



## **Freedom from Inner Prisons**

### **Introductory notes**

These studies are designed for a group who are already Christians, but should not exclude people who have not made a profession of faith. You may have to back-track sometimes to re-explain the gospel.

Please see below for some guidance on the issues covered. This is not comprehensive guidance, but aims to give you a brief overview of the topics covered in this series. You may uncover issues in individuals that require more in-depth discussion, or feel that an individual would benefit from counselling or therapy. Please speak to your Chaplains to discuss the options available locally.

Please make sure you make time to check-in and check-out. Make sure you are happy that everyone is OK to go back to the wing, and if you are worried about anyone, tell the wing officer and / or a Chaplain.

### **Structure of the studies**

There are a lot of questions in each study, but you will notice that several of them are simple comprehension questions and should not take more than a couple of minutes. I recommend that you do the study yourself before running it with prisoners, so that you can see which questions are likely to take up more time, and have a good understanding of the answers, and where the study is going.

Each study is designed to last for about 90 minutes. Guidance for timings are given, which should help you to see when to keep discussion brief and when to go a bit deeper! If you get diverted, and don't finish the first set of questions, make sure you study at least one application question before you close. I would suggest that you take a 10 minute break around half-way. If you only have an hour, just do the starred \* questions.

Each study is written out twice, once for leaders (*with a guide to answers*) and once for participants. The studies are laid out in 2 sections:

### **What does the passage say and mean?**

Please don't be put off by the number of questions in a study! These studies contain some comprehension questions – it is important that we understand what the passage literally says. These questions can be taken fairly quickly. Try not to go too deep with them - they just aim to set the background. There are also some deeper questions to help the group to think, and unpack the meaning of the passage. There are some interactive questions, to keep people who have short attention spans engaged:

**SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING – SDL** – questions that need to be prepared. Write them on flip-chart paper, spaced out so that there is room to write the answer. Prepare enough flip-chart sheets for the group to work in pairs, and provide enough marker pens for them to write their answers. When they are finished, download the answers as a group, with a leader co-ordinating the discussion.

**STICKERS** – Write the question on the top of a flip-chart sheet. Give the group stickers or post-it's and ask them to write the answer to the question on their sticker. Give them biro's to do this. Ask them to stick their stickers on the flip-chart. When they are finished, the leader reads out the answers, and then explains the right answer to the group.

**SHOUT-OUT** – Write the question on the top of a flip-chart sheet. Ask the group to suggest answers, and write their answers up, so that they can see the results of their brainstorm. If someone gives an answer that is unacceptably wrong (i.e. not just slightly wrong), don't write it up, but do explain why you are not writing it.

### **How can I live according to these truths in my life?**

Each study ends with some application questions. These application questions are very important, but should not be tackled without understanding what the Bible says – we cannot apply the Bible to our lives if we have not read and understood it!

### **Notes on topics in this series**

Some of these topics roll into each other, so you may find it helpful to read all the following notes, even if you are only running one study. For example, someone who is depressed may have low self-esteem, which affects their self-identity and has its roots in guilt.

## **Self-esteem**

Low self-esteem can develop for a variety of reasons – guilt, previous abuse, depression, emotional / physical neglect, people telling you that you are useless / stupid, etc.

For various reasons, low self-esteem is likely to be more prevalent amongst prisoners than the general population. For example, it is known that over half the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence and one in three has experienced sexual abuse, and women in prison are twice as likely to have an eating disorder as women in the general population (PRT factfile 2010).

Low self-esteem may be a cause or a symptom of depression, and it may lead to abuse of your own body (promiscuity, substance abuse, neglect etc.), allowing others to take advantage of you and to acts of self-harm. Low self-esteem lowers the ability to cope with stressors and can increase the risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, social phobias and eating disorders.

Low self-esteem can create a cycle. A perception that 'I am a failure' may be reinforced by actual failure at work, parenting, relationships etc., which is itself a source of low self-esteem.

Someone whose self-esteem is poor may feel unwanted, unloved and unlovable and have poor self-confidence. They may actively avoid situations which would involve the risk of being let down, e.g. stable relationships, and tolerate other situations such as abusive relationships, resulting in feeling even more unwanted, unloved and unlovable.

Low self-esteem may also affect how you respond to the gospel – 'I know no-one else loves me, so why would (or how could) God love me?'

It is important to realise that what we believe about ourselves – that which forms our self-esteem – is only our opinion. It being our opinion does not make it a fact. Our self-esteem is not a good indicator of our real worth, or of who we really are.

Our self-esteem is not fixed – it can change and Christ can break the cycle!

You may find this helpful: [www.mind.org.uk/assets/0001/7295/How\\_to\\_increase\\_your\\_self-esteem\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mind.org.uk/assets/0001/7295/How_to_increase_your_self-esteem_2011.pdf)

## Self-identity

Our self-identity is the way we view, and therefore value, ourselves. It involves the conscious recognition of self as separate from other individuals, and contributes significantly to our self-esteem.

Our self-identity may be based on what we have been told about ourselves by others, for example, parents telling us that we are good for nothing, or on things that we do, for example our career, our criminal record etc. We may identify ourselves as 'John's dad', 'Tom's son', 'a murderer', 'a doctor', 'a disabled person', 'just-a-checkout-worker' or 'nobody really'.

Our self-identity may build us up ('I'm a much loved father'), but it may also crush us ('I'm a failure'), or become an idol ('I'm a doctor').

Ultimately, our identity as Christians is in Christ. We are, first and foremost, children of God. All other labels are secondary compared to being a child of God.

Think about it, when someone asks you to describe yourself, what do *you* say first? 'I'm Adam's mum', 'I'm a teacher', or 'I'm God's workmanship', 'I'm a child of God', 'I'm a new creation'...?

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