



Week 4

Date: _____

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) outweighed 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.

Who am I 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?

- _____
- _____
- _____



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:



Them: Why try?
They don't fire me, I still have my job

You: Why won't they change?

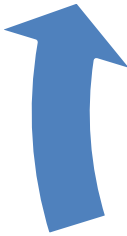
Opinion



Expectation

Them: I'm not sure what they expect out of me, I have always been late everywhere I go.

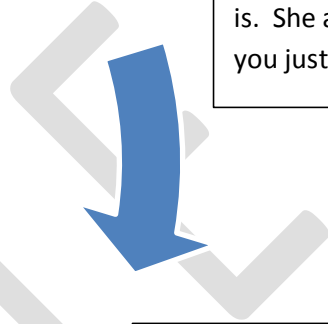
You: Well this is just who she is. She always runs late and you just learn to expect it.



Them: They continue to be late

You: You talk with the boss and you make personal promises while making excuses for them

Event



Action

Them: do they change? No they continue to be late

You: Maybe if I go over and talk with the boss. Maybe they won't get fired.



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?

Why do I continue to make excuses for myself?

Why do I continue to make excuses for _____?

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

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

Why do I allow shame to become my expectation?



How do I want to see myself?

What is my new expectation for myself?

Who on my bus do I still need to evaluate?

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