years into our wait for a family. My best friend was five months into an 18-month battle with stage four cancer - a battle she lost one year later. I was neck-deep in heartache. *Words rang hollow in my heart pierced by pain.*¹

But through the plucking of my heartstrings came this. The book you're holding in your hands. Cover uncreased. Pages fresh. Treasures undiscovered.

It's such an honor to have you here with me.

Truly,

Praying His Spirit fills you with every word,



SMALL STEPS

Generally, a book's forward is written by a published author or person of significance. I am neither. I am a completely ordinary person by almost any standard. The one *extraordinary* thing that qualifies me to write this is that this study, and its author, has deeply affected my walk with God.

I write this coming out the other side of my own well-wrung dish cloth experience. A little over a year ago I got *that call* from my father's doctor. The next day I sat across a rustic restaurant table from Jane, explaining how I would be moving home for the rest of the year to care for him.

The following week I found myself saying goodbye. Jane stood beside me, still very much aching from her own pain. There we began a year together unlike any I'll ever again experience. She stood in front of me, guiding the way through a difficult path. I stood beside her, listening and asking the difficult questions.

A year later I sat across a rustic restaurant table from Jane as she counted the weeks left until she and her husband were to move on to an adventure years in the making. There were nine. She paused, and asked me a question she already knew the answer to. The next afternoon she sent an email to a group of women asking if they'd walk beside her through a rough, unedited nine-week bible study she had been sitting on.

He couldn't have woven the fabric of women together with a thread more of perfection. Struggling with divorce, infertility, death, guilt, inadequacy and grief, this band of women came together in Jane's living room every week, and together combated years of spiritual and physical pain. Nine weeks later we were different. Better. Changed.

I pray you discover abundant healing. I pray He reveals abundant love. I pray you stick through the study – especially when you feel you cannot. For me, that is when He revealed His hidden treasures. Even through the darkness.

- Amanda Lenke

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

The following items are recommended to have on hand in order to get the most out of our study together:

1. Bible (I use the NKJV unless otherwise noted)
2. Journal (to record the verses and pray through the homework)
3. Computer (you will be on www.blueletterbible.org every day)

This study not only provides a truth-trail of the things He has taught me through a season of suffering and loss, it also teaches how to dig into Scripture on your own, through any season.

Hang on tight; you're about to jump into the deep end of the study-Scripture pool!

When the people of the land come before the LORD on the appointed feast days, whoever enters by way of the north gate to worship shall go out by way of the south gate; and whoever enters by way of the south gate shall go out by way of the north gate.

He shall not return by way of the gate through which he came.

Ezekiel 46:9

I will give you the

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*and hidden riches of secret places
that you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you
by your name, am the God of Israel.*

Isaiah 45:3

THE BACKGROUND

journal pieces and other things

It was late summer in 2011 and I had just begun reading a new book. *Let God be God: Life-Changing Truths from the Book of Job* by Ray Stedman - one of the twentieth century's foremost pastors and biblical expositors. Just a few pages in, my heart began to be convicted. Everything was taken from Job. *Everything*. Yet he didn't complain. He didn't blame God. He didn't question Him or say "why did this happen to me? This is so unfair!" The pages in my journal were full of wrestling. And questioning. And raw emotion. I wish I could have responded like Job had to difficult circumstances. But I was also incredibly thankful that God knows my heart. And He is patient with my emotions.

Up to that point, my year had been a circle of hope, discouragement, thankfulness, hope again, fear of hope, thankfulness...it was an exercise in endurance. And I happened to be on the discouragement side of the circle. Another month. Another period. Another ugly cry in the closet. Followed by another pull-myself-up-by-the-bootstraps-and-pour-it-out-to-Him-again morning.

(8:20am) Saturday

8/20/11

"Sorrowful"	yet <u>always</u>	rejoicing..." (2 Cor. 6:10)
↓	↓	↓
to grieve (continually)	perpetually; incessantly; invariably at any and every time: when, according to the circumstances something is or ought to be done again...	to rejoice exceedingly; be glad; to be well, thrive (continually)

I cried in the closet last night. Again. I tucked myself into the back, dark corner and really let out. Even asking for the joy in the morning because I'm tired of the weeping. I let myself hope again. Sort of a last ditch effort. I hoped for a positive pregnancy test today. And it isn't so...and I cried. This is the moment I was reading about on Thursday. The moment I want to stop running the race. Stop hoping. Stop weaving my robes. And yet I push through the tears, because hope does not disappoint. I know continual sorrow. LORD help me to also know the gladness and joyful cries. Help me to perpetually, incessantly rejoice. To thrive. To throw my thread beautifully and confidently. When, according to the circumstances, I should cry again ... help me to rejoice.

Four months later, I opened *Streams in the Desert* (my favorite devotional) on a Tuesday morning. It was based on Isaiah 45:3. "I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places that you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, am the God of Israel." And this story followed:

"In the famous lace shops of Brussels, there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate patterns. These rooms are altogether darkened, save for a light from one very small window, which falls directly upon the pattern. There is only one spinner in the room, and he sits where the narrow stream of light falls upon the threads

*of his weaving. 'Thus,' we are told by the guide, 'do we secure our choicest products. Lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when the worker himself is in the dark and only his pattern is in the light.'"*¹

Verse three, and the story that followed, simultaneously spoke to me and intrigued me. I began to dig. And I learned that it was a prophecy about Cyrus, the renowned 6th century King of Persia, given nearly 200 years before he was actually born. A prophecy that brought Israel out of their harrowing captivity in Babylon and back home to the land of promise. Verse three refers to the rich treasures of Babylon that the kings had taken as spoils of war from everyone they encountered - especially the Israelites. They were shoved away and locked up for many years or buried underground, never seeing the light of day.

Historical documents say that Cyrus obtained thirty-four thousand pounds weight of gold and five hundred thousand talents of silver from the conquest of Asia. In modern day values, that would add up to nearly \$800,000,000! Incredible riches came out of heartbreaking captivity. Just like God promised. There *are* treasures in the darkness. Invaluable, faith-changing, treasures. Through the cancer. The unanswered prayer. The sorrow. And the pain. If we just dig a little deeper. Press in a little further. He's waiting with treasures to balance the pain by His grace piled high with mercy and truth. That we may know that He, the LORD, Who calls us by our names, is the God of Israel. He waits. With treasures in hand.

The devotional ended this way: *"Sometimes [our weaving is in the] dark. We cannot understand what we are doing. We do not see the web we are weaving. We are not able to discover any beauty, any possible good in our experience. Yet if we are faithful and fail not and faint not, we shall some day know that the most exquisite work of all our life was done in those days when it was so dark."*²

¹ *Streams in the Desert - December 13th*

THIS WEEK'S NUGGET:

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:29-32

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- INTRODUCTION -

The summer after my best friend Shawna was diagnosed, I was studying the book of Job. Really studying it. In depth. Simultaneously dissecting commentaries, looking up the original Hebrew definitions, and reading collections of sermons dedicated to the book. In the week leading up to writing the first week of this study, I was struck by these words:

"Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice. Who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world? If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust." (Job 34:12-15)

And I began to think.

If I can't breathe, I can't talk. The only reason I have breath is because He has given it to me.

And the verses came flooding.

"In (Your) hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12:10)

"As long as my breath is in me, and the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness." (Job 27:3-4)

"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4)

The Hebrew word for breath in this particular context is *něshamah*. It means breath, spirit - (a) the Spirit of God (imparting life and wisdom); (b) the spirit of man, soul.¹

*"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Genesis 2:7)*

As I read the words, a beautiful picture formed: God bent over Adam, blowing life into His otherwise breathless piece of art. Without missing a beat, Adam takes up the rhythm of His breathing. His life-giving breathing. In. And out. And in. And out. *How can I possibly use my breath to complain about the life He has given me? The plan He has laid out for me? My breath is not my own. Just like my life is not my own. Whatever He chooses to give (or withhold) is a gift. And*

¹ Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon, Strong's H5397

my only responsibility is to say as Job did: 'Blessed be the name of the LORD.' (Job 1:21)

With that in mind, read James 3: 2, 8: *"...we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body...but no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."*

I'd like you to read a handful of different translations of the same section of Scripture to get a fuller picture of what James is trying to say:

"If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life. This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!" (James 3:2, 8 - The Message)

"For we all often stumble and fall and offend in many things. And if anyone does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things], he is a fully developed character and a perfect man, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature." (James 3:2, 8 - Amplified Version)

"If we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. "
(James 3:2 - New Living Translation)

There is not one person on this earth that can tame their tongue. And if no one can successfully restrain their tongue for good to the point that they will never again struggle with gossip, slander, or simply saying the wrong thing, how much more do we need to actively and continually pray that we can at least make it through one day successfully?

We need to knowingly use our breath, as much as is within our abilities, to honor and glorify God.

LORD, help me to feel the cadence of Your breathing with every breath I take today. Remind me that my breath is not my own and show me ways that I'm not using it to best glorify You. Retrain my mind, and my breath, LORD.

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- DAY 1 -

Read Ephesians 4:29-32, and then write it in your journal. You will be studying each individual verse this week.

Now you're about to jump into the deep end. Get on your computer. Go to www.blueletterbible.org and put Ephesians 4:29 in the search box. Click on the "tools" button to the left of the verse to show the Greek Lexicon (a dictionary that was created for a deeper understanding of the original text of the Greek Old and New Testament). In the second column of the tools window, you will see a list of numbers associated with each word or phrase. Those are the numbers assigned to the corresponding Greek from the Strong's concordance of Biblical words. Click on the Strong's number next to each of the following words and write down their definitions (called Outline of Biblical Usage on the website):

Corrupt: _____

One of the cross-references for this particular word is Matthew 12:33 where it's translated "bad fruit". Go read it.

What is a tree known for? _____

If you study the gospels, you'll notice a very simple truth repeated about trees and their fruit. Take a minute to read both Matthew 7:17-18 and Luke 6:43.

If we break this idea of corrupt words down into the simplest of black and white terms, it's safe to assume that corrupt words are equal to bad fruit. And a good tree does not bear bad fruit. Ever. One bad piece of fruit makes for a bad tree. It affects the full tree. Not just part of it.

I don't know a lot about horticulture. Ok, I don't know anything about it. But I get the idea that the bad fruit grows as a result of something diseased within the tree. It's the visual result of what's happening inside. Just like a cancer patient's hair loss is the visual result of the poison inside their body trying to kill the rogue cancer cells.

Matthew 12:34 goes further to say "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks". By the time the negative words reach your mouth, it's pretty safe to say that you're already consumed with some level of bitterness or resentment in your heart. Eventually, the bitterness has nowhere else to go but out. And the good tree produces a bad piece of fruit? No. The good tree produces one isolated little sickly branch? No. The bad fruit comes from a bad tree. *LORD, I long to be a*

healthy tree. A good tree. Since we're at it, look up Matthew 12:33 in blueletterbible.org, and click on the Greek Lexicon word for "good". Write the very first word of the definition here: _____

The more good, wholesome, and edifying words come out of our mouths, the more beautiful we are. And we'd be lying if we didn't say that as women, we want to be beautiful. Inside and out. Go back to Ephesians 4:29 on blueletterbible.org and write down the Greek Lexicon definition for "good" (note: this is a different "good" than what you just looked up in Matthew): _____

If you scroll down on the page, you'll see a section called Thayer's Greek Lexicon which contains a lengthy paragraph describing all the different ways this particular word is used in the Greek language. Buried in the middle of the paragraph is a cross-reference to Acts 23:1, where Paul is talking about living in "good conscience before God until this day."

How often have you found yourself subconsciously looking over your shoulder before saying something to make sure the person in reference doesn't happen to be within ear shot? Or you've said something and later regretted it?

One of the definitions of "good" in Ephesians 4:29 is a peaceful conscience.

Write down the Greek definition for "edifying": _____

I was struck by the idea of only allowing words to proceed out of my mouth that promote another's holiness. Just chew on that for a second. Edification also means the process of building up. The Thayer's Lexicon explains it in reference to "the heavenly body, the abode of the soul after death (2 Corinthians 5:1)". Do my words provide a golden, holy brick that helps the hearer build their "treasure in heaven"? Or is it robbing them of their treasure?

Finally, write down the Greek definition for "grace": _____

A spoken, edifying word gives grace to the hearer when God uses it as His instrument. When we slander and gossip, we aren't giving God the opportunity to speak through us. Now, what do you do with all this information?

Turn Ephesians 4:29 into a prayer in your journal. Don't just recite the verse. Really pray it. Make it personal. Ask for forgiveness if you need to, and be specific. Talk with God specifically about the things that struck you most as you studied these words. And pray for His grace to be able to promote the holiness of those around you.

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WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- DAY 2 -

Read Ephesians 4:29-30. Write verse 30 in your journal.

Now that we know what we know from yesterday's digging, we're going to be held accountable. We have a choice to make as to whether or not we will diligently and proactively work toward not letting any corrupt word proceed out of our mouths.

Read Isaiah 61:1-3.

Isaiah is proclaiming what God has called him to do. And He's being very specific in speaking the things that God wants to do for the Israelites. If they would just let Him.

Now skip ahead two chapters and read Isaiah 63:9-10.

God never forces His will upon us. And because of that, the Israelites had a choice to make. God is always standing by ready and waiting to take all these burdens and replace them with good things. And throughout the Old Testament, we see the Israelites consistently choosing God for a time, then setting Him aside for awhile.

The amplified version of Isaiah 64:10 says this: *"But they rebelled and grieved (actively resisting) His Holy Spirit..."*

What happened when they grieved His Holy Spirit: _____

Our introduction to this week discusses the impossibility of taming the tongue. Thankfully God specializes in making the impossible possible. The idea of taming our tongue is just a small example of the larger picture. The other struggles. God is standing by to equip us with the supernatural ability to promote holiness. We just have to choose to accept it.

And when we don't...His Spirit is grieved.

What does it really mean to grieve the Spirit of God? Go back to blueletterbible.org and search for Isaiah 63:10. Before you actually click on any of the words, take note of the far right column titled "Parsing". A lot of times, there is more

than one definition for a word. If there is a button in the parsing column, you will be directed to the correct definition. In this particular case, the parsing link instructs you to look for the Piel stem, which is an intensive action. You'll see that clearly when you read the definition. Click on the Strong's link next to "grieve" and look for the section titled Piel in the Outline of Biblical Usage. There's a much stronger word that can be used for "grieve". What is it? _____

If you read the Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon description below, there's a much more interesting picture given in the first reference. What is it? _____

"The original idea is perhaps that of cutting..." That struck me. Because as soon as I read it, I thought of one thing - particularly since this is the Old Testament: creating idols.

The second we resist the Spirit of God, we're actively choosing to develop and form the very idols that separate us from Him. The second Piel definition means to shape or to form. Grieving the Spirit of God cuts apart what He is wanting to do, and we begin forming our own choices. Our own self-interest. Our own idols.

Go back to Ephesians 4:30 and read the verse again.

Now that we know the definition of grieving the Spirit of God from the Old Testament, the idea of being sealed for the day of redemption is a little bit more intriguing.

Read Ephesians 1:13. Once we believed unto salvation, what were we sealed with?

The Spirit *Himself* is the seal of our redemption. We were sealed by the Spirit and with the Spirit. And when we grieve the Spirit, according to Isaiah, we're performing an act of cutting. The only thing that's really destructive to a seal is cutting. When we actively resist the Spirit, and choose to do what we know we shouldn't do, we're essentially trying to cut open the seal of our own redemption. How convicting is that?

What are areas in your life beyond the tongue that you suspect might be grieving the Spirit?

Turn all the things you've learned today into a prayer in your journal. Take your time. Allow Him to show areas in your own life where you're grieving Him (and may not even realize it). And then thank Him that we are sealed for the day of redemption.

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- DAY 3 -

Read Ephesians 4:29-31. Write verse 31 in your journal.

Let's get right into it - go to www.blueletterbible.org and search for verse 31.

Click on the Strong's number next to each of the following words and write down their definitions:

Bitterness: _____

Did you notice the definition next to the letter "b"? "*A bitter root, and so producing a bitter fruit.*" Think back on your homework for Day 1, particularly the part about good trees vs. bad trees. We've been talking all week about taming the tongue, and now we're going to start looking at the steps we can actually take to do that.

By the time we begin speaking corrupt words, a bitter root has long since been growing in us that produces the words that result. Bitterness is a tricky, sneaky little thing that easily overtakes us without us realizing it. A misconception or a perceived wrong can quickly spiral out of control. Once we get bitterness in our hearts, it's very difficult to get it out. And it doesn't poison anyone but ourselves.

Read Hebrews 12:14-15.

Pursue peace with all people. Actively. Looking carefully for any root of bitterness that causes trouble, and defiles many. Because bitter roots produce bitter fruit. And for some reason, we're more apt to share our bitter fruit with anyone that will take it than our good fruit.

Flip over to Deuteronomy 29:18, paying particular attention to the last part of the verse. I did a quick read about wormwood on wikipedia, and found this little tidbit interesting: "it is used in companion planting to suppress weeds, because its roots secrete substances that inhibit the growth of surrounding plants".

Did you catch that? *Wormwood inhibits the growth of surrounding plants.* Remember what you just read in Hebrews 12? Bitterness defiles many. And when people are defiled, their spiritual growth is *inhibited*.

Read Exodus 15:22-26.

Now we get to the good part. The Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness and were without any water for three solid days. When they finally found water, it was undrinkable. They were furious. They were bitter at Moses, perceiving that he misled them. And they told him about it. And he told God about it. And God told Moses what to do about it.

How did God heal the bitter waters? Write verse 25 here: _____

At the end of verse 26, God introduces a new piece of His character by revealing another name of His to the Israelites: Jehovah Rapha. The LORD Who Heals You. He made the introduction by demonstrating His power over the most common disease His people suffer from across the board: bitterness.

The only way we can heal the bitterness in our hearts is to throw it upon a tree (also translated wood). But not just any wood. It must be the wood of the cross. And then we have to leave it there. Because as long as the tree was in the bitter water at Marah, the water was made sweet. The verses say nothing of the tree being removed. I imagine that if the tree were taken out, the water would go back to where it was. Maybe not immediately, but over time whatever was in the tree that sweetened the waters would fade. And the bitterness would slowly return to where it was. We have to be so careful to guard against bitterness because it's one of those things that just keeps coming back if we let it.

Go back to Ephesians 4. Look up the definition for "be put away".

You'll see quite a list of different translations. In these cases, I dig through the Thayer's Greek Lexicon until I find a reference to the particular verse I'm studying (which may or may not be there). On this word, you'll see it in the middle of the paragraph:

"To rend away, to cut off, John 15:2." Look up John 15:2 and write it here: _____

It's time to think about any bitterness that you need to let the cross be cast into and allow the Vinedresser to remove. (Or something that is small now, but can easily turn into bitterness.) Take some time to turn the verses you've read today into prayers in your journal. Pray specifically. And rend away anything that Satan can turn into a bitter root. Because by it many are defiled.

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- DAY 4 -

Read Ephesians 4:29-32. Write verse 32 in your journal.

Go to blueletterbible.org and look up the Strong's definition for "kind". If you read further in the Thayer's Greek Lexicon, you will see that the correct translation for this particular verse is the second one. Write it here:

To be manageable is the opposite of harsh, hard, sharp, and bitter. When we are finally able to put the bitterness that we studied yesterday away from us, all that's left is kindness. I find it interesting that the root word of *chrēstos* means to grant a loan. To lend. The act of giving is rooted in kindness. There's a reason why giving gifts is a love language. If you're angry or bitter with someone, the last thing you want to do is give them a gift.

A pastor shared a handful of years ago about how he puts quite a bit of thought into buying someone a book if he's particularly frustrated with them, or their relationship is at odds. He said that it always dissipates the situation for him. That is a very specific example of this verse being acted out. He illustrated making the choice to put away the bitterness and, instead, choose kindness. Then acts it out through a gift of something that he loves.

Go back to blueletterbible.org and look up the Greek Lexicon for "tenderhearted":

This definition surprised me. Strong bowels? What do your bowels have anything to do with being tenderhearted? And if you're tender, how can you be strong? As I dug more into it, I learned that the term bowels doesn't just refer to your intestines, it also includes your vital organs like the heart, lungs, and liver.

I think it's safe to say that we can replace "tenderhearted" with strong-hearted. It's interesting how the stronger you love someone, the more tender you are towards them. And how much more quickly you are moved to have compassion for them.

“...forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you.”

I read a quote by Jamieson, Fauusset and Brown in their verse-by-verse expositional commentary on this verse and was so convicted at how simply, yet pointedly, they explained those words: *“It is but just that you in turn shall be so to your fellow men, who have not erred against you in the degree that you have erred against God.”*

Yikes.

It doesn't matter what someone did. Or said. Or how they acted. Or what was perceived. It is still not to the same degree as our sin. And if God freely forgives me...how can I cling to bitterness, refusing to forgive those around me?

Matthew Henry was an English ministrer in the 17th century, and his commentary on scripture is one of my very favorites. He says this about the same passage:

“Occasions of difference will happen among Christ's disciples; and therefore they must be placable, and ready to forgive, therein resembling God Himself, who for Christ's sake hath forgiven them, and that more than they can forgive one another. Note, with God there is forgiveness; and He forgives sin for the sake of Jesus Christ, and on account of that atonement which He has made to divine justice. Note again, those who are forgiven of God should be of a forgiving spirit, and should forgive even as God forgives, sincerely and heartily, readily and cheerfully, universally and for ever, upon the sinner's sincere repentance, as remembering that they pray: forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

I want you to just chew on these things. Spend some time praying in your journal over any unforgiveness you're harboring. Ask God to reveal any areas of unforgiveness in your life that you might not be aware of. And then start the prayer journey of letting go.

If you're not harboring any unforgiveness, spend time praying for the supernatural ability to be kind. Strong-hearted. Genuinely loving and compassionate to those around you. That might even mean specifically praying for your marriage, and for extra kindness toward your husband. Let God lead this time for you. Spend at least 15 minutes praying and/or waiting on the LORD.

TREASURES *of* DARKNESS

WEEK 1: TAMING THE TONGUE

- DAY 5 -

Read Ephesians 4:29-32 for the last time this week, and write all four verses in your journal.

I was hesitant to delve into the topic of unforgiveness, because I want to make sure we're going through things that are personally relevant to you. Ironically, I kept forgetting where we started in James last week. *No one* can tame the tongue. And the more I studied bitterness and unforgiveness, the more I realized just how relevant it is to all of us.

In her book *Praying God's Word*, Beth Moore puts it this way in the chapter on Overcoming Unforgiveness:

"No matter how different the rest of our challenges may be, every believer can count on a multitude of challenges to forgive. Remember, God's primary agenda in the life of a believer is to conform the child into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. No other word sums up His character in relationship to use like the word forgiving. We never look more like Christ than when we forgive; since that's God's goal, we're destined for plenty of opportunities!"

She goes on to say, *"if only we could understand that God's unrelenting insistence on our forgiveness is for our own sakes, not the sake of the one who hurt us. God is faithful. He will plead our case and take up our cause... but only when we make a deliberate decision to cease representing ourselves in the matter."*

Confirming what we've already been studying this week, she explains: *"Innumerable strongholds are connected to an unwillingness to forgive. Left untreated, unforgiveness becomes spiritual cancer. Bitterness takes root, and since the root feeds the rest of the tree, every branch of our lives and every fruit on each limb ultimately become poisoned. Beloved sister, the bottom line is... unforgiveness makes us sick. Always spiritually. Often emotionally. And, surprisingly often, physically."*

*"Please keep in mind that forgiveness is not defined by a feeling, although it will ultimately change our feelings. The Greek word most often translated "forgiveness" in New Testament Scripture is *aphiemi*, meaning 'to send forth or away, let go from oneself. To let go from one's power, possession. To let go from one's further... attendance, occupancy.' Forgiveness is our determined and deliberate willingness to let something go. To release it from our possession. To be willing and ready for it to no longer occupy us." And to let it go to God.*

I've pulled a few of the scripture-prayers she included in the chapter. There's plenty more where this came from - if you would like them, you can find the book on Beth Moore's website¹ or at most Christian book stores.

1 www.lproof.org

Lord, as hard as this may be for me to comprehend or rationalize, Your Word is clear: if I forgive others when they sin against me, You, my heavenly Father will also forgive me. (Matt. 6:14)

Lord God, if I do not forgive others their sins, You, my Father, will not forgive my sins. (Matt. 6:15)

Father, according to Your Word, if I judge others, I too will be judged, and with the same measure I use, it will be measured to me. (Matt. 7:1-2)

Christ Jesus, when I want so badly to judge, condemn, or refuse forgiveness to another person, I can hear Your Word speak to my heart saying, 'If you are without sin, be the first to throw a stone at them.' (John 8:7) I am *not* without sin. If I claim to be without sin, I deceive myself and the truth is not in me. (1 John 1:8)

Lord, I must ask myself why I look at the speck of sawdust in another person's eye and pay no attention to the plank in my own eye. How can I say to my brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in my own eye? O God, rescue me from being a hypocrite! Give me the honesty and courage to first take the plank out of my own eye, and then I may see clearly to remove the speck from another person's eye. (Matt. 7:3-5)

Jesus, in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the only person in the end who was imprisoned and tortured was the one who would not forgive. (Matt. 18:33-34) Help me to see the monumental price of unforgiveness. It is so enslaving and torturous. According to Matthew 18:35, You may allow me to suffer the same kind of repercussions if I refuse to forgive from my heart someone who has sinned against me.

Lord, Your Word tells me that when I stand praying, if I hold anything against anyone, I am to forgive him or her so that You, my Father in heaven, may forgive me my sins. (Mark 11:25)

God, if I am offering my gifts to You through worship or service and remember that my brother has something against me, I am to leave my gift there in front of the altar. I am to first go and be reconciled to my brother, then I am to come and offer my gift. (Matt. 5:23-24) Help me to be obedient to Your will.

If I do not judge, I will not be judged. If I do not condemn, I will not be condemned. If I forgive, I will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37) Help me, Lord, to extend more grace, and I will continue to receive more grace!

Lord Jesus, when You were being led out to be executed, after being beaten, ridiculed, and spit upon, You said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) If You can forgive those kinds of things and You were totally innocent, by Your strength and power, I can forgive the things that have been done to me. I also acknowledge the people who hurt me haven't always known what they are doing or what repercussions their actions would have.

Lord, You tell me to forgive others in the sight of Christ in order that Satan might not outwit me. Help me never to be unaware of his schemes. (2 Cor. 2:11) Please help me to see how much the enemy takes advantage of unforgiveness. I offer him a foothold any time I refuse to forgive.