

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM HANDBOOK

UNIT II

KEY 2 FAITH

Purpose of this Key:

- 1) Realize that faith is brought to us by the Holy Spirit working through the Word.
- 2) Realize that nothing in us is able to produce faith in Christ.
- 3) Realize that temptations do not go away after we accept Jesus as our Savior.
- 4) Realize how the World, the Flesh, and the Devil work together to tempt us to sin.
- 5) Accept that only faith can make us able to resist a sinful habit.
- 6) Recognize how we use sinful habits to avoid facing painful memories and experiences.
- 7) Recognize how faith makes us able to face painful memories and experiences.
- 8) Accept that while do not know what kind of a person God is going to turn each of us into, faith assures us that He works for our good, and that each will like who He turns him/her into.
- 9) Jesus' death and resurrection give us victory over temptation.

Psalm 30:5

Common responses:

- 1) God is angry at our sins but quick to forgive the penitent.
- 2) We will have problems in life, and our faith makes us strong to deal with them.
- 3) We can have hope.
- 4) We should not take advantage of God's mercy by continuing in deliberate sin.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) God wants to deliver us from our sins and the effects of sin in our lives.
- 2) Trials in life often reveal hidden weaknesses.
- 3) If we are feeling pain, we should examine ourselves to find the cause.
- 4) We need to be alert for sins of the mind and lies of the devil.

- 5) Instead of committing sin in order to get temporary relief from painful emotions, we should take the pain to God in prayer.
- 6) Reassure them that trials and tests often precede blessings.
- 7) If we remain faithful during our times of trials and tests, we can expect God to bless us with joy (Romans 8:18 & James 1:2-4).
- 8) Sometimes when God tries to bring us blessings, our sinful nature blinds us to what He is trying to do.
- 9) None in the Bible are judged without God first giving them a chance to repent.
- 10) God does not just forgive our sins; He will help us clean up the messes our sins have caused if we will do things His way.
- 11) His discipline is part of His mercy.
- 12) We need to surrender self-will.
- 13) This is a good verse to memorize to encourage us.

Hebrews 11:1

Common responses:

- 1) God can be relied upon to help us overcome our sinful habits.
- 2) Faith is being sure of what we hope for but cannot yet see.
- 3) If we have faith, we will accomplish many things.
- 4) Faith relies on God's power, not our own.
- 5) Some think that faith means that we will get our way if we believe hard enough. They were told they can "name it and claim it". This belief must be corrected.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Reassure them that God can be trusted to change each of them into someone he/she can like and respect.
- 2) Faith does not mean getting what we want; it means willingly accepting what God wants.
- 3) Faith means praying for what God wants (Mark 14:36).
- 4) Faith needs to be in the merits of Jesus, not in our own merits.

- 5) Faith assures us that sin will lose its grip if we persistently repent (Romans 6:17 & 21).
- 6) Faith makes us willing to surrender our self-will.
- 7) Faith assures us that we can trust God during the process of change.
- 8) Faith does not just “hope”; faith is *knowing* that God will act on our behalf as we walk in obedience (Romans 8:28 & Jeremiah 29:11).
- 9) Faith is a gift from God brought to us through the Word, not something we can generate by our own efforts.
- 10) Over time, as we accumulate a record of God acting on our behalf, our faith grows stronger (Psalm 46:1-3).

Proverbs 15:29

Common responses:

- 1) God will hear our prayers if we are willing to do things His way.
- 2) God will not listen to our prayers if we continue to deliberately sin.
- 3) Some put a legalistic interpretation on this verse.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) The “righteous” person is not righteous because of his/her clean life and good works. We are righteous if we repent and accept the covering of God’s mercy in Christ (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1).
- 2) “Wicked” people are not wicked because they have committed many sins, but because they refused to repent and accept God’s forgiveness.
- 3) The righteous person puts his/her problems before God and leaves the solution with God’s will.
- 4) If we have been confessing our sins, relying on His mercy to save us, working toward forgiving others, and surrendering our self-will, we can take our petitions to God and ask Him how He wishes us to proceed.
- 5) The Lord is far from the wicked because they push Him away and insist on doing things according to their self-will (Luke 18:9-14).

- 6) Be alert for hidden legalism; some think that God hears only perfect people who do enough good works.
- 7) Be alert for prosperity theology, which teaches that if we do enough good works, God's favor in prayer can be earned.

Romans 4:18-25

Common responses:

- 1) God's favor and the ability to have faith are free gifts that we cannot earn.
- 2) Abraham's faith made him right with God.
- 3) If God can cause an old woman to become pregnant, He will do far more for us.
- 4) We need to build our lives on the promises in God's Word.
- 5) We need to have faith when the going gets tough and things seem hopeless.
- 6) Sometimes we have to wait a long time for God's promises to come true.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Faith comes from the Word of God (Romans 10:17), not our own efforts to believe.
- 2) God came to Abraham; He made the first move (Genesis 12:1-3).
- 3) Faith focuses on God's promises, not our circumstances (Psalm 105).
- 4) God is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13).
- 5) Faith assures us that a powerful temptation will not last forever but will eventually end if we remain transparent before God.
- 6) Faith keeps us focused on God for the long term, not just the short term.
- 7) Sometimes new Christians or people with no Church background need this text explained to them. If they are new to the Bible, they may not yet have read about Abraham.
- 8) Abraham did not live a perfect life; he sometimes sinned. His righteousness was based on his faith (Genesis 16:1-2 & 17:18-20).
- 9) God loves to work miracles in hopeless situations.

Matthew 7:21-29

Common responses:

- 1) We must build our lives on faith in Christ.
- 2) Not everyone who proclaims Jesus as Lord is going to heaven. To be real, faith has to lead to obedience.
- 3) If you try to get to heaven based on your good works and not faith, you cannot stand up to tests and trials in life.
- 4) We cannot build our lives on our own goals, but on God's goals.
- 5) We must beware of false teachings.
- 6) Some put a legalistic interpretation on this passage.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) The Rock is the mercy of God in Christ, not our own good works.
- 2) Our good works are like sand, which is not stable, and which comes and goes.
- 3) We can think we are good people, but when trouble comes, we react in unrighteous ways.
- 4) Legalists often fall into the very sins they are quick to condemn in others. The Law cannot save us (Romans 3:20-24).
- 5) One can speak in God's Name and still remain totally committed to self-will.
- 6) The people who try to live under the Law in verse 22 are called "lawless" in verse 23.
- 7) Troubles in life show us where we are weak.
- 8) We need to continually examine ourselves for hidden weakness so that we do not fall into sin (Psalm 19:12-13).
- 9) On Judgment Day, none can point to their good works. We can only point to Christ and say, "There is my Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21)".
- 10) This text ends the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus sets the standards so high that no human being can achieve them. He thereby proves that *everyone* needs to repent (Matthew 4:17).
- 11) The Sermon on the Mount was never meant to be a New Testament legal code that would be harder to obey than the Old Testament legal code. It was meant to show how helpless we are in our sins and how much we need God's mercy.

Psalm 127:1-2**Common responses:**

- 1) God has a plan for my life. If I follow His plan, I will become the person He wants me to be.
- 2) God provides for the ones who believe in Him.
- 3) We cannot expect God to bless any action that is outside of His will.
- 4) God will guide our lives if we let Him.
- 5) If we do not trust God with our problems, we will never be rid of them.
- 6) Some confess ways in which they had tried to build a life without God.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) We need to ask God to show us His plan, and be willing to surrender to it.
- 2) Any other approach to life is pointless.
- 3) Working harder will not help if God is not blessing our efforts.

1. Why do we need faith in Jesus (Proverbs 20:9 & Acts 15:9)?**Common responses:**

- 1) Because we are all sinners in need of forgiveness.
- 2) We cannot save ourselves.
- 3) Only Jesus can save us.
- 4) So that we will become capable of doing good works.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Most people understand these verses, though new Christians might have difficulty grasping that it is so simple.
- 2) Emphasize that our good works do not save us; our good works are done out of gratitude for the free gift of salvation.

2. What is God saying to you in 2 Corinthians 5:7?**Common responses:**

- 1) Because we cannot always see what God is doing, we need to have faith.
- 2) God will deliver us from our struggles even though sometimes He does not seem to be doing anything.
- 3) We cannot rely just on what we can see.
- 4) We cannot rely on our feelings or subjective experiences, but only on the Word.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) When we step out in faith, faith eventually will become sight.
- 2) Our faith will grow stronger as we see God blessing and helping us in various situations.
- 3) New Christians often need encouragement, because they have not yet experienced God's blessings and help in various situations.
- 4) They might benefit from older and more experienced Christians who can testify how God has blessed and helped them in their lives.
- 5) The more we surrender our self-will, the more opportunities we have to see God showing His strength on our behalf.
- 6) When we step out in faith, and God proves Himself faithful, we will receive another test later on. As a result, our faith will grow.
- 7) The devil tries to persuade us to give up at the last minute, when help is on the way.
- 8) When things seem to be going badly, we need to look for the hand of God hidden in the trouble.
- 9) The Christian life is therefore full of surprises.

3. What is God saying to you in I Corinthians 15:20,25, & 56-57?**Common responses:**

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Christ won the victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil when He died on the cross and rose up alive.

- 2) He thereby imputes to us His righteousness.
- 3) He thereby imputes to us eternal life.
- 4) He thereby imputes to us his victory over the power of the devil.

4. How do you apply Proverbs 22:3 to your struggle?

Common responses:

- 1) Keep focused on God.
- 2) Avoid people and places that tempt us to sin.
- 3) Be aware of the weaknesses that open us to temptation.
- 4) Many realize that they have been like the foolish man who walks blindly into sin.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) We all need to be aware of warning signs of temptation, both in our own mental states and in the world around us.
- 2) Fatigue, fear, anger, shame, humiliation, sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem, or painful memories can make us vulnerable to thoughts that lead toward temptation.
- 3) Thoughts that are selfish, self-piteous, envious, cynical, resentful, judgmental, hostile to others, or prideful make us vulnerable to temptation.
- 4) When we have negative feelings and thoughts, we should look for the lies of the devil that feed those feelings and thoughts.
- 5) The devil likes to get us into negative feelings and thoughts and then offer us a temptation so that we will try to feel better by sinning.
- 6) Sin will make us feel better only for a short while.
- 7) If asked, the Holy Spirit will show us the lies of the devil that lead to our negative thoughts, feelings, and temptations (Psalm 139:23-24).
- 8) When the lies of the devil are exposed and the truth from the Bible spoken against them, we feel free (John 8:44, 32, & 36).
- 9) Temptation is a warning signal that we may have allowed ourselves to think negative thoughts. If we are mindful of our thoughts, we are less easily tempted.
- 10) We fight temptation more easily while it is still small instead of after it has grown large (Song of Solomon 2:15).

- 11) No matter how careful we are, we can still be caught off guard by temptation (Psalm 19:12-13).
- 12) We may need to avoid certain people and situations until our faith has grown and we have become stronger.
- 13) We should not feel ashamed when we need to avoid certain people and situations.
- 14) Unless we are sure we are strong enough, we should take another believer with if we feel led to witness to a tempting person. Discernment is necessary.
- 15) We sometimes learn to discern danger only through hard experience.
- 16) If we do slip and fall into sin through our own carelessness, we need to repent (I John 1:9), and learn from the experience.
- 17) Some ex-ssa/ma/tx people become strong enough to go to bars or parades to witness to ssa/ma/tx people, but working in pairs is wise.

5. Check which best describes your faith at this time. Please explain your answer.

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Most check “growing”. Some check “weak”.
- 3) Some show evidence of “dynamic” faith but may feel they would be prideful to say so.
- 4) Many will describe how their faith has grown through the Word, Sacrament, prayer, church participation, fellowship with other believers, etc.
- 5) Those who describe it as “weak” often confess that they have backslidden in their Bible reading and prayer life.
- 6) Many express that they recognize how much more growth they need.
- 7) Some still wonder if God can forgive them for all of their sins, especially if they hurt a child.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm anything that builds faith: the Word, Sacraments, prayer, church participation, Christian fellowship and accountability relationships, witnessing to others, etc.

- 2) If they have had some difficult trials and tests, give encouragement.
- 3) Affirm any growth and improvement.
- 4) If they view their faith as weak, encourage them to continue to build faith through the Word (Romans 10:17).
- 5) If they confess to backsliding, do not judge or criticize them. They need to feel safe admitting to their short-comings, and not feel pressured to tell you things are better than they are.
- 6) People who avoid Bible reading are often still putting a legalistic interpretation on what they read. Encourage them to look for evidence of God's mercy in every passage.
- 7) People who avoid prayer may still view God as an angry judge or a punishing father, so they are afraid of being transparent before Him. Bring their focus back to the mercy of God (Hebrews 4:15-16).
- 8) Give assurance that Jesus on the cross made full satisfaction for all of their sins.
- 9) People who avoid church may have sound reasons for doing so. Perhaps the pastor does not preach the Gospel, or perhaps the congregation is backslidden and offers no real fellowship. No other churches may be available, which may be the case in prisons, the military, or remote areas.
- 10) In such instances, they should pray for God to point them to people with whom they can have Christian fellowship, whether inside or outside of a church. They should also look for opportunities to be of service.

6. Check which best describes the use you make of your faith during temptation. Please explain your answer.

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary and are usually in the middle range.
- 2) Some acknowledge that their habits are hard to break.
- 3) Some recognize that they rely on their own strength instead of praying for protection or quoting Scripture.
- 4) Some recognize that resisting temptation is becoming easier, especially if they combat temptation with Scripture.

- 5) Some are quick to use their faith to combat the “big” sins but are less quick to use it to combat their “little” sins.
- 6) At this point in their recovery, very few have learned to use faith as an “automatic reflex”.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm any improvement in fighting temptation.
- 2) Give encouragement. The more they use their faith, the more they will see of God’s power.
- 3) Encourage them to use their faith to confront negative thoughts and lies of the devil. Then they will be less tempted by the “big” sins.
- 4) Encourage them to be alert for temptation whenever they feel fatigue, fear, anger, shame, humiliation, sadness, loneliness, or low self-esteem, or recall painful memories. The devil attacks us when we are weak.
- 5) Assure them that if they are consistent, they will get closer to the point of “automatic reflex”.
- 6) Encourage them to use the Emergency Prayer (Matthew 14:30) and call on God for rescue immediately.
- 7) When one gets to that point, God might put another test into one’s life.
- 8) The so-called “little sins” can sometimes cause worse problems than the big ones.
- 9) Remind them that change takes time. The Word re-wires our minds at the same time it builds our faith.

7. Are there any specific problems you are having with faith?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) Some are going through difficult trials and tests.
- 3) Some ssa/ma/tx overcomers are having trouble believing that they can find acceptance in church.
- 4) Some have been exposed to prosperity theology and therefore believe that faith means that they will get what they want and life will not be too difficult.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Never criticize any difficulties. Give encouragement.
- 2) New Christians may not realize that their faith is being tested. Explain that trials and tests are part of the normal Christian life.
- 3) Encourage them to stay in the Word to build their faith.
- 4) Encourage them to bring every difficulty to the Lord in prayer and ask Him what He wants them to do about it.
- 5) Explain that prosperity theology is a false teaching, and that real faith surrenders to God's will (Romans 8:18 & 28).
- 6) Ssa/ma/tx overcomers usually gain acceptance in church if they come regularly and offer to serve.
- 7) Sex offenders may have legal restrictions set by government authorities. These might include using only single-stall bathrooms, not going into the Sunday school area, and talking to minor children only if an adult is present. Accepting these restrictions in a spirit of humility helps to gain people's confidence. These should be discussed privately with the pastor.
- 8) Sometimes we have to wait a long time for God to make Jeremiah 29:11 prove itself true. Faith grows in the waiting.

8. Can you give a specific example of where using your faith has helped you?**Common responses:**

- 1) Answers will vary. Some are very specific; some are more general.
- 2) Some give examples of fighting temptation.
- 3) Many find that fighting temptation with Scripture is very effective.
- 4) Some give examples of faith holding up through trials and tests.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm any growth of faith. Give encouragement.
- 2) Give counsel for specific situations based on your knowledge, experience, and what you have learned from working with this person.

9. What new things have you learned about faith?**Common responses:**

- 1) Answers will vary. Some are very specific; some are more general.
- 2) Some say that for the first time in their lives, they are applying their faith to overcoming ssa/ma/tx.
- 3) Some say that they need to put their faith into action.
- 4) Some have seen their faith grow as they successfully resisted temptation.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Affirm any response that is Biblically sound.
- 2) If necessary, counsel based on your knowledge, experience, and what you have learned from working with this person.

10. On a scale of 1-10, how victorious have you been lately? Please explain your answer.**Common responses:**

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for any victory gained
- 2) More tests will likely be put in their way, but future tests should not spoil their enjoyment of the victories they have had so far.
- 3) If they sin less frequently than before, assure them that God has been working in their lives. Encourage progress, not perfection.
- 4) If they have slipped, encourage them to confess it, accept God's forgiveness, and get back on track.
- 5) Encourage them to retrace their steps and ask the Holy Spirit to give them insight into what weaknesses led to the fall.
- 6) Encourage confession of sins of thoughts (Romans 12:2), which makes it easier to avoid sins of words and deeds.

- 7) Continue to encourage them to use memorized Scripture to block tempting and negative thoughts. Encourage use of the Emergency Prayer.
- 8) If they view themselves as making very little progress, keep their focus on God's mercy, rather than their own failures.
- 9) New Christians do not always understand the difference between temptation and actual sin. Some give themselves a low number, but while the temptation was great, they may not have fallen into actual sin. Explain the difference to them.

11. On a scale of 1-10, how much memory work have you done?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.
- 2) By now, most people are memorizing Scripture and seeing benefits.
- 3) Even if they are not actively memorizing, verses may be staying in their minds from their Bible-reading.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) If the answer correlates with the number in #10, point out the correlation.
- 2) Encourage any memorization, especially verses that speak of God's mercy and promises.
- 3) Verses that only condemn sin are not helpful. Verses that give the consolation of the Gospel to the penitent sinner are the ones that are powerful and bring change.
- 4) If they are having trouble memorizing, they can write down meaningful verses on paper and read them several times throughout the day.

12. Did you use any memorized Scripture to battle temptation lately? What was the result?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage using Scripture to battle all temptation, sexual or otherwise.

- 2) If they have had no significant temptation lately, they need to memorize in order to be prepared.
- 3) If they have not been using Scripture to battle temptation, encourage them to confess their sins and start using their sword (Ephesians 6:17).

13. How is your spiritual life in general, how are your private devotions, and how are things at your church/fellowship group?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for whatever is going well.
- 2) Explore what is not going so well and try to pinpoint what might be holding them back.
- 3) Give encouragement and be patient. These people are often getting many new thoughts and ideas in a short period of time.

Plan of Action:

- 1) Affirm any Biblical response.
- 2) Be alert for any hidden legalism.
- 3) Give lots of encouragement.
- 4) By this time, many are learning to be Spirit-led, and less dependent upon the written Plans of Action.

Additional Points:

- 1) Some still express feeling guilt over their former sins.
- 2) For the first time, they might be feeling empathy for the people they hurt, especially children.
- 3) If they feel guilt because of empathy for others, that is a good development. Their consciences have become more alert to sin and the harm it causes.
- 4) However, continual guilt can be a trap of the devil (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

- 5) If guilt leads to a desire to be purged of sin, that is a good development.
- 6) If guilt leads to hopelessness and despair, it is a trap of the devil.
- 7) Our sinful human nature desires to atone for our own sins, so we beat ourselves with guilt.
- 8) People who do not believe that Jesus fully atoned for their sins may beat themselves with guilt to try to atone for their sins themselves.
- 9) Assure them that Jesus has made full satisfaction for all of their sins, and that we cannot add to what He did on our behalf.
- 10) Some people in the program have been exposed to prosperity theology. They were told that if they live clean lives and do good works, God will bless them by giving them what they want.
- 11) They might have been told that if they have enough faith, they will have money, good marriages, good children, good health, and good jobs. Nothing seriously bad will ever happen to them, or if something bad happens, it will only be temporary.
- 12) Prosperity theology is unbiblical. God does not promise His servants an easy life (2 Corinthians 11:24-28).
- 13) He does promise to be with us in trouble (Psalm 46:1-3), forgive our sins, give us eternal life, and never leave us.
- 14) These promises are of greater value than material rewards.