

*Excuses*

Excuses.... We all have them and we all use them. What is an excuse? Have you ever considered how many excuses we use in a given day? “Officer, the light was yellow when I went through it.” “The dog ate my homework.” “I didn’t think you’d mind...”

Write a few examples of excuses you use:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

No matter how big or small an excuse may be, they are usually meant to mask our true intent. For example, an excuse that might be used is: “I did not have time to buy milk like you asked because traffic was too bad” when in reality you had your mind on something else and completely forgot to stop by the store.

We also make excuses for people. Making excuses for people is what gets us into relationships that can become toxic, or dysfunctional.

What is toxic? \_\_\_\_\_

What is dysfunctional? \_\_\_\_\_

Toxic is defined as capable of causing injury or death; poisonous.

Dysfunction is defined as not operating normally or properly.

So, serious question who do you make excuses for? *And yes, you need to write down their names:*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

In 1519, Conquistador Hernan Cortez set out from Spain to capture a great treasure of gold and emeralds in the magnificent Aztec Empire (now Mexico). Before leaving Spain, he’d sold everything he had to buy a fleet of boats and he’d enlisted an army of 500 men who believed in his mission to journey with him. Halfway to their destination, his army began grumbling and complaining. According to legend, Cortez feared that some of his army would attempt to retreat back to Spain, so he told them to burn the ships. By burning their only means of transport back to the safety and comfort of their homeland, the army had no choice but to journey forward and work their hardest to achieve success.



In our own lives, we have many “boats” that allow us to retreat to the (false) comfort of our “old” ways, our “go to” behaviors. We are frequently tempted to hop aboard the boats that are rowing downstream – back to the land of the familiar because it’s easier than rowing upstream toward change and unknown territory.

Remember that change is scary because it involves being held accountable for your actions (choices).

Think about it for a minute what “boats” do you need to burn? Meaning, are there things in your life that keep you returning to the comfort of your old ways instead of rowing forward towards success.

Keep in mind, when we talk about *success* in these lessons, we are not talking about earning millions of dollars and having a huge house. No, our definition of *success* is triumphing over our addictions and achieving personal and financial independence.

Remember: addictions are not just drugs and alcohol. An addiction is anything that keeps you from going forward. *Addiction*: the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice. Our definition of success also involves ridding our lives of all idols. *Idols*: any person or thing regarded with blind admiration, adoration, or devotion or putting anything before the Lordship of God.

Now that you thought about it; write down what “boats” you need to burn today.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Think back to the story again. Why did Cortez have his men burn their boats?

\_\_\_\_\_

Answer: With no way to get home, the men were forced to look forward and work to make their journey in the new land a success.

Cortez had a goal and he risked everything to accomplish that goal.

What is it that you really want for your life but are too afraid to go after? A college degree? Freedom from an abusive relationship? Freedom from drugs? Freedom from anger? Write it down: \_\_\_\_\_



We live in an excuse filled society. Disagree? Then, just pay attention to people’s conversations. Does anyone take responsibility for themselves today? For the most part, the answer is NO. Our first response is usually: “something happened *to me*,” “somebody did *me* wrong.” When was the last time we looked in the mirror and said, what could I do better or differently? It goes back to the definition of insanity we talked about earlier in the book.

Insanity is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Insanity:* Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Growing up, do you remember why your mama told you not to eat raw cookie dough? Because cookie dough contains raw eggs and eating raw eggs will make you sick! Okay, confession, we’d still sneak a taste or two while we were mixing the dough, right? My mother and grandmother would say, “If you get sick, it’s your own problem”. There would be no sympathy, no “I’m sorry you are sick”. There would only be a “I told you not to eat that, and you still made the choice to get the spoon and eat that dough.” Then there would be a “have you learned your lesson”? At that time we would say yes, because we were feeling real bad, but as soon as the stomach ache was gone and Mom made cookies again where was I? Back in the kitchen eating more dough. Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Because the consequence (the idea I might get sick) didn’t outweigh my desire. I was willing to make that choice on a “what if” consequence. But if I got sick, whose fault would it be? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who would have to live with the consequence? \_\_\_\_\_

But in the excuse filled world we live in what would be the response?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How about this response: Mom, I can’t believe you let me eat that cookie dough.

I am trying to place blame on \_\_\_\_\_ and take the blame off of? \_\_\_\_\_

This is a form of making an excuses so you don’t have to take the consequence it’s called the “It’s-not-my- fault” mentality. So think about it for a few minutes and recall some “It’s not my fault’s” that you have heard or said in the past day or even week.

It’s not my fault: \_\_\_\_\_

It’s not my fault: \_\_\_\_\_

It’s not my fault: \_\_\_\_\_



I know each one of you now recognizes that everything you do has a consequence. But hopefully by now you also know that a consequence can either be a bad consequence or a good consequence.

Usually, “it’s not my fault” is said when the consequence did not happen just as the person planned. So remember, all choices are either good or bad, therefore all consequences are good or bad.

So, what’s it going to take for you say **NO MORE EXCUSES?**

Are there people in your life for whom you make too many excuses? You may need to disassociate with those people. Remember the bus analogy from week 3? Kick them off of the bus! You may be thinking, I can’t get rid of my spouse/children. That’s true. But, you can change your relationship with them and seek new ways to interact with them

Names of people who you still make excuses for:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Name the people in your life that are making excuses for YOU:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Making excuses for bad choices actually enables, gives permission, to continue in that pattern of living. Remember in Week 2 the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy? Well this week we will look at it again with excuses being our “Expectation”.

What excuses do you use a lot or hear a lot?

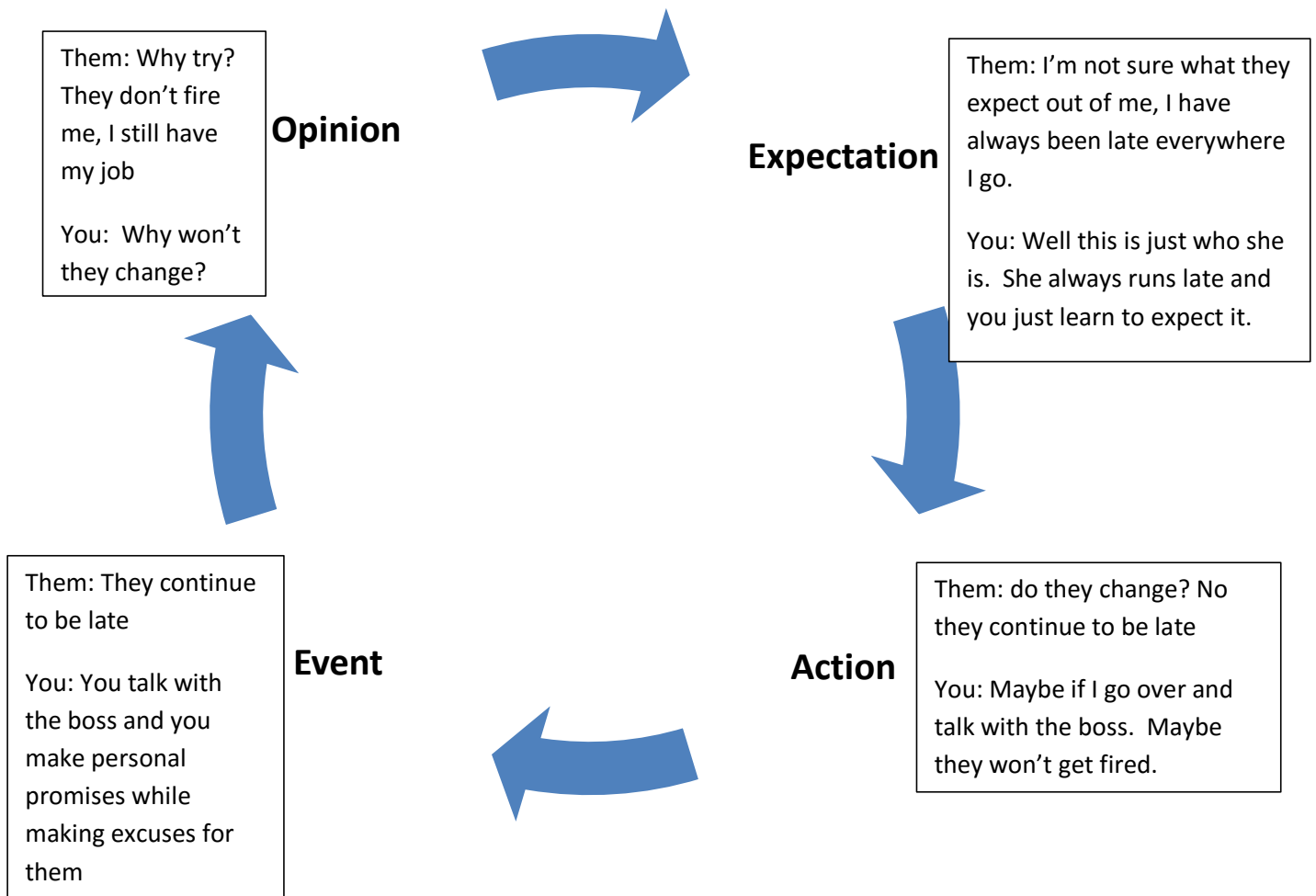
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For this exercise we will use the excuse: “I am sorry I was late again” Based upon the expectation that: I am going to be late.



By making excuses for this person it ends up like this:



So do you see that while making excuses for their bad choices are actually “enabling” them to continue to make bad choices? This is called living with denial, which obviously is not helpful for them or for you.

Here are some examples of statements if someone is living in denial:

- I can stop \_\_\_\_\_ whenever I want to.
- I have the right to choose how I live my own life
- My behavior doesn't affect anyone but me.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

So are you enabling someone or is someone allowing you to stay in an unhappy, possibly unhealthy state?



Our actions/behaviors *do* affect everyone. Think about either a behavior or an addiction you are dealing with or how has allowing someone to live in the state of denial affected the following:

- Friends \_\_\_\_\_
- Siblings \_\_\_\_\_
- Parents \_\_\_\_\_
- School \_\_\_\_\_
- Spouse/significant other \_\_\_\_\_
- Job \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

As our current relationships become *healthy* (born with honesty at their core), we will still have to deal with past relationships that may not be so healthy. Let's talk about co-dependency, shame and guilt.

Guilt = what I have *done*. Shame = who I *am*.

Issues start when people transfer *their* shame to us. When an individual masks their own feelings of shame by either directly or indirectly deflecting the shame onto someone else, psychologists call it transference of *shame*. Transference of shame is a major element of "dysfunctional families".

For example, an alcoholic father may attempt to cover up the shame of his addiction by transferring it onto his kids/wife through power, control, criticism, contempt, rage, blame or even a demand for perfection.

*I grew up with a step father who never beat me physically but this man that my mother married was supposed to be a father figure and he was far from it. He was a womanizer, an alcoholic and he was also my abuser. We lived in a world of dysfunction and secrets. I remember that when I was old enough to date, I would get ready as quietly as possible, watch from my bedroom window, and as soon as my date showed up I would make a run for stairs and door with the hopes that I would not hear my name being called back to the living room.*

*I very rarely had friends over, because I never knew what mood my step-father would be in for a whole 24 hours.*

*I learned that when you get mad, you threatened and sometimes even got your things thrown down the stairs to be packed up by your mother before she would get you out of bed in the wee hours, only to stop at the donut shop so you did not show up empty handed at your Grandfathers.*

*But as soon as the "I'm Sorry" was said we were packed back up.*

*There was no behavior change just an "I'm Sorry, come back". Complicating matters, I was told: If I would quit pushing his buttons thing would be ok. So you see the "I'm Sorry, come back" equals if you would not push buttons. I was the excuse for his behavior.*



Further complicating the matter is a dysfunctional family's unspoken "no talk rule".

The rule states: "Be silent. Act as if it never happened."

Abuse creates shame when the victim of abuse seeks help and no one hears their cry for help. That abused person then thinks they did something to cause the abuse.

Family secrets produce shame.

*I also learned a pattern of major dysfunctional living. When I would start to enjoy myself while out with a group of friends, I found myself making excuses as to why it should not be fun and I should not have fun. While writing this, years after my graduation from high school, I realized that this was a learned behavior that I actually find myself still doing.*

*Shame: Fun equaled getting into trouble when you got home not because I was doing anything wrong but because that was the fear I lived with. Living with dysfunction in our house, things don't make sense but because it is "Normal", until you are away from it you don't realize how "Un-normal" it really was or is.*

*Guilt: I wasn't doing anything wrong*

Shame is often *directly* transmitted through words, like we talked about in our "Self-fulfilling prophecy" cycle in Week 2.

- "Everything was fine until you came along."
- "You are no good; you are just like so and so."
- "You can't do anything right."
- "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."
- "You will never amount to anything."

As in my childhood these ended up becoming my "expectations", how about your childhood? Does any of this sound familiar?

A more serious question though is are you still allowing it to happen because you are in an abusive relationship? Remember abuse is not always physical or sexual, it can be mental, verbal and emotional.





Acknowledging things in your past will help you break the cycle and quit repeating the same mistakes. Or another way of looking at it is, you will quit stumbling over the demons in your past. If you keep looking at your cycle and saying “if only...” then you will never get to the point of “remember when...”

So we need to grow up and quit blaming \_\_\_\_\_, (insert the name of anyone that you make excuses for or who makes excuses for you).

Start taking the much needed actions to guarantee your success. Again, remember success here does not mean monetary/material success. It means victory over \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever it is that you hold as an idol or an addiction).

I know each one of you now recognizes that we live in a society where not taking responsibility for ourselves is the norm. We want to blame everyone else but ourselves. So, to make a change you must go against society and live out *Romans 12:1-2(NLT)* daily:

*And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Read this carefully: **QUIT MAKING EXCUSES**—for yourself and for others! If the people in your life (friends, relatives, etc.) are not helping to build you up, then they should not be a part of your “board of directors”, (remember week 3). They should not have any influence on the choices **YOU** make! **QUIT MAKING EXCUSES!** Get on with your life! Burn those boats! Start heading toward a different future. What is your goal in life?

My goal in life is: \_\_\_\_\_

Decide **TODAY** to take responsibility for yourself. If that is a decision you are ready **TODAY** to make, then sign here and date it

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***But remember it is a choice, a daily choice to stop making excuses and letting your excuses become your reality***



We have talked a lot about our past again this week. Here is a journal page for you to write your thoughts to the following questions:

Why do I continue to live in denial?

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Why do I continue to make excuses for myself?

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Why do I continue to make excuses for \_\_\_\_\_?

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What's it going to take for me to stop making excuses?

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What's it going to take for me to stop "stumbling over the demons of my past"?

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Why do I allow shame to become my expectation?

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How do I want to see myself?

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What is my new expectation for myself?

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Who on my bus do I still need to evaluate?

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What do I believe about myself that may not allow me to have my new expectations?

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To end this session I want you to write yourself a letter. This letter needs to be addressed to you and for you. This letter needs to have the following items in it: Hello, How are you? I'm

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(be honest with yourself, where are you today) then talk about how you got here

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( be honest) and now write the following: I have these new expectations

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end the letter with: I can't wait to hear from you on how I am doing and to see how much I have accomplished:

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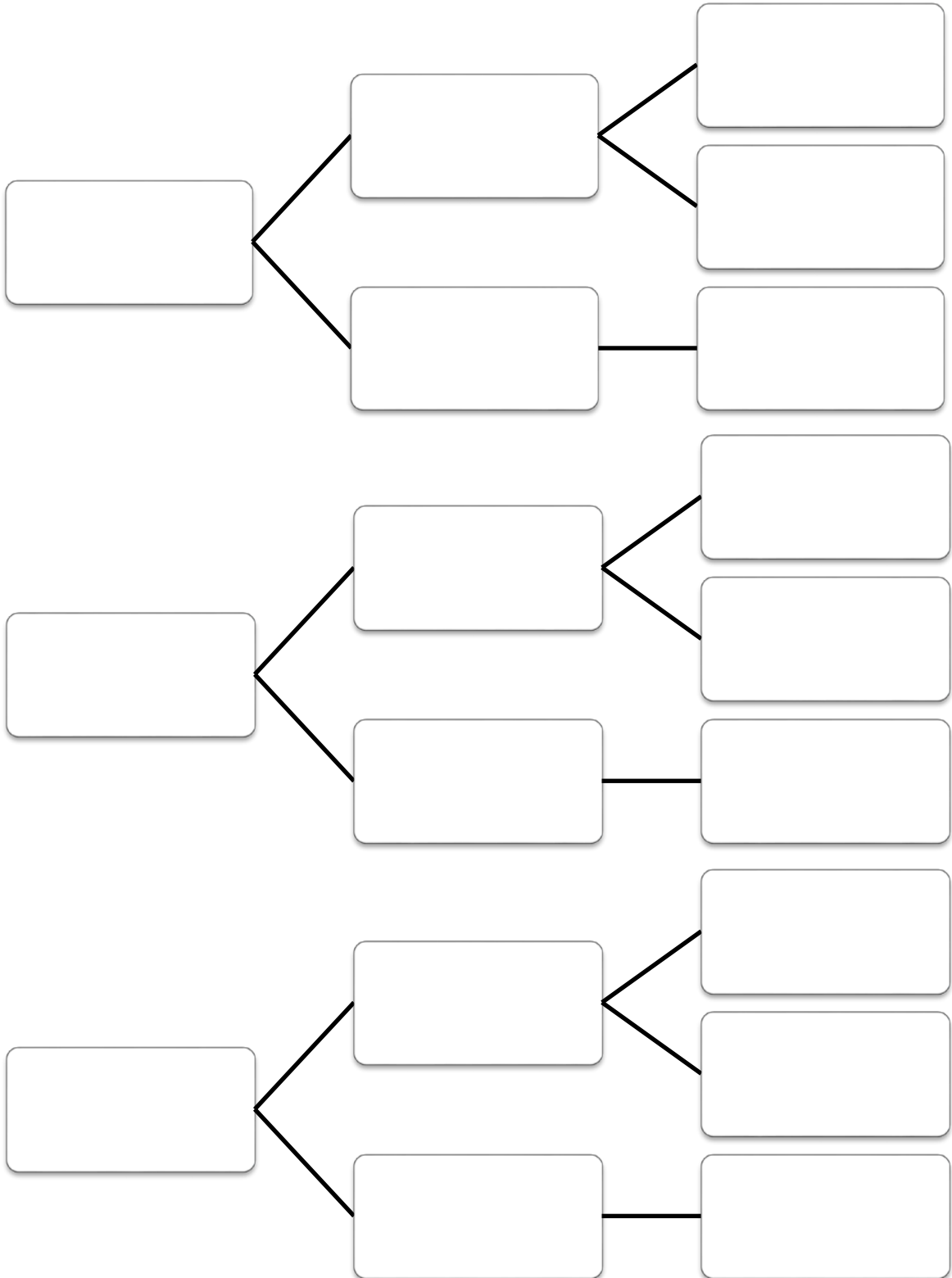
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*Goals for the week:*





*Day 1*

***Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man***  
***Proverbs 6:6-11(NIV)***

Think of the Ant, a little ant that scurries around collecting. Have you ever seen an ant with a piece of bread or cookie? All summer long it prepares for the winter. No one tells it what to do. It just knows what it needs to do to survive. Do you know what you need to do to survive? Are you doing it? If you aren't doing what is needed then you need to re-read the last part of this verse and think about what you really want out of life.

***What does this mean to me?***

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***How will this affect my way of thinking?***

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***How does this make me feel?***

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***What have I done in the last 24 hours that I am proud of and why?***

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*What have I done in the past 24 hours that I wish I had done differently?*

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*How can I avoid this in the future?*

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*As you finish this day... tell God how you really feel...*

*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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*Day 2*

***Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6(NIV)***

Do you understand this promise? God created you for a reason! He has a purpose for your life and it is NOT to sit here and make excuses and blame everyone else for your problems. If I had allowed my childhood to be an excuse for what happened to me, I would live in a very depressed area of the United States; hate my job, live each day with little meaning. But, NO! I took what was dealt to me and used it to become who I am today. Some may say that I'm a "bull in a china shop". Can you even imagine a bull in a china shop and the damage that it would do? Is that what you need to be to make something new today? Are you ready for that challenge?

***What does this mean to me?***

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***How will this affect my way of thinking?***

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***How does this make me feel?***

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*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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Day 3

***Brothers (sisters), I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

***Philippians 3:13-14(NIV)***

Are you living in the past and just letting life *happen* to you? If you are, then you need to re-read the underlined part of the passage. You need to be straining toward what is ahead. If you are just letting the future happen, then what are you straining towards? Just another let down because you have no goal? Have you gotten serious about your goals? If not, then you need to sit today and reevaluate your goals. Are they too aggressive? Perhaps your goals aren't aggressive enough. Are you bored with them? Before you answer the following questions, go back to the goals you wrote in Week 2 and revisit your goals for the week. If they are too general then make them more specific. If you set your goals too low, then make them higher, bigger! Do not be afraid to dream.

***What does this mean to me?***

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***How will this affect my way of thinking?***

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***How does this make me feel?***

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*What have I done in the last 24 hours that I am proud of and why?*

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*What have I done in the past 24 hours that I wish I had done differently?*

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*How can I avoid this in the future?*

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*As you finish this day... tell God how you really feel...*

*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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Day 4

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us Hebrews 12:1(NIV)*

What will it take for you to run with *perseverance* (determination, purpose, intention). Do you have what it takes? I think you do or you would not want to do this program. So, today, make your choices and make them with purpose...determination...intention. But, remember every choice has a consequence

*What does this mean to me?*

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*How will this affect my way of thinking?*

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*How does this make me feel?*

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*As you finish this day... tell God how you really feel...*

*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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Day 5

***I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***  
***Philippians 4:11-13(NIV)***

This scripture is a popular “life verse” for many people. “I can do all things...” Well, I am here to tell you as long as you are looking to Christ for all your answers and not the world you *can* do all things. But, as soon as you take your eyes and hope off Jesus and rely on the world, you WILL FAIL. God wants you to love Him and rely on Him...so follow Him and allow Him to give you strength.

***What does this mean to me?***

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***How will this affect my way of thinking?***

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*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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*Day 6*

***By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.***  
***Genesis2:2(NIV)***

God created the world in 6 days and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup>. You need to earn your rest. You cannot think that because you gave it your best for 1 hour a day or 4 hours at work that you can call it a day. A day is 24 hours. You need to work and work hard so that on the 7<sup>th</sup> day you can take a break. We Americans think we “deserve a break today” because that’s what the TV tells us; but God, our King and our Lord, says not so fast. The precedent He set through creation was to work 6 full days and then rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. So, when you can’t find a job or you aren’t making progress in reaching your goals, ask yourself, “Am I giving it 100% or am I only giving it 50% or less? And be HONEST! Achieving your goals is directly related to your willingness to *work* towards those goals.

***What does this mean to me?***

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*God today:*

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*God I am thankful for:*

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Now that you have finished the week how do you feel? If you are doing this with a friend/mentor or as a group study, be prepared to talk about your feelings and maybe even things that this week's study brought up in your life that you have not thought about in years. Remember to be honest with each other but also remember your last verse of this week. The things you discuss with your mentor or in your group stays between you. Do not break that confidentiality. Do not discuss what others share with anyone outside of this group.

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