



## Week 2

*"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten"- Joel 2:25*

Life feels tedious and flat. I long for vitality and adventure from some faraway place, but find myself exhausted with trying to cover up my weaknesses, failures and needs. Is this you today? God is waiting to restore true hope and joy. But we need to start from where we really are, not where we think we should be. Read, pray and journal with me this week. Let's walk this out together.

*"God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."* - John Ortberg, Soul Keeping.

### Day 1 - Shattered dreams

What has paralyzed you from moving forward with God? We all have hurts and failures in our past and present. What determines where we end up is what we do with these unwanted visitors? What do you do? Do you ignore the feelings? Do you default to bitterness or despair? Do you play the victim and blame others for your failures? Sit quietly before the Lord with a notebook or computer and invite the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind past or present hurts, failures, or disappointments in your life. Psalm 46:10- *"Be still and know that I am God"*. Without censoring or judging the thoughts that come to you, just capture as much as you can. What emotions do you feel when you remember. Write them down. For today, just remember, feel, and sense his gentle and loving presence with you. Sit with him a while. Matthew 12:20- *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.*

### Day 2 - Hide with pride

There are typical lies we believe about ourselves. I find myself crippled by negative inner narrative all too often. Are you beaten down by mental messages telling you that you're not good enough to love, have failed one time too many, are not a candidate for grace and forgiveness? Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we hide our shame and don't believe God will forgive our sin. Instead we develop a false, independent self, we refine a "mask" to present to God and other people. We "play church". We serve as a performance to win peoples' approval, hoping this will ease the pain of our shame and sense of unworthiness. Matthew 23:27- *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.* What mask(s) do you wear? Consider and journal the following: What are some "false personas" you have developed to hide behind? How are they working? What would it look like to believe in God's forgiveness for you? How might that change your relationship with him? What steps can you take to begin aligning your inner narrative with what God has declared to be true?

### Day 3 - Burnout days, lonely nights

Crossroads time. Desert time. You're not flourishing. Just working on the chain gang. Joy is nowhere to be found. All your efforts seem invisible. You want to feel celebrated but nobody's throwing a party. You can't remember the last time you experienced the sweet feeling of TRUE HOPE: Jeremiah 29:11- *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Journal these questions with your answers: Do I want to be vulnerable and admit how shamed and lonely I feel, or do I want to continue to hide and not risk more hurt and disappointment? Be honest. Am I willing for my relationships with God and others to remain shallow and distant? Am I willing to live chained to my past? What does that place look and feel like? Is that where I want to be? Who do I want to become? "What would I be willing to do to become that person? What would that change look like? Our past doesn't have to define us. Rather, if we allow it to, it can refine us. For this radical transformation to take place we have to turn to God and allow him to change our self-talk from "I am shamed and not worthy" to "I am redeemed, forgiven and made worthy." As the refining process begins, we can drop our masks off in the nearest trash bin.

### Day 4 - Redemptive desperation

God whispers to us "come to me". God often uses pain to get our attention. Isaiah 1:18- *Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* In turning to him to embrace the pain and be forgiven and healed instead of running and hiding, we choose redemption. Innocent or perfect people don't need forgiveness. Jesus came for the sinners and people who have messed up, people like you and me. And there is good news for us in this: Psalm 34:18- *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* Part of not allowing our mistakes to define us is receiving God's forgiveness. From a broken place, we can catch the first rays of HOPE breaking in a new morning. If this is what you want, if you are willing, pray this prayer: Psalm 51:1-2- *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving-kindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Amen.* This journey is never complete this side of eternity. We will need to choose redemption over picking up a mask again and again. But it is a good and holy journey, and I believe we will feel God smile along the way.

### Day 5 - Running into the arms of Abba - our past refines us

Psalm 40:1-3: *I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the lord and put their trust in Him.* This Psalm gives an incredible picture of how to allow our past to refine us. There is such JOY in store for us when we acknowledge the pain caused by injustices done to us and our own failures and sins against other people, and seek God's forgiveness and healing. Let's actively challenge the lies of our inner narratives and replace them with truths about what God has declared to be true about us. What would change in my life if I began replacing old narratives with what God has said about me? How would that affect my relationship with God, with other people and with myself? Consider using a concordance (or Google) to look up scriptures about who you are as a follower of Jesus. Meditate on God's thoughts about you. Sit in silence and listen to what God is saying about you, choose to hear his truth. This is choosing a new path. At first it is difficult and may feel awkward but this is the way to healing. Journal about what God reveals to you. Continually come back to these truths whenever trouble comes. And here's the best part - on the new path we become a tile in God's mosaic of redemption: We are becoming people who think, feel and act like Jesus.