

C L O S E

SESSION ONE

She may not make a regular appearance on your Spotify rotation, but you've probably heard of Adele. She's won ten Grammys and about a billion other awards. But did you know that she has major stage fright? At one show in Amsterdam, Adele was so nervous that she snuck out of an emergency exit before her show. She's thrown up multiple times before taking the stage. Adele even said that "Once in Brussels, I projectile-vomited on someone." We're talking about an artist whose net worth is \$55 million! Imagine the Belgian fan who showed up to see one of today's most famous artists only to be hurled on by that artist. One word: lawsuit. Make that vomit pay! Seriously, though, I bet that fan had an entirely different expectation for Adele's concert. And those expectations were, um, hurled out the window*.

The truth is, we all have expectations for how we think things are going to be. Saul had an expectation of what God was like. He had spent his entire life devoted to who he thought God was. And his thinking led him to believe that Jesus—and anyone who followed Him— was a pretender. On his way to eliminate as many of those pretenders as possible, Saul's view of God and Jesus was flipped upside down by a blinding light and a voice from heaven. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." "Uhhhh, what? Ohhhh, got it!" Suddenly, Saul realized that he had been seeing God in the wrong light. God was different than he had ever expected. But what happened next? Surely the next words out of God's mouth would be, "You idiot! What are you thinking? Do you realize all the damage you've done—all the people you've hurt? And all in MY name!" Maybe that's what Saul expected.

WE ALL HAVE AN IDEA, AN EXPECTATION OF HOW WE THINK GOD SHOULD RESPOND TO ALL THE MESSED UP STUFF IN OUR LIVES.

But instead of yelling at Saul, God simply says, "Go to Damascus."

GOD DIDN'T BEAT SAUL UP. INSTEAD, HE JUST SHOWED SAUL HIS NEXT STEP.

That's grace. God wasn't who Saul thought He was. And God showed His true character by not responding the way Saul thought He would.

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS LIKE? (Try to use at least 5 non-churchy words to describe Him).

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD THINKS ABOUT YOU?

HOW DO YOU THINK GOD RESPONDS WHEN YOU MESS UP?

Just like Saul, God has a next step for you, too. God has a different version of "Get up and go to Damascus" for you.

TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO PRAY. OPEN UP WITH GOD. BE HONEST ABOUT ALL OF THE MESSED UP STUFF IN YOUR LIFE. INVITE HIM TO SHOW YOU THE WAYS HE'S NOT LIKE YOU'VE EXPECTED.

THEN, ASK HIM TO SHOW YOU THE NEXT SIMPLE STEP YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO TAKE. WHEN HE SHOWS YOU THAT STEP, WRITE IT HERE.

This devotional came from page 47 of LIVE FREE: A five week devotional journal for students (or anyone else who needs a little more grace in their lives).

C L O S E

SESSION TWO

In 2015 a Kenyan marathon runner named Hyvon Ngetich collapsed two-tenths of a mile away from the finish line. She was in the lead at the time. Race officials offered her a wheelchair, but she refused to use it. She literally crawled her way to the finish line. Amazingly, she still finished in third place. In fact, the race director was so impressed that he upgraded her award to second-place prize money.³³ How would you like to be the girl who finished fourth? "So you didn't beat the lady who was crawling?" Ngetich was fine after they raised her blood sugar level back to normal. Let's be clear: we don't suggest finishing a race after you collapse—your body is sending you a pretty clear message at that point. But the simple reason why Ngetich finished the race is this: she chose to. She made a decision to keep moving. The mind is a powerful thing. In day one of this week, we looked at a verse where Paul urges us to offer our bodies as "living sacrifices" to God. In the next verse, Paul talks about how we live that out day by day. And it starts in our brain. 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). Culture is constantly trying to influence how we live. Every image, every magazine article, every commercial, every show, every marketing campaign is trying to convince us to think and act a certain way. Paul is telling us to be different. He's asking us to make a decision to let God be the commanding officer in our lives. How? By re-programming our minds. And here's the payoff: we will be in touch with God's "good, pleasing, and perfect will." In other words, we will be in direct contact with things that are pleasing to God. Take a time out and think about this: God wants an amazing

life for you. He wants more than a life where you just do right and don't mess up. He cares infinitely more about you living a life full of peace, joy, healthy relationships and satisfaction than He does about catching you doing something wrong. He has good and perfect gifts waiting for you.

IF YOU WENT ALONG WITH WHAT CULTURE WANTS FOR YOU, WHAT WOULD YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE?

WHAT ARE SOME GOOD THINGS THAT YOU THINK GOD WANTS YOU TO EMBRACE?

NAME ONE AREA WHERE YOU NEED TO RE-PROGRAM YOUR MIND TO FOCUS ON THOSE GOOD THINGS? SPEND SOME TIME PRAYING. INVITE GOD INTO YOUR THINKING. MAYBE PRAY SOMETHING LIKE, "GOD, YOU KNOW WHAT THE WORLD PULLS ME TOWARD. I CHOOSE YOU INSTEAD. HELP ME TO SEE THAT, OUT OF YOUR GRACE, YOU WANT GOOD THINGS FOR ME. LORD, PLEASE RE-PROGRAM MY MIND."

This devotional came from page 132 of LIVE FREE: A five week devotional journal for students (or anyone else who needs a little more grace in their lives).

C L O S E

SESSION THREE

Why are prison escape attempts so fascinating? Maybe it's the Mission: Impossible storyline. Or maybe it's because they almost never work.

In 1970 Billy Hayes was a 22-year-old American who got busted trying to smuggle a small amount of drugs out of Turkey. (The country, not the bird. That would be really weird.) He was thrown into a remote island prison where he received a steady string of beatings and concluded that his life was probably over. Six months later Hayes snuck out of the prison, stole a boat, and rowed 17 miles to the mainland. Hayes knew his blonde hair would attract attention, so he dyed it black. Barefoot, he then walked for miles and swam across a huge river to the Greek border. Eventually, Hayes made it safely back to the United States.¹⁴ Again, fascinating. And maybe these escape stories fascinate us because they make us wonder what we would do in that situation. How would we get out? Do you ever feel like temptation is your own personal prison? Maybe there's some type of sin in your life that makes you feel like you deserve to be in that prison. And every time it knocks at your door, you think, There's no way I can escape this. I've already gone back to it so many times. Let's look at one of God's incredible promises, courtesy of Paul: No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God promises to be with you. And when you're tempted, He promises to give you a way out, every time. Like we said yesterday, your weakness provides an opportunity for God to show off His power, if you allow Him.

WHY DO WE SOMETIMES GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION EVEN THOUGH. . .

WE KNOW WE SHOULDN'T? WE KNOW WE'LL FEEL GUILTY AFTERWARDS?

This devotional came from page 73 of LIVE FREE: A five week devotional journal for students (or anyone else who needs a little more grace in their lives).