

A RENEWED MIND



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Carmine C., Crossroads student



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PRISON MINISTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

This course has been designed to help students have the renewed mind that God intends. Our thinking and our hearts interact to form our attitudes and behaviors. In prison, classes on “thinking errors” and addictions help show us where our wrong thinking causes us to do the things we do that are unhealthy. This course is different in that it examines what the Bible says about our thinking, attitudes, and behaviors. We will see that these are spiritual matters that can help us have a right relationship with God and others. It has taken a lifetime for us to develop the thoughts and attitudes we have about others and the world. We pray that these lessons will help set you free from the thoughts and attitudes that have prevented you from experiencing all the peace and joy that God desires you to have. As you do these lessons, pray that God will shine a light in your heart to see how much He loves you.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.



Crossroads provides NIV Bibles, upon request, to students who need them to complete the lessons (if allowed by their facility).

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Associations – Friendly or cooperative relationships between people.

Attitude – A feeling or emotion toward a fact or person.

Attitudes – How we think or feel about someone or something, often shown in how we act.

Colossae – An ancient city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The first church there was started by Epaphras. Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to this church.

Commitment – An agreement or pledge to do something in the future. It could be a promise you are making to yourself or someone else.

Conform – To change yourself to behave according to the expectations of others or society.

Consequences – A result or effect of an action or condition.

Confrontations – Hostile or argumentative meetings or situations between people who disagree.

Glorifying – To give praise or admiration to someone or something.

Immune system – A network of biological systems that protects us from diseases.

Influence – To have an effect or impact on the way someone behaves or thinks.

Meditate – To think reflectively about a topic, idea, or God. When we meditate on God's Word, we are sitting quietly, considering what the Bible might be showing us about God, ourselves, or others. We can also simply be thinking about and appreciating God's holiness and goodness.

Metanoia – A Greek word used in the New Testament that is translated as repentance. Repentance isn't just about changing behavior. It is about having a "new mind," changing our thinking about God and the attitudes and behaviors that lead to behavior that is sinful or prevents us from experiencing God.

Perch – To sit on or close to the edge of something.

Selfish Ambition – The desire and action to do and accomplish things that satisfy our own selfishness. This could be an unhealthy desire for riches, power, fame, or the approval of others.

Social setting – The immediate physical and social environment in which we live or in which something happens or develops. It includes the culture that a person was educated or lives in and the people and institutions with whom they interact.

Sower – A person who plants seeds, like a farmer in a field.

LESSON 1: Metanoia: A New Mind

Lesson Focus:

Changed behavior is a product of changed thinking.

You are likely familiar with the words “repent,” or “repentance.” If you are a follower of Jesus, you not only know the meaning of the words, but you know what it is like to repent or change behaviors that are not helpful or pleasing to God. When you were first taught about repentance, the person who taught you may have said that repentance was turning from sin and walking in the opposite direction. This is a great definition. When we became followers of Jesus, we turned away from many of our sins, unhealthy behaviors, and wrong attitudes and began walking toward God and His will for our lives.

Repentance, however, is not just changing our behavior. The Greek word that is translated as repent in the New Testament is “metanoia.” Metanoia* means a new mind or a new way of thinking. Our behaviors change when our thinking changes. We only start to treat our neighbor better when we start first “thinking” that we should treat our neighbor better. All behavior starts with a thought.

A key Bible verse that will be our guide in this lesson, and through this course, is Romans 12:2. This is a helpful verse to commit to memory:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)*

The patterns of this world are all of those things that society holds as valuable. Money, power, fame, pleasure, comfort, selfishness, pride, and violence are all things that society, and our own desires, may convince us will bring us happiness. All of these things will eventually fail to bring us joy. Surrendering to God and allowing His Spirit to fill and direct us will bring us true fulfillment and joy.

To illustrate how our thinking impacts our behavior, let's look at an example from the apostle Paul. In his second letter to the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians), Paul refers to a previous letter he had written to them that had caused them sorrow. Paul acknowledged that his letter may have caused them sorrow, but that sorrow led them to repent:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:8-9)

Think about those things from your past that you were truly sorry for. You may have made a commitment to not do those same things in the future. Guilt, sorrow, or coming to understand the consequences of that behavior changed how you saw yourself and what type of person you wanted to become. Your behavior changed because you now had a new mind (or thinking) concerning those things.

1. When was there a time in your life when you changed a behavior because you had a new understanding about the impact or harm of that behavior?

The student should identify a specific behavior that they changed because of how it impacted someone else. If the student cannot identify a behavior, they should be challenged to examine their past more critically.

Not everyone's situation is the same, but the primary reason that many people end up in prison is bad thinking that leads to breaking the law. Look at this list of common thinking errors that can lead someone to commit a crime:

- I'm too smart to get caught.
- Why even try to do right? It's a waste of time.
- I'm not hurting anyone.
- It's not my fault. They had it coming to them.

You probably can think of many more examples of thinking that can lead to making bad choices. If bad thinking can lead to making bad choices, the opposite might also be true. Correct thinking can lead to making good choices.

2. As you look at your life, and some of the choices you made that led to bad outcomes, what were the thinking errors that contributed to making those choices?

Possible answers could include, but are not limited to, some of the following:

- **I won't get caught.**
- **Why even try to do right? It is a waste of time.**
- **I'm only hurting myself.**
- **It's not my fault. They deserved it.**
- **I'll just do it this one time.**
- **I can't let others disrespect me.**

The student answer should reflect an understanding that the thinking that led to the bad outcome was faulty.

The Bible sets a high bar or expectation for Christians. Look at the following verses, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16:

*The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for,
"Who has known the mind of the Lord*

*so as to instruct him?"
But we have the mind of Christ.*

This is an amazing and powerful truth, that we can have the mind of Christ. The Christian life isn't primarily about what we do, it is about who we are. It is about the transformation that happens in our life through the Holy Spirit. This transformation changes how we see the world and how we think.

You may have been in a course where you learned to identify what some people refer to as thinking errors. In this lesson we will look at some of those common thinking errors from a Biblical view.

Let's look at a passage from Paul's letter to the Philippian church to contrast thinking that conforms to the patterns of this world with thinking that conforms to the mind of Christ.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3-4)*

3. How would the world be different, or our own lives be different, if each of us were more concerned with looking out for the interests of others, rather than being more concerned with our own selfish ambitions?

The student's answer should reflect an awareness of the importance of having concern for others being more important than selfish behavior.

4. When was a time in your life where your selfishness negatively impacted people you cared about?

A student's answer should include a specific act of selfishness that negatively impacted their family or friends. Sample answers could be (but are not limited to):

- **I was selling drugs and didn't consider the impact coming to prison would have on my children.**
- **When I was deep in my addictive behavior, I didn't care about anyone else, including my family.**
- **My sexual addiction was out of control. I hurt the people I loved the most to satisfy my lust.**

As we mature in our faith, we will see that we increasingly begin thinking more about others and how we can care for their needs as well as our own.

The world has an expression: **"Look out for number one."** At some time, you may also have had this thinking. The "patterns of this world" try to convince us that others are out to get us and that we should think and do what it takes to make sure we "win" the game of life. One of the first changes that occurs when we start following Jesus is an understanding that surrendering

to what God wants for our lives brings us life, peace, joy, and contentment. Selfishness and selfish ambition lead to loneliness, harming the people in our lives that we care most about, and an empty feeling that we are unsatisfied.

If you're not for me, you are against me!

At some point in our lives, we may have had the thought that the whole world was against us. You may feel that way, being incarcerated and having limited freedom to do what you want. It is a harmful mindset to have, thinking that the whole world is against us. This thinking can lead to loneliness, depression, and the idea that, since the whole world is against me, the world is my enemy. If the world and the people in it are my enemies, I can do what I want to others. After all, they are my enemies.

5. Have you ever felt like the world was against you? If so, explain what that was like and how it impacted your behavior.

Believing that the world is against us is a common thinking error of someone who is anti-social. The student's answer should reflect an understanding of why this is a wrong perception. A student may simply answer, "No, I never felt that way." That is a valid, but less than insightful, answer. You can affirm their "no" answer but include: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

Feeling like the world is against you, or out to get you, can be a result of paranoia. Paranoia is an imagining that someone is trying to harm you when they really are not. Paranoia can be a result of drug use or the result of the extreme stress that comes with the dangers of criminal activity. You might say that there are people that really do want to harm you, and that could be true. If you have surrounded yourself with others who only look out for their own interests, or who you know are not trustworthy, you may have reason to be on guard. But let's contrast worldly thinking with a Biblical mindset. Look at this verse, again from Paul the apostle, in his letter to the church in Rome:

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

If we are Christians, we can live in the reality that God is really for us, regardless of what our situation may look like to us. The peace that comes with the knowledge that God is for us is life changing. As Paul says, "*If God is for us, who can be against us,*" tells us we can rest in God, knowing that He loves us without any strings attached.

Along with Romans 8:31, "*If God is for us, who can be against us,*" here is another passage of scripture that we might want to commit to memory from the Psalms:

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

*but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates* on his law day and night.*

The law of the Lord in Psalm 1 is what the early Israelites called the first 5 books of the Bible. The word “meditates” here is different from what some people may think of based on modern definitions. To think about what David meant by “meditates” when he wrote this psalm, think about someone giving you a piece of your favorite hard candy, like for instance, a favorite butterscotch. You place the candy in your mouth and slowly the flavors reach your taste buds. It melts slowly as you think about how good it tastes. Meditating on scripture is similar. You may read even one line or phrase from the Bible and think about it carefully. You consider everything that verse means or says to you in your current situation. Imagine the transforming impact that meditating on the truth that “God is for you” can have. Over the course of a day, you may say it again and again or think of the verse silently. You will start to consider what knowing that God is for you means to you when your situation may not look so good to you. This is what renewing of our minds looks like. Eventually, we will actually believe that God is for us.

6. Do you believe that God is for you? If so, why? If not, why not?

The student may answer yes or no. Neither is a wrong answer. Use their response to affirm the truth that God is indeed for them. They should include a “reason” for their belief. If they answer, “Yes, because the Bible says God is for me,” that is acceptable. But if they can point to a specific example from their own life that either confirmed God’s love for them or made them believe God was not for them, that will give you as the mentor more information to provide helpful feedback to the student.

I either win or lose. There is no middle ground.

Over the course of our lives, some of us take on a win/lose attitude or way of thinking. By this we mean that, for these people, there are always only two options. In every situation they can either win or they will lose. People that have issues with trying to control others typically have this type of thinking. If we think we can only win or lose in every situation, we will always have to win. It might be winning an argument. It might be taking advantage of others before they can take advantage of us. It might cause us to be the loudest, the angriest, or even the sneakiest. It will cause us to do anything we can possibly do to not lose in every situation.

This win/lose thinking often begins early in life. Some of us grew up in homes where our parents modeled a win/lose attitude that was demonstrated in loud arguing, threat of physical violence, or other forms of abuse. We may have had to fight our own brothers and sisters for our position in the family, or even for food. Win/lose thinking may have worked for us in those situations to protect ourselves. But this way of thinking is destructive and not what God wants for us.

7. Think of a time where you said or did something that you later came to regret because you were determined to “not lose.” What would you have done differently if you could go back in time to do it over?

A common student answer might be related to an argument or physical altercation that they came to later regret because of the consequences. The student's answer should include a reasonable, more thoughtful or alternate way they could have responded in that situation.

Look at the following verses that describe a way of thinking that reflects the mind of Christ, rather than the patterns of the world. Answer the questions that follow each verse.

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

8. What is a way that you can love and honor someone when you have a disagreement with them or are angry with them?

Possible answers include (but are not limited to):

- **Apologize**
- **Try to see the situation from their perspective.**
- **Do not overreact or let your anger get out of control.**
- **Pray for them.**
- **Ask God to help you have a good heart regarding the disagreement.**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

9. Why do you think Christians, knowing that God has forgiven them, sometimes have a difficult time forgiving others?

Possible answers include, but are not limited to:

- **People's behavior towards us can be very hurtful.**
- **We are human and forgiving others is not always easy.**
- **When we are in our feelings, we can easily lose sight of the grace and forgiveness God gave us.**
- **We don't fully understand how our unforgiveness of others hurts us.**

My troubles are because of other people, not because of my actions.

We might look back at our lives and see that negative things that we had no control of have affected us. We may have been abused, neglected, or made to feel that we were worthless in the environment we grew up in. These "wounds" are very real and have served to shape our image of ourselves. We will need God's grace and love to find healing from these wounds. Some people do find healing, while others go to the grave unable to find freedom from the hurts of the past. Not only does God want to heal our hurts, more importantly, He loves us and wants us to be free to experience His love to the fullest.

While we cannot change the things that happened to us in the past, we can absolutely change our futures. We begin to do this as we forgive those who have hurt us, and more importantly, when we begin taking responsibility for our own actions.

Here is an important passage of Scripture that sums up the responsibility we have for the things we say and do:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:7-9)

The concept of sowing and reaping are probably familiar to you from your previous study of the Bible. Sowing and reaping are farming terms. A farmer sows when they plant seeds, fertilize the soil, and provide water for their crops. Reaping is the end result, when they harvest or pick their crops. Bad seeds, poor-quality soil, or lack of water will produce a poor-quality harvest.

10. What are things you can do in your life now to sow good seed, or in other words, actions you can take that can provide a good result or outcome in your personal and spiritual life? List at least 3.

Possible answers include (but are not limited to):

- **Pray.**
- **Serve others.**
- **Study God's Word.**
- **Surround ourselves with Christians and positive people.**
- **Forgive others.**
- **Repent of sin when we identify it in our lives.**
- **Trust God in difficult times.**

Remember, you have the ability to start sowing good seeds in your life today regardless of what your past has been. Forgiving others, adding spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study, making and pursuing positive goals, and repairing broken relationships are all ways to “plant good seed” that will produce a good result in your life.

Action Step

Read Psalm 139 in its entirety. In this Psalm, David asks God to search his heart. As you read, pray and ask God to search your heart to reveal any areas of your life where He wants you to repent or any thoughts or thinking patterns that are not consistent with His truth.

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

LESSON 2: A New Attitude

Lesson Focus:

Our attitudes reflect our thoughts, feelings, and character

In lesson 1 we looked at how our thinking impacts our behavior. Our thinking is also closely tied to our attitudes.* If we think that the whole world is against us, we will form attitudes about people. Attitudes are held in our hearts. We might not always act based on our attitudes, but a bad attitude is a lens that we will look through when we make decisions or judgements. Likewise, a positive attitude helps us see the world and ourselves in a more productive way. When we have a positive attitude, our relationships with others will be better. We will enjoy our lives more and desire to set healthy goals when we approach each day with a positive attitude.

Guard Your Heart

Proverbs 4:23 says the following:

*Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.*

As Christians, we have no higher responsibility than to maintain a good heart. Everything we think, say, and do comes from our heart. The writer of Proverbs says that out of the heart “spring the issues of life.”

1. Rewrite the above verse, Proverbs 4:23, in your own words as if you were explaining its meaning to someone who asks what it means.

Sample Answer:

“I need to work on having a good heart and attitude, because that affects all of the things I say and do.”

The apostle Paul wrote the following to the Christians at the church of Colossae.* We **must** rid ourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying. These are sins and attitudes that live in our hearts.

But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:8-10)

We might have thoughts that others have wronged us or disrespected us. Those thoughts can then cause us to take on an attitude of anger in our hearts. We may not lash out in anger towards the people that wronged us, but we may lash out at others, because that anger is alive and well in our hearts. We may turn our anger inward towards ourselves. Anger turned inward can contribute to depression. It will certainly impact many areas of our lives.

Anger that we hold onto has many negative health consequences.* Unresolved anger can impact our immune system* and lead to a variety of health problems. Stress, related to anger, can cause cardiac (heart) health problems.

2. How has anger negatively impacted your life or the life of someone you know?

No one is immune from having experienced anger that has impacted them. The student's answer should reflect an awareness of how anger can be harmful to us and others.

Character

The Oxford Dictionary defines character as “the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.” A.W. Tozer was an important Christian author and pastor of the 20th Century. He described character as “the excellence of moral beings.”

Our character reflects the condition of our hearts. Another word for positive character traits is **virtues**. Virtue is *behavior showing high moral standards*.

3. Take some time to think and pray thoughtfully about your personal character. In the list that follows, mark each character trait with either S, N, or W. (**S** = one of your strengths, **N** = needs work, **W** = one of your weaknesses)

- _____ **honest**: truthful with yourself and others
- _____ **ethical**: morally good or correct
- _____ **charitable**: helps those in need
- _____ **integrity**: does the right thing even when no one sees
- _____ **wise**: shows good judgement
- _____ **humble**: a modest, accurate estimate of one's importance
- _____ **respectful**: treats others with respect
- _____ **compassionate**: shows concern for others
- _____ **kind**: doesn't cause harm to others
- _____ **responsible**: others can depend on you
- _____ **patient**: accepts delays without getting annoyed
- _____ **merciful**: able to forgive others

Use the student's responses to better understand your student. You can provide some simple feedback on one or more of their answers in the list.

4. After completing the above checklist, what stood out to you as areas to focus on in your personal and spiritual growth? Explain why those character traits are most important for you to work on.

The student should have been able to identify some areas of their life they want to focus on for improvement. The student's answer will help you as a mentor better understand your student.

Having an Attitude Problem

Have you ever heard somebody say about someone that they have an attitude problem? Having an attitude problem is usually reflected in our being unfriendly or uncooperative. Having a negative attitude about others, yourself, or life in general is a good indication of an attitude problem or a heart in need of repentance.

A bad attitude will destroy a person's ability to be happy. If we are bitter, or feel that nobody cares about us, we build a wall to keep others away. This wall will chase people away from us who could become positive, healthy friends. Feelings of loneliness can be related to chasing people away from us with our negative attitudes.

One good indication that we may have an attitude problem is that others have told us we have an attitude problem. Sometimes others can see things in us that we can't see ourselves.

5. In the following list, put a check mark next to those items that you think may be problem areas in your life.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Uncooperative | ☐ Feeling like a "victim" |
| ☐ Unreasonable expectations of others | ☐ Negative moods |
| ☐ Others are "the enemy" or "the competition" | ☐ Stubbornness |
| ☐ Inability to take criticism | ☐ Arrogance (an exaggerated sense of our own importance) |
| ☐ Strongly opinionated | ☐ Inability to be happy for the success of others |
| ☐ Inflexible | ☐ Disrespectful to others |
| ☐ Inability to apologize when we have wronged someone | ☐ Demanding respect from others |
| ☐ Believing we are better than others | |

The student should be able to identify one or more problem areas in their life.

6. As you look again at those items in question 5 that you put a check mark next to, what item(s) stand out to you as attitudes you need to change? Explain your answer.

The student should provide an explanation of why a particular attitude in their life should be a focus for growth.

Attitude and a “Right Heart” Are Choices We Make

Having a strong relationship with God will be visible in having a “good heart” and positive attitude. But God does not force us to have a good attitude. We choose each day what negative or positive attitudes and thoughts we want to hold onto. The apostle Paul wrote that when our hearts are blameless and pure, we will shine like the stars in a world that is full of evil.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. (Philippians 2:14-15)

7. Think of a person you know that seems to be happy and has a “good heart” or positive attitude towards life. What stands out to you as to how this choice they make improves their life?

The student is being challenged to consider how choosing to have a positive view of life improves their motivations and relationships. By looking at the fruit of a positive attitude in the lives of others, the student should make connections about how a more positive outlook could impact their own life. Students may say:

- **They don’t seem to have as much drama in their lives as others.**
- **They are always working towards positive goals they have set.**
- **They seem to have more friends and positive work relationships.**
- **They seem to have less worry and stress.**

It’s Not Easy

While having a positive attitude is a choice, that does not mean that it is easy to change our negative attitudes. Our attitudes develop over time through our experiences and the way we interpret the interactions we have had with other people. Many people grow up in homes where there is conflict and bad attitudes that have made an impact on them. Most of us have been legitimately hurt by the words and actions of others. Our attitudes about the world are often deeply rooted in our hearts.

One researcher reported that “half, if not more, of the individuals entering prison or jail are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder” – PTSD (Widra, 2020). PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by a traumatic event. Symptoms can include flashbacks, nightmares, and anxiety. Traumatic events can be something we experience or witness that is terrifying or dangerous. PTSD is a condition that can require professional counseling to overcome. The experience of arrest, court, conviction, and incarceration are, themselves, traumatic.

8. In your life, have you experienced violence or trauma that you suspect may have negatively impacted your life?

_____ Yes _____ No. If yes, how has it influenced the way you look at life, others, or your future?

Especially among men and women in prison, the experience of violence and trauma are very common. They can answer “no”; it is not a wrong answer. It can be difficult for people to examine how they have been hurt or experienced trauma. If they answer “yes,” you can use their full answer to provide encouragement or share the love of God.

Tending the Garden of Your Heart

Our hearts are the places where we store our negative and positive attitudes. For Christians, it is also where the Holy Spirit takes residence. Just like Adam and Eve, we have been given gardens to take care of.

The Parable of the Sower

Have you ever grown a garden? Think about what it took to prepare the soil before you put the seeds in the ground. You first broke up the soil with a shovel or hoe. You took out the weeds, making sure the roots were out of the soil. You probably tried to get the rocks out of the garden. You might have added mulch or fertilizer to have soil that would be healthy and full of the nutrients your plants needed to grow strong. Then you planted (sowed) the seeds carefully to be sure that each seed had room to grow properly. Then as you waited for your garden to grow to maturity, you watered the soil and pulled out any weeds that grew around your plants.

Now, look at your heart as a garden. Preparing the soil of your heart, to experience the fullness of God’s presence in your life, is very similar to the process of tending a garden. In fact, Jesus used this exact example to teach the people about having a heart that is able to receive “the Word of God.”

Read **Matthew 13:1-23**.

Jesus’ disciples, after hearing Him tell this parable, asked Jesus why He spoke to the people using stories that illustrate a truth rather than just speaking to them plainly. Jesus’ response was:

“Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

Jesus then went on to explain to His disciples the meaning of the parable, saying:

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

If you can put yourself in this parable, thinking about the soil as your heart, consider the following:

The seed sown on the path can represent areas of our lives that we are unaware are a problem or are not ready to confront. The rocks could be unforgiveness, resentment, a poor self-image, or lack of faith that prevent God's Word from taking root in our hearts. The thorns are those things that are solidly imbedded in our hearts like anger, selfishness, hatred, addiction, or another life-controlling habit that can easily prevent God's Word from penetrating through to our hearts.

9. The condition of my heart is generally (check one):

- ☐ Rocky – I easily fall away from God.
- ☐ Thorny – Life chokes out my joy and love of God.
- ☐ Good – I am able to receive and enjoy God's Word.

There is no correct answer to this question.

10. Explain why you answered the question above as you did.

The student's answer here will provide a window into the student's thinking and struggles.

Our Gardening Tools

If we are willing to seriously improve the attitudes of our hearts, God has left us with tools to do that.

Prayer: Ask God for a new heart

Repentance: A willingness to confront our sins

Forgiveness: A willingness to forgive others

Serving: Moving away from thinking of our desires only

Fellowship: Having others that encourage us to change

Gratefulness: Having a grateful heart for what God has done

Fruit of the Spirit: God's gift as we submit to Him (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Word of God: The Bible shapes our thinking and attitudes

Worship: Time spent with God acknowledging His goodness

Pruning: Regularly examining ourselves and our attitudes

Love: A choice we make to love people (God chooses to love us)

It is not enough to know that God has given us tools to tend the gardens of our hearts. We have to use the tools he gives us. A shovel won't be helpful to a gardener until they pick it up and dig.

In his New Testament letter, James wrote:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. (James 1:22-24)

We are going to make an action plan to use the tools God has given us today, this week, and the weeks ahead. Answer each of the following with something you will do to put action to your faith.

11. **Prayer:** Write a short prayer asking God for a good heart and godly attitude towards others:

There are no requirements for the student's prayer to be a certain length. Affirm their willingness to pray and let them know you will also be praying for them.

12. **Repentance:** What are some attitudes that you need to repent of? In prayer make a confession to God and request for forgiveness and a willingness to change:

Everyone can find attitudes that they have that are not healthy or pleasing to God. Provide the student here with encouragement and your own life experience changing your attitudes.

13. **Forgiveness:** Who is someone that you have refused to forgive for something they did?

There is not a right answer, and the student may not want to provide a name or details. That is perfectly okay. If we are honest, most of us can think of someone that harmed us that we haven't fully forgiven.

14. **Serving:** This week I am going to serve others by doing the following:

The student should provide a concrete example of how they will intentionally serve others in the coming week.

15. **Gratefulness:** Three things I am grateful to God for today are:

Being grateful is an important part of our spiritual health. The student should be able to identify three things for which they are grateful.

16. **Fruit of the Spirit:** Read Galatians 5:22-23. From the list of fruit of the Spirit in this verse, this week I am asking God for more of which three? (Pray and ask for more of this fruit.)

The student should list at least three from Paul's list in Galatians 5 that they are making a commitment to pray about.

17. **The Word of God:** Write out a verse or verses from the Bible that, this week, God has used to remind you of something He wants you to do:

The student can choose any verse that the reminds them of something God wants them to do or an area of their life that needs attention.

18. **Worship:** This week I spent time worshipping God through _____ (attending a worship service; spending quiet time listening to worship music; writing a poem, song, or letter to God acknowledging His goodness; other). Explain your time of worship:

The student can describe what they did as part of their worship that week. Use their answer as an opportunity to affirm the importance of worship.

19. **Pruning:** Pray the prayer that David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24:

*"Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."*

What came to mind as a sin you may have avoided as you prayed this prayer?

The student's answer may provide insight into their current spiritual health or struggle.

20. **Love:** Who is someone in your life you have not loved well recently? What will you do this week to love them the way God loves you?

The student's answer should reflect a specific act of love that they are committing to doing for someone.

In this lesson we examined the attitudes that we have in our hearts, positive and negative. Once again, there is no more important task for a Christian than having a right heart towards God, others, and ourselves. Everything we think, say, and do is strongly influenced by the condition of our hearts. As Joshua said: *"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* (Joshua 24:15)

Action Step

Choose two of the verses from this lesson to write down on note cards and memorize them in the coming days and weeks.

LESSON 3: The Things We Do

Lesson Focus:

The thinking, attitude, actions connection

Our thinking forms our attitudes.* Our thinking and attitudes fuel our actions. It is impossible to separate the three. Our faith in God grows as our thinking and attitudes begin to line up with what the Word of God teaches us. The Holy Spirit plays a big part in that process. Having saving grace in Jesus is a gift from God. It is God that plants faith in our hearts. Then, we need to tend the gardens of our hearts to help that gift of faith grow and mature.

Jesus said,

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32)*

1. Give an example of how you have seen your faith in God grow over time (more trust in God, more faith that God loves you and has forgiven you, more love for others, faith that God desires a good future for you, other). Explain:

Hopefully, your student is experiencing growth in their faith. Affirm the student's answer and provide encouragement for their growth. If they write that they are not growing in their faith, look at their explanation and provide some ways that they may begin experiencing growth.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of heaven, planted in our hearts, is like a small mustard seed that grows within us. Over time, it will become like a large tree. Now, think again about the "Parable of the Sower" from the previous lesson. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus compared seeds planted on different soils. As we prepare the soil of our hearts to receive God's presence and Spirit more and more, our faith will grow and blossom into a faith that is strong and able to endure trials and believe God for good things.

2. In the Parable of the Sower,* Jesus explained that the seed planted among the thorns did not bear fruit. The thorns, Jesus taught, are the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. What are some of the worries in your own life that make it difficult for your faith to grow?

There is much that can potentially be worrisome for your student, especially living in the prison environment. Provide the student feedback and possibly a lesson you learned in your own life that helped you trust in God and worry less.

Faith Without Works is Dead

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. (James 2:14-19)

Some Christian scholars through the centuries have struggled with these verses from James' letter. They believe that James is emphasizing "good works" as the way to build faith. Instead, James is saying that if we have faith, that faith will be visible in the way we conduct our lives. When we come to faith in Jesus, we should see changes in our attitudes, speech, and actions. Of course, some of those changes will happen slowly over time. Some behaviors may take years to change. But when we come to faith, we should have more joy, less hatred, and less confusion in our hearts and minds. These changes will be visible in the way we start treating others. This is what James means when he says our faith will be visible in what we do. He is not saying that God is keeping a score card and giving us grace and faith as a result of our good deeds. Remember, faith "IS" a gift of God.

3. When you first asked Jesus into your heart and came to faith, what were some of the behaviors that changed quickly in your life?

If your student has embraced faith in Jesus, they should be able to point to some behaviors that changed quickly at conversion. It is okay if your student says they have not yet come to faith. If they have not yet become a Christian, encourage and pray for them. God has perfect timing. There is no need to pressure them.

4. What are some behaviors (or sins) that have been harder to see changes in?

Every one of us struggles still with some sin in their life. Use the student's answer to encourage them, provide some Bible verses that may be helpful, or spiritual advice to experience freedom.

5. What behaviors in your life would the people you live with be able to see that demonstrate that you have faith in God?

James wrote that his faith could be seen in the way he lived his life. Encourage the student as they identify areas of their life that demonstrate growth.

Red Flags

Red flags are used to signal danger. Red flags are placed at beaches where the water conditions are dangerous. They are used in auto races when the condition of the track is unsafe. They are also used in areas where there is a high danger of wildfires. In our own lives, red flags are signals that we need to be alert and careful. A red flag in our lives could be that we are spending too much time with people that hinder our spiritual growth. Other red flags might be that we have gotten lazy in our worship, study of God's Word, or prayer life. Being too busy can also be a red flag. Some people, when they leave prison or jail, try to make up for lost time by working two jobs. They become so busy that they stop going to church or spending time in fellowship with other believers.

Jesus said:

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (Luke 6:45)

The things that come out of our mouths are important red flags that our hearts might need attention. God is not keeping a count of how many swear words we say. But as we look at the words we speak, do we see sarcastic, untrue, hurtful, critical, or crude words? We need to examine what words come out of our mouths. They are important red flags that point to things that Jesus said are "stored up in our hearts." Are our words encouraging to others, full of grace and mercy, kind and glorifying* to God? This is an indication of the "good things" stored up in our hearts.

6. Think about the words you speak. Do they point to "good things" or things that might be red flags of some negative thoughts and attitudes? Explain:

The words that come out of our mouths indicate the things in our hearts. The student here is asked to reflect on their language and what the things they say reflect about their spiritual life.

7. Take a few minutes now to be quiet and ask God to show you other things in your life that might be red flags that something needs your attention. List some of the red flags that you identified here.

The student should be able to identify some things in their reflection time that could indicate something in their life that needs to be attended to and prayed about. The student here is giving you another glimpse of their spiritual life so you can better know them.

Spiritual Exercise

We might think of spiritual exercises as prayer, fasting, quiet time with God, worship, or Bible study. These are all important spiritual exercises. Like physical exercise that strengthens our body, spiritual exercise strengthens our faith. Think of the amount of exercise and practice that goes into the training of an elite athlete. An elite athlete doesn't wake up every morning wanting

to run 5 miles, lift weights, or practice their sport. However, their desire to improve in their sport is stronger than the voice that tells them to go back to sleep and take it easy.

Some Christians have a habit of waking early each morning to spend time with God in prayer or with devotional reading. These people will probably say that it is the most important part of their day, but it took a long time to create the habit.

8. Have you ever tried to keep a set time or habit for spending time with God? Were you unsuccessful or successful in your efforts? Explain:

It isn't easy to develop new, consistent, healthy spiritual practices. Offer the student advice from your own life about developing healthy spiritual habits.

How Our Brains Work

Neurons are the microscopic nerve cells that are the building blocks of the human nervous system and brain. The gaps between these microscopic neurons are the pathway for nerve impulses and our thinking. The human brain has about 100 billion neurons. When we exercise certain parts of the brain, these pathways are strengthened. The parts of the brain that we do not exercise grow weaker.

Habits take time to build. If you were to ask someone you know who is very consistent in their spiritual exercise what their secret to success was, they might say that, "at first it was difficult, but over time it become a habit that became natural and much easier." They strengthened and retrained the neuropathways of their brain to create a habit that is hard to break.

In a support group, like Alcoholics Anonymous, you might hear the expressions "fake it till you make it" or "your head and heart will follow your feet." What they mean is, at first, you may not want to attend meetings or call a sponsor or support person when you are struggling. That is okay and natural but do it anyway. You are retraining your brain, creating neuropathways in your brain that are forming new habits. Many people that have been sober for decades still attend meetings and support groups weekly or more often.

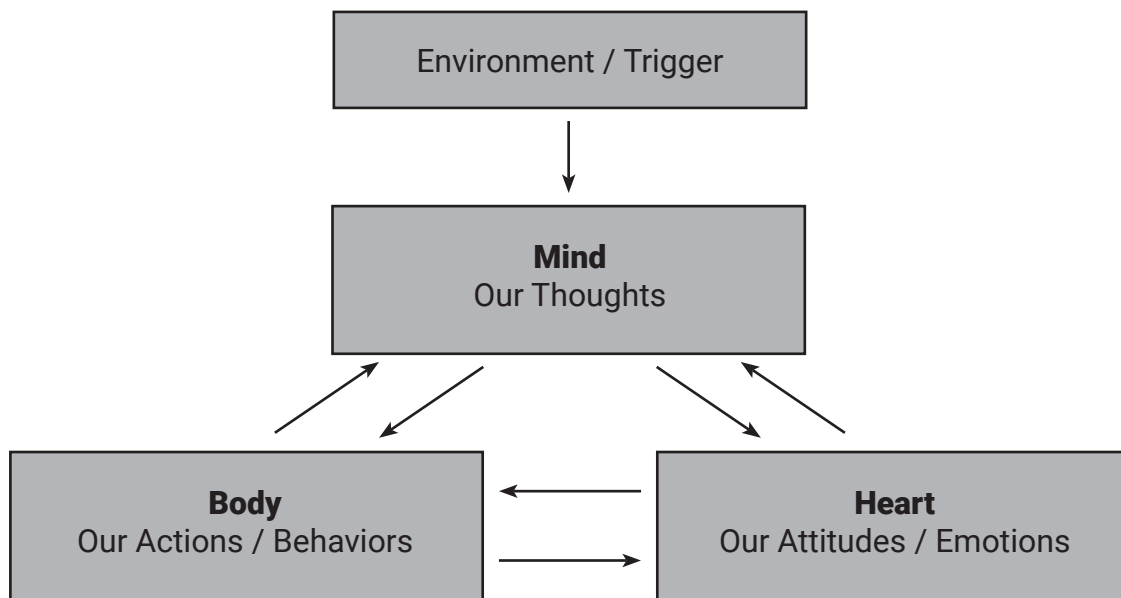
9. Think of a new, healthy spiritual habit that you want to create in your life. What is the new habit and how do you plan on creating that habit? (For example: I want to get up at 5AM each morning to spend 10 minutes with God in prayer to start my day. I will start going to sleep earlier, set my alarm for 5AM, put a check mark on a calendar each day that I do this behavior, and will commit to doing this for 1 to 2 weeks.)

Habit: _____

What will I do to make myself do this even when I may not feel like it?

The student should be specific about the new spiritual habit they are going to try to develop and how they will be consistent even when they don't feel like it.

The connection between our minds, our hearts, and our bodies cannot be separated. You may have learned about these connections, using different language in a course or program you have been part of. The connection between the mind, heart, and body is the way our thinking, attitudes, and behavior interact with each other.



Look closely at the above diagram. It illustrates the interaction between our minds, hearts, and bodies. First, we find ourselves in an environment that may trigger our thinking. Maybe in that environment we encounter someone that has a bad attitude. This can trigger a thought, such as, “This person is disrespecting me,” or “This person has a problem with me.” Our thoughts about this person might lead to a bad **attitude** in our **hearts** about them. It might ruin our whole day if we allow it to. We may react with an **action** like confronting them or getting into a fight. Our thinking impacts both our actions and our attitudes (body and heart).

Now, when we have a bad attitude about them, our brains may go into overdrive. We may spend hours thinking about that person and how we can get back at them. With this attitude in our hearts, it can lead to further actions against them. We may even develop an attitude about others, thinking, “If they have a problem with me, maybe other people do too.” Or we might get into a confrontation* with someone else that day because we are in a bad mood. That confrontation then leads to more negative thoughts about others or bad attitudes that harm all of our interactions with people that day.

Let’s look at how these interactions between our thinking, attitudes, and actions have been demonstrated in our lives.

10. Think of a situation that you recently had that led to negative consequences. What was the **environment** you were in? (For example: at work Thursday with someone that is not easy to like.)

The student is being asked to identify a specific situation they encountered. Provide the student with feedback on their answer.

11. What **thoughts** entered your thinking about that person?

This may not be an easy question for some students but will help them think about how they could have responded differently.

12. What were the negative **attitudes** that resulted from your thoughts about this person (grumpy, hurt, angry, embarrassed, revengeful)?

Our thoughts feed the attitudes that we hold on to. Provide the student with feedback on their answer.

13. What **actions** resulting from your thinking and attitudes did you take against that person or someone else that happened to cross your path (swearing, short temper, getting depressed, negative confrontation)?

The student is being asked how having a bad attitude can impact their emotions, thinking, and behavior. The question is specific to the example the student offered in questions 11 and 12.

As you look at the situation you outlined, can you see how our thinking attitudes and actions work together?

Here is another example of this interaction of thinking, attitude, and action for someone that has an addiction issue.

Environment: Driving home from work after a very hard day. They drive by a nightclub that used to be a favorite hang-out.

Thinking: "I sure had some good time there." "I need to be around people that I like." "I deserve to unwind a bit."

Attitudes: "I sure miss the old life sometimes." "I really need a drink." "I'm sick of the garbage I have to put up with." "I don't care!"

Behavior: "Turn the car around and go to the club." "Have a drink, then a second and a third." "Dance with someone attractive." Get drunk and smoke some weed with my old friends." "Call in sick to work the next day."

Here is an alternate way to deal with this same situation:

Environment: Driving home from work after a very hard day. They drive by a nightclub that used to be a favorite hang-out.

Thinking: "I am so glad that God has taken the chaos of my old life away." "It is so good to have a stable job and good relationships with my spouse and children."

Attitudes: “Gratefulness to God.” “Love for family.” “Satisfaction for a better life from sobriety and a relationship with God.”

Behavior: Drive home, have a good meal, visit with my spouse to talk about our day, get to bed at a good time. Go to work the next day determined to have a good attitude and better day.

In Lesson One of this study, we looked at a Greek word, metanoia, translated in the New Testament as Repentance. Repentance is certainly a change in behavior, but Jesus taught that repentance starts in our thinking. Metanoia is literally, “a new mind.” Jesus taught this interaction between our minds, hearts, and bodies (actions).

Here is an important verse from Jesus’ teaching that illustrates the importance of our thoughts and how they impact our attitudes and actions:

Jesus taught:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
(Matthew 5:27-28)*

We think of adultery as the act of cheating on our spouses. Jesus said that the sin of adultery goes much deeper. The sin has already been committed once we have a lustful thought about someone and let that lust live in our hearts. Jesus was teaching us that the sin begins in our minds and hearts even before we act. That is why repentance has to start in our thought lives, “metanoia.” It doesn’t mean that we will never have a lustful thought, but these thoughts are “red flags” that demand immediate repentance before they take root in our hearts. Once they are alive in our hearts, we will eventually act out in some way. Maybe not by cheating on our spouses, but by, for instance, looking at pornography. We then start to build neuropathways in our brains that lead to behaviors we have difficulty controlling.

The teaching of Jesus in the Matthew 5:27-28 verses are difficult teachings. It may sound simple, but it takes commitment and diligence, and most importantly the Holy Spirit’s help, to tend the garden of our hearts.

14. Read Matthew 5:27-28 again, slowly, and think about the words of Jesus. Is this teaching too difficult? Does it make sense to you? Is it realistic? Is repentance in your thought life, attitudes, and actions something to which you are committed? Write out your thoughts here about these two verses:

This exercise is designed to help the student be self-reflective and more aware of how sin begins in our hearts long before we act out. This is not an easy concept, but it is important for the student to understand the importance of developing spiritual practices to cultivate a good heart. Provide feedback and encouragement to the student.

In these first three lessons, we looked closely at our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. In the next lesson we will look more closely at the environment or situations we place ourselves in that can

trigger negative thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We will look most closely at our associations,* the people we spend our time with. In young people, spending time with friends that engage in criminal and risky behavior is the best predictor of who will engage in criminal activity (Fergusson DM, et al. 2002). When we are released from jail or prison, if we spend our time with others that are engaged in harmful or criminal behavior, we greatly increase our chances of rearrest and re-incarceration.

Action Step

For two weeks, keep a journal of your actions that are negative or not glorifying to God. For each action you write down, include the thinking and attitudes that might have led to that action. Also, list any negative consequences of that action you observed in yourself.

LESSON 4: Our Friends, Family, and Associates

Lesson Focus:

The influence of others

*“Walk with the wise and become wise,
for a companion of fools suffers harm.”
(Proverbs 13:20)*

There is no question that the people in our lives have had an influence* on us. We learned our most basic ideas about life, people, and ourselves from our families of origin (or those who raised us). Parents who viewed the world as harsh, unfair, or dangerous may have caused us to see the world the same way. If we were raised in a home where we were loved, cared for, and encouraged to develop our gifts and talents, we will more likely have positive views about our lives.

Staying out of jail or prison when we are released will be challenging if we surround ourselves with people who have a negative influence on us. Our associations, the people we spend our time with, have a significant impact on our thinking, attitudes, and behavior. If we spend time with people who engage in illegal behavior, our chances of rearrest are extremely high.

Here are some important Bible verses about the company we keep.

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” (1 Corinthians 15:33)

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.
(Psalm 1:1-3)*

Our “Social Setting”

The people we surround ourselves with are part of our “social setting.”* We can’t choose whom we are surrounded by in jail or prison. The social setting can be negative. We are in a place where there is noise, angry or irritating people, bad attitudes, and a lack of control over the choices we can make. Even if we don’t want to, we change our thinking and behavior to adapt to our environment. At the local Walmart, when someone accidentally bumps into us, a simple apology is all it takes to maintain a pleasant attitude. In the prison chow hall, it may not be so simple.

1. Describe your social setting at the facility where you currently reside. Think specifically about the challenges associated with the people you live around and have to interact with.

The social setting the student lives in at their facility includes the people and culture of the environment. The question asks the student to identify challenges that are inherent in the environment they live in at their facility. Possible answers include, but are not limited to, some of the following examples:

- **Hectic and noisy**
- **Dangerous culture that requires hyper vigilance**
- **Facility staff that do not treat us with respect**
- **Isolated from the people I most care about**
- **People that are trying to take advantage of others or looking for weaknesses to exploit**
- **Lack of freedom to make choices**

Family and Friends

We love our family and friends and miss them dearly. God has given us a command to honor our parents and take care of our family commitments.* But how do we do that without opening ourselves up to their potential negative influence?

In chapter 9 of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has conversations with two men who said they wanted to follow Jesus. Jesus' comments to the men may seem harsh.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

Both men wanted to do what would seem like good things, burying a father and saying goodbye to family. Jesus was not saying these were not good things. He was saying to follow Him. The Kingdom of God had to be the most important thing for their lives. He was challenging their commitment and motivation.

Our families and friends are not unimportant, but our commitment to God must be our first commitment.

2. Think of some things in your life that might be important to you but have the potential to get in the way of following Jesus. List some of those here (money, a girlfriend or boyfriend, your physical appearance, etc.):

The student should be able to identify things in their life that distract them from their

relationship with God. Give the student feedback and advice on making their spiritual life their number one priority.

Not only do we love our family and friends, but they love us as well. That is why we need to be wise about how we allow them to influence us. Do our family members or friends abuse alcohol or drugs? If so, they might try to make us think that, because we don't do those things any longer, we are judging them. They may try to make us feel guilty about not joining in with them. They may be critical of our relationships with God, reminding us that they know us well enough that it will only be a matter of time before we abandon our new Christian faith.

When your family and friends see your commitment to God and new life, they may be offended because of their own sin.

3. Have your friends and family been supportive of the changes you are making in your life? Have they tried to discourage you from making positive changes? Explain:

Our family and friends may not support our commitments to our Christian faith and the positive changes we are trying to make. When they are not supportive, it can endanger our walks with Christ. Provide the student with ways they can set boundaries with those friends and family members that are not supportive.

Adders, Subtractors, Multipliers, and Dividers

In her book, *The Power of People: Four Kinds of People that Can Change Your Life*, Dr. Verna Cornelia Price describes four types of people that have an impact on our lives. Everyone we associate with falls into one of four categories: Adders, Subtractors, Multipliers, or Dividers. (We recommend that you try to locate her book in your facility library.)

In short, here are simple definitions of each of the four types of people in our lives.

Adders: These are people that make us better. They are people in our lives that encourage us, give us wise advice and have a positive influence on our thinking, attitudes, and behaviors.

Subtractors: These are people who have a negative impact on the way we see ourselves and the world. Their bad attitudes, thinking errors, and influence on us can bring discouragement and lead us to turn back to those behaviors that led to our incarceration.

Multipliers: These are people that have the ability to impact us in ways that will lead us to accomplish great things. A mentor can be one of these people. Multipliers are wise guides that see things in us that we can't even see in ourselves. They might see abilities or potential in us and speak powerful words that can change the courses of our lives. Multipliers don't have to be people that we know personally, but they can be. A multiplier can be someone from the past that we read about in a biography about their life. Here are three suggested inspiring biographies that may be in your library:

Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela
The Story of My Life by Helen Keller
William Wilberforce: A Hero for Humanity by Kevin Belmonte

Dividers: Simply put, dividers are people that live in a state of mental and emotional chaos. Dividers are the most dangerous of the four types of people. Dividers break up families and often ruin the lives of the people with whom they come in contact.

Each of us can probably think of people in our lives that have, or still do, fit into each of the above four types of influencers. Don't write down the names of those people here but think of specific people that you know that have been either an adder, subtractor, multiplier, or divider in your life.

4. **Person 1: The Adder** – The attitudes, wisdom, and influence of this person made me a better person. Describe how they influenced you positively and made you a better person:
The student should identify someone in their life that adds a positive influence on their personal or spiritual health. Provide the student with affirmation or feedback.
5. **Person 2: The Subtractor** – The attitudes, thinking, or behavior of this person had a negative influence on me. Describe how they influenced you negatively or led you to unhealthy thinking or behavior:

The student should identify someone in their life who is or has been a negative influence on their personal or spiritual health. Provide the student with affirmation or feedback.

6. **Person 3: The Multiplier** – This person was a major influence on the course of my life and changed how I see the world or myself. (This could be an historical person you have read about who influenced you.) This person helped me change my life in the following ways:

The student may or may not have, or had, people in their lives that provide wisdom and encouragement to help them realize the potential God has for them. If they can't identify someone, encourage them to look at people in the Bible that they want to emulate.

7. **Person 4: The Divider** – I now see how this person influenced my life in a way that led to addictive, criminal, or destructive behavior. This is a person I know I need to cut out of my life because:

Dividers are people that bring chaos and destruction to our lives. The dividers are people that we need to cut out of our lives. Having them in our lives jeopardizes our walks with God and can lead to coming back to prison after being released. Provide the student with feedback.

Remember 1 Peter 5:8:

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Our enemy, the devil, is smart and crafty. When we are seeking God in our lives, Satan will surround us with people that will try to cause us to stumble and abandon our commitment to God. Often, he will use the people that are closest to us, like friends and family. We love and trust these people and let our guards down.

8. Describe a time when someone close to you distracted you from your walk with God:

This may seem like a redundant question in light of the previous questions but challenges the student to look for people in their life that may not be an existential threat to their growth but provide enough distraction to make them lose their focus.

The People We Work With

Especially in prison or jail, we usually will not be able to choose the people who surround us. We might have a negative roommate that creates drama. At almost every job we have ever had, we can think of someone we worked with that could put us in a bad mood or who was a bad influence on us.

Our work environment can be challenging. We work with people that we have not necessarily chosen to work with. Each employee brings their attitude, work ethic, and integrity to work with them.

Someone we work with may be stealing from the employer. We don't want to be a snitch, so we may not say anything. But the employee has put us in a bad position and maybe at risk of getting blamed for a theft. Some of the people we work with will be hard and conscientious workers. Others will slack off and leave us with extra work. Every employee brings a good or bad attitude to the workplace. Someone with a bad attitude can make our lives miserable.

9. What type of people are the most difficult for you to work with? Why?

Provide the student with lessons you have learned from your own life that helped you deal with difficult coworkers.

We will be unhappy when we learn that we can't change the people around us. What we do have power over is our own thinking, attitude, and behavior. If we come to work each day with a positive attitude and a willingness to help create a work environment where people get along and work productively together, we will find that we can influence others and will be happier ourselves.

Treating your coworkers with fairness, respect, and kindness will help create positive work relationships. Leading by setting a good example for others is more influential than we may think.

One of our most important work relationships is with our bosses or supervisors. Working hard, being respectful, dependable, and making our bosses' lives easier can help build mutual respect and trust. It won't guarantee that our supervisors will treat us fairly or with respect, but over time it should help build positive working relationships. When opportunities for promotions come up, we will likely get consideration for those jobs.

10. Think about the most positive experience you have had working with a boss or supervisor. What made that experience positive? What did you do and what did they do that made it a positive relationship?

This question challenges the student to think about the type of people they want to work with or for. Provide encouragement and feedback.

Thinking, Attitude, and Behavior Summarized

In this course, we have looked at how our thinking, attitude, and behavior impacts every part of our lives. Whether we go back to prison or not is a decision that we will make. It isn't being lucky that will keep us out. We will make decisions about our actions by the way we think about the world, ourselves, and others. As Christians, our most basic responsibility is examining and correcting our thinking, attitudes, and behavior. In earlier lessons we called this *cultivating our hearts*. A "good heart" is something that the Bible emphasizes from Genesis to Revelation (beginning to end).

*Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23)*

11. Thinking back to all you learned in this course, list 5 habits that you are developing in your life to help you in your thinking, attitudes, and behaviors:

This question allows the student to summarize their learning in this course. Provide feedback and encouragement.

Action Step

During your daily prayer time over the next two weeks, ask God to show you what you can do to have a right heart and the mind of Christ in your thinking. Keep a list of anything that stands out during your prayer time that may be direction God is giving you to cultivate your heart.



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