



# KEYS TO FREEDOM

**LIVE FREE, STAY FREE**

CANADIAN EDITION

An interactive discipleship study to educate, equip, and empower you with biblical keys to live free and stay free.



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*mercy*  
CANADA

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# Setting the Stage

## Day 1: *Getting to the Root*

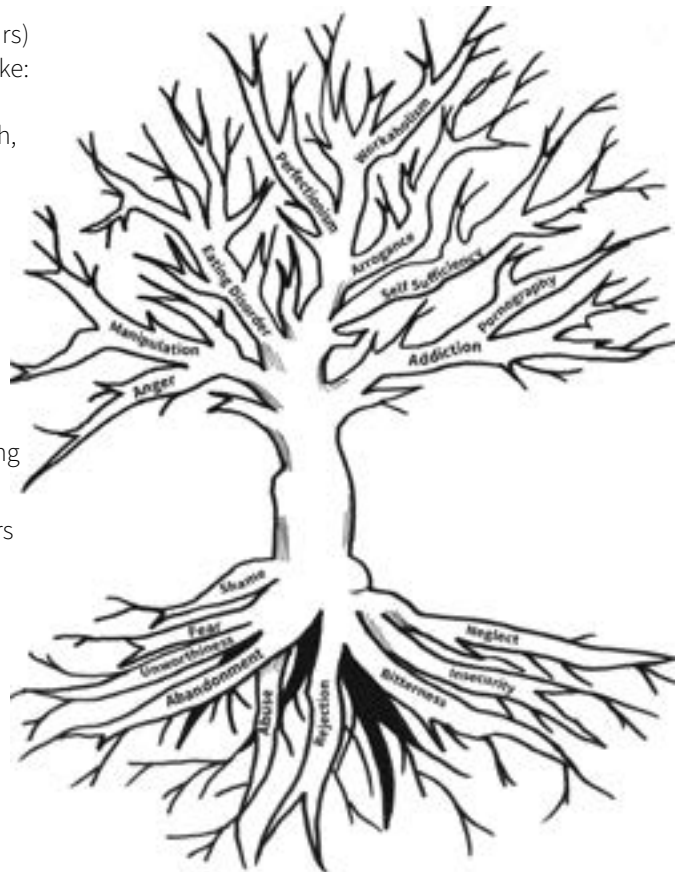
Cutting off the branches won't change the fruit that grows.

One of the easiest ways to explain the approach we are going to take throughout this study is by using the analogy of a tree to describe our lives. Imagine your life as a tree with branches, a thick tree trunk and a root system underground, feeding and sustaining the tree.

The branches of this tree represent our BEHAVIOURS—the “above-ground” visible aspects of our being and how we behave. These are the things that become clear when you get to know a person well, or in some cases, the “branches” are so obvious that they can be spotted almost immediately. The branches on our tree can be healthy or unhealthy, depending on the health of our root systems. Today we will focus primarily on the unhealthy factors in our lives, as those are the things that we need to address in order to overcome.

Some very common unhealthy branches (behaviours) that can grow on the tree of our life can include things like:

- Inability to commit to relationships, a church, job, etc.
- Lack of healthy boundaries
- People-pleasing behaviours (struggling with saying “no” and finding self-worth through acceptance of others)
- Workaholism
- Promiscuity
- Putting others down, comparison, and feeling threatened by others’ success
- Bullish / aggressive / intimidating behaviours
- Isolation
- Manipulation (actions that position one to stay in control of others and situations)
- Codependency
- Emotional instability (either disconnected from emotion or ruled by emotion)
- Insecurity



More serious “life-controlling” branches (behaviours) can include:

- Addiction (alcohol, drugs, pornography, social media, work, video games, etc.)
- Self-harm
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders and panic attacks (insomnia, obsessive compulsive disorder)
- Eating disorders

The tree trunk describes the BELIEF SYSTEM a person has developed over the course of their life. Our belief system is what sustains and upholds our behaviours. We act within the context of how we think and what we believe. A healthy belief system will grow healthy behaviours and an unhealthy belief system will grow unhealthy behaviours.

The roots of the tree feed both the tree trunk and the branches. These roots draw their power from the specific circumstances that affect us from childhood, such as divorce, the loss of a loved one, long term sickness, or any other mental, spiritual, sexual, or physical trauma. Those roots then grow into a trunk—a belief system—and it’s our belief system that determines our behaviours.

*We act within the context of how we think and what we believe.*

Interestingly, while the branches that grow on people’s lives can vary tremendously from person to person, as we all have a variety of healthy and unhealthy branches, the types of roots that feed those branches tend to be fairly universal. The roots listed below are some examples of “the why behind the what”—the true causes of the unhealthy belief systems

and branches in our lives. Many of us are affected by their presence, without even realizing their influence.

- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| • Abandonment   | • Fear       |
| • Rejection     | • Pride      |
| • Worthlessness | • Bitterness |
| • Shame         | • Despair    |

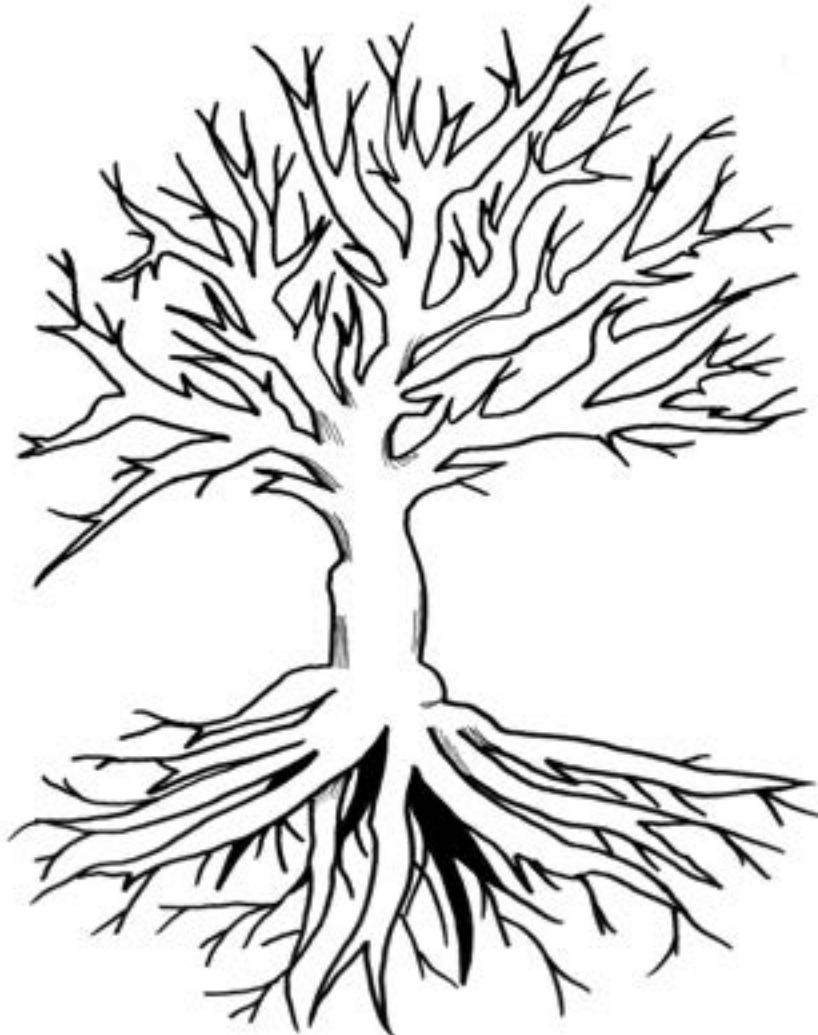
People typically focus their attention only on what they can see, so help is sought (and given) with the “cutting off” of unhealthy branches. In other words, behaviour modification is the goal, and negative behaviours are often dealt with by behaviour management and/or medication. This approach may appear successful because a branch can indeed be cut off and removed from the tree; however, unless the root structure is addressed, that same branch will grow back, either in the very same place or elsewhere on the same tree. That is true for the tree that stands in a garden as much as it is true for the tree that represents your life.



**Can you think of a time when you spent time, energy, and/or resources trying to “fix a branch” in your own life only to realize that it was wearing you out and not creating lasting change?**

The challenge is not simply a behavioural one; rather, the challenge we all face is the removal of the roots that have grown because of imperfect people and imperfect circumstances in our lives. Without dealing with the roots, you will never be truly healed and free. The truth is that we need a perfect God to bring the revelation and healing that cannot come merely by focusing on the branches.

- **Consider the branches and roots in your life today. Try to identify one or two branches and one or two roots and write them on the tree below. Please don't overwhelm yourself by trying to identify them all but remember that healing comes in layers. God will often do a deep work in us and then lead us to our next layer of healing. Allow yourself to only write down the branches and roots that immediately come to mind. It may be easier to identify "branch issues" in your life that you want to overcome than it is to identify the roots under those issues. You may want to ask God, "Where did this start? When did I first learn to respond to life in this way?" If it's difficult to identify the roots right now, don't be discouraged. The Lord will begin to shine a light on those areas as you move forward in this study and you will be prompted to come back and fill in this tree accordingly.**



Now that you have identified some areas on your own tree, spend some time in prayer before you close your study time. Use the space below to ask the Lord to help you in the process of overcoming any areas that you have identified today.

## Day 2: *The Roots Determine the Fruit*

Yesterday we spent some time discussing the tree analogy that we will use throughout this study and the importance of recognizing the roots in our lives. As we mentioned yesterday, this is not typically the way that people address their issues. The focus is usually on addressing the behaviours themselves—the “branches”—instead of addressing the roots.

 **Read Matthew 12:33. How does this scripture relate to the tree analogy?**

*Making a tree healthy—making our lives whole, healed, and free—has to come from our roots.*

This scripture says that a tree can be either healthy or unhealthy, and that either way, it is known by its fruit. The fruit that a tree produces cannot be affected by simply cutting off the branches. Making a tree healthy—making our lives whole, healed, and free—has to come from our roots.

If you choose to remain focused on the behaviours that you want to overcome instead of your past hurt, betrayal, trauma, disappointment, or abuse, those roots will continue to shape your belief system, and you will continue to grow the branches of damaging and unhealthy behaviour.


**What does Jeremiah 17:7–8 say about our roots? What do we need to be fed by?**

Our roots need to be fed by God’s Word, His presence, and His power. The roots of abandonment, rejection, fear, shame, pride, bitterness, and unworthiness will never be able to produce healthy fruit. We may be able to trim back

the branches by using all our will power and resources, but a tree without branches produces no fruit at all. It is bare, lifeless, and will not fulfill its potential and purpose.

**Write out the fruit that is described in Galatians 5:22–23.**

Over the coming weeks, you will have the opportunity to examine your behaviours, to rebuild your belief system with what God’s Word says, and to receive healing for the pain that enabled those roots to grow. We are going to teach you how to expose the root causes of your behaviours through a partnership with the Holy Spirit. As you focus on the root system in your life instead of the branches, you will have the opportunity to truly overcome in a whole new way!

 **As you wrap up your study for today, write one “fruit” that you would like to see grow in your life. As that fruit becomes more present in you and through you, how will your life be changed?**

Tomorrow we will begin discussion on a topic that is not only a foundational part of this study but also for any true healing and transformation that you receive.

## **Day 3:** *Hearing from God*

This week, we are focused on setting the stage for the rest of our study with a few foundational pieces. So far, we have discussed the tree analogy and the importance of identifying and understanding the root systems in our lives, which ultimately feed our behaviours. Today we will explore the different ways that God speaks to us as His sons and daughters.

The reason that hearing from God is foundational to this study is because we believe that lasting healing and freedom is not possible outside of the presence and truth of God that He communicates to us. No person or book has the power to change or heal your heart; only God has the ability to change your heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s words have unmatched power to create and to transform, so if you want to see true, root-level transformation in your life, it is vital that you know how to hear from Him.



The idea of God speaking may be foreign or unfamiliar to you, but it's important to know that God is a relational God and desires to connect and communicate with us. In fact, He promises to respond to us when we ask.

**Write Psalm 91:15 in the space below.**

While God speaks to us in many different ways, His primary means of communication with us is through his Word, the Bible. The Word of God is not simply a history book or book of stories. In fact, Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word is actually living and active. It has the ability to change our hearts, and it always has something to say about our lives. The Word is our ultimate standard of truth.

However, Scripture is not the only way that God speaks to His children. One of the most amazing benefits of being a child of God is that we have the ability to directly communicate back and forth with Him. Today we will help you identify how you personally receive from the Lord and position you to do so throughout this process.

**What does Jesus say in John 10:4?**

*Jesus shares that we are able to recognize His voice and have two-way communication with the Father through the Holy Spirit.*

Jesus shares that we are able to recognize His voice and have two-way communication with the Father through the Holy Spirit.

God can communicate to you in any way that He chooses—He even used a donkey once (Numbers 22:21–31)! When we refer to hearing from the Lord, it does not necessarily mean that you hear an audible voice. It simply means that the Lord shows you something, and you receive what He is communicating to you. It might come as a thought, a memory, a picture, or a verse from the Bible that pops into your mind. God can be very creative!

Here are four common ways that the Lord may speak or communicate with us (in addition to the written Word):


- **His still, small voice**—This is often referred to as our conscience, or that voice in our head, that redirects or challenges us when we are struggling with making a decision. That still, small voice is the Holy Spirit speaking to our mind and heart. As this way of hearing from the Lord grows, you will find yourself having two-way conversations with Him throughout the day.
- **Impressions**—These are thoughts that come to mind that we do not intentionally think on our own. These thoughts seem to fall quietly as we become aware of them. Some examples of this may be an inclination to do something for someone that we did not think of on our own or a memory coming to mind that we have not thought about in a long time.
- **Confirmation**—This is when the Lord speaks through themes that are confirmed over and over again. Some people would call this “coincidence”. People who receive from the Lord in this way will begin to recognize the Lord speaking a specific theme to them—for example, forgiveness—and will see it in many ways and places. One morning they may overhear a conversation about forgiveness, see a billboard with this theme across it, and then notice a licence plate with 4GVNESS. Later, they might read two Bible verses on forgiveness and then find out that the topic for the next sermon series at their church is going to be on what topic? You guessed it, forgiveness. The theme would seem to be everywhere because the Lord doesn’t mind repeating Himself or confirming what He is speaking when one of His children is open and aware.
- **Pictures**—Sometimes this is referred to as visions or dreams. This area can often sound a bit weird, or even spooky, but it is a legitimate and significant way God uses to speak to His children. Receiving from the Lord in picture form is often found in people who are creative and imaginative. They see pictures easily and may receive dreams from the Lord while they sleep as well. Sometimes the meaning of these dreams or pictures is not clear right away, but through prayer and discussion with other believers, the Lord will reveal what He was communicating with you through the dream or picture.


It’s important that we understand our uniqueness when we begin to discern the ways that the Lord speaks to us. Any parent of more than one child would agree that each of their children is unique in the way they are designed, the way they communicate and learn, and the way they connect with them as parents. It is the same thing for us as sons and daughters of God. He has made us uniquely; therefore, the way we will connect with Him and hear from Him will be unique.

Let’s take some time to identify how you most readily receive from the Lord.

**In what ways do you most naturally connect with the Lord (e.g. Bible reading, worship, out in nature)?**

**When you are communicating with someone, do you typically see pictures, or do you hear words?**

 **Have you ever had a thought come to mind or received some sort of impression or picture and wondered if it was from the Lord? Describe your experience.**

 **When is the last time you experienced the Lord revealing something to you? In what form did it come? What did He speak to you or show you during that moment?**