# WEEK#5:THE WASTELAND — RECURRING CAPTIVITY
## *A Dominion of Deception*

**Big Idea:** Recurring captivity develops when wounds, lies, and familiar responses repeatedly shape our choices. Jesus leads us into freedom as we receive His truth, renew our minds, and learn to respond differently through the power of His Spirit.

The Wasteland is a teaching picture ***(a state of being)*** of recurring captivity, rather than a biblical name for a fixed stage of Christian maturity. It describes the experience of moving through life while repeatedly returning to familiar fears, beliefs, and destructive patterns.

**Teaching outline**

1. **Recognizing the pattern:** Israel repeatedly returned to captivity.
2. **Understanding the spiral:** Experiences influence beliefs, and beliefs influence responses.
3. **Returning to the familiar:** What enslaves us can begin to feel safe.
4. **Encountering the ceiling:** Growth requires a willing response to God.
5. **Interrupting isolation:** Truth and loving community expose deception.
6. **Walking into freedom:** Christ transforms us as we practice a new way of living.

**1. RECOGNIZING THE PATTERN:** ***Israel repeatedly returned to captivity***

**Judges 2:10–19:**

***Israel Disobeys the Lord***

*10 After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel. 11 The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight and served the images of Baal. 12 They abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the Lord. 13 They abandoned the Lord to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth. 14 This made the Lord burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. 15 Every time Israel went out to battle, the Lord fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.*

***The Lord Rescues His People***

*16 Then the Lord raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers. 17 Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by worshiping other gods. How quickly they turned away from the path of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the Lord's commands. 18 Whenever the Lord raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the Lord took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.*

The book of Judges describes a recurring pattern in Israel's life:

**Turning from God → oppression → distress → God raising a deliverer → relief → renewed unfaithfulness.**

God repeatedly showed mercy, yet after a judge died, the people returned to their former practices. Their circumstances improved, but their renewed faithfulness did not endure.

This provides a biblical picture of recurring captivity. We can sincerely want relief from painful consequences while remaining reluctant to surrender the practices and loyalties that contribute to them.

We may ask God to change our situation while resisting His invitation to change how we live within it.

- We want healthier relationships but avoid honest conversations.
- We want peace but continue rehearsing resentment.
- We want connection but withdraw when we feel vulnerable.
- We want growth but resist correction.

The point is not that every hardship results from personal sin. Israel's historical covenant experience should not become a formula for explaining everyone's suffering. The relevant question is whether we repeatedly return to something God is calling us to leave.

***Relief changes what we are experiencing. Formation changes how we respond.***

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE LOOP: *Experiences influence beliefs, and beliefs influence responses*

The diagram *(See Page 8)* traces a movement through *experience, security or insecurity, worldview, unhealthy choices, and negative outcomes*. Those outcomes can then reinforce the beliefs that shaped the choices.

Consider the example:
**Rejection → "I'm not valuable" → insecurity → fear of rejection → withdrawal → isolation → loneliness → "Nobody wants me."**

The original rejection may have been real and deeply painful. But the conclusion - *"I have no value"*— is not a reliable statement about our identity.

Once accepted, that conclusion can become a lens through which we interpret new experiences. An unanswered message becomes evidence of rejection. A disagreement feels like abandonment. Someone else's distraction becomes proof that we do not matter. Withdrawal may feel protective, yet it can reduce opportunities for connection. The resulting loneliness then appears to confirm the original belief.

This creates the loop: the belief shapes the response, and the result seems to prove the belief.

Supporting Scriptures:

- Genesis 3:1–13: *The serpent distorts God's word and character; disobedience is followed by fear, hiding, and blame.*
- Romans 12:2: *Transformation involves the renewal of the mind.*
- Ephesians 4:22–24: *Paul connects leaving the old way of life with renewed thinking and putting on the new self.*

Not every painful thought is a chosen sin, and not every negative outcome is self-produced. Nevertheless, we can learn to distinguish what happened to us from what we have come to believe because of it.

***An experience can explain how a belief developed without proving that the belief is true.***

**3. RETURNING TO THE FAMILIAR: *What enslaves us can begin to feel safe***

**Exodus 16:1–8:**

***Manna and Quail from Heaven***

*Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. 2 There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. 3 "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death." 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "By evening you will realize it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. 7 In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaints, which are against him, not against us. What have we done that you should complain about us?" 8 Then Moses added, "The Lord will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfy you in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. What have we done? Yes, your complaints are against the Lord, not against us."*

**Numbers 14:1–4:**

***The People Rebel***

*Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. 2 Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!" they complained. 3 "Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 Then they plotted among themselves, "Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!"*

After leaving Egypt, Israel encountered hunger, uncertainty, and fear. Under pressure, the people remembered Egypt selectively and even proposed returning.

The place of slavery began to seem preferable to the uncertainty of trusting God.
We can recognize something similar in ourselves. Familiar patterns offer a sense of predictability:

- Control seems safer than trust.
- Withdrawal seems safer than vulnerability.
- People-pleasing seems safer than honest boundaries.
- Blame seems safer than admitting our contribution.
- Resentment seems safer than facing grief.

These responses may have developed as attempts to protect ourselves. Yet what once helped us manage a situation may now interfere with love, trust, and obedience.

We can change jobs, relationships, churches, or circumstances—and still repeat familiar responses. External change may be necessary, especially in harmful situations. But external change alone does not automatically renew what has been formed within us.

***Freedom requires learning to trust God beyond what feels familiar.***

**4. ENCOUNTERING THE CEILING:** ***Growth requires a willing response to God***

The diagram *(Page 8)* describes an **"artificial ceiling"** associated with not taking responsibility. This can illustrate the point at which we desire growth but resist the response growth requires.

**James 1:22–25:**
*22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

*James calls believers to put God's word into practice.*

**Hebrews 5:12–14:**
*12 You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. 13 For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. 14 Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.*

*Hebrews describes maturity as involving discernment developed through practice.*

Knowledge matters, but knowledge alone does not produce maturity. We grow as we respond to what God reveals.

The diagram's "consumer" language can help us examine whether we primarily approach Christian community by asking: *Who will meet my needs? Who will fix my situation? Why am I not getting what I want?*

Discipleship adds further questions: *What is Jesus teaching me? What response belongs to me? How can I receive help and participate in the good of others?*

Handle the diagram's phrase **"victim mindset"** carefully. Being victimized is real; acknowledging harm and seeking protection are appropriate. Responsibility means discerning our present response, not accepting blame for another person's wrongdoing.

*Philippians 2:12–13* holds effort and grace together: believers actively respond because God is already at work within them. = *12 Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

***I may not be responsible for what happened to me, but God can help me discern the faithful next step available to me.***

**5. INTERRUPTING ISOLATION: *Truth and loving community expose deception***

The diagram *(Page 8)* connects the downward spiral with *lies, isolation, and becoming a critic.* Isolation can leave our assumptions unchallenged. Without trustworthy relationships, we may repeatedly rehearse the same interpretation until it feels undeniable.

**Hebrews 3:12–13:**
*12 Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. 13 You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.*

The passage calls believers to encourage one another so that sin's deceitfulness does not harden their hearts. Mutual encouragement is part of God's provision for perseverance.

Additional Scriptures:

- Ephesians 4:15–16: *Speaking truth in love supports the growth of Christ's body.*
- Galatians 6:1–2: *Restoration should be gentle, and believers are called to carry one another's burdens.*
- James 5:16: *Confession and prayer belong within a life of mutual care.*

**"Becoming a critic"** can describe a defensive posture in which we continually identify everyone else's failures while avoiding our own vulnerability. However, honest questions, discernment, and reporting wrongdoing are not evidence of spiritual immaturity.

Healthy community makes room for truth about both personal responsibility and genuine harm.

The diagram also names "**generational trauma"**. Painful family patterns can influence what feels normal, but they do not determine our future or make us guilty of another person's sin. *Ezekiel 18:14–20* describes a child who sees a father's wrongdoing and chooses a different path.

***Healing relationships help us examine the stories we have been telling ourselves.***

**6. WALKING INTO FREEDOM:** ***Christ transforms us as we practice a new way of living***

**John 8:31–36:**
*31 Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 "But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. 35 A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.*

Jesus connects continuing in His word with knowing the truth, and He identifies Himself as the one who sets people free from slavery to sin.

Freedom is grounded in Christ. It develops in daily life as we learn to trust Him and walk by His Spirit.

*So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law. - Galatians 5:1*

*So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. - Galatians 5:16*

*Galatians 5:1, 16:* connects the freedom Christ gives with an ongoing life directed by the Spirit. Return to the rejection example. A different response becomes possible:

**Rejection → acknowledge the hurt → examine the belief → receive Christ's truth → seek trustworthy connection → practice a healthy response.**

For example:

- **Name the experience:** "That rejection hurt me."
- **Identify the conclusion:** "I have been treating it as proof that I have no value."
- **Receive truth:** "In Christ, I am loved and welcomed into God's family" *(Ephesians 1:4–5).*
- **Choose a response:** "I can ask for clarity, maintain appropriate boundaries, and reach toward trustworthy people."
- **Practice with support:** "I can keep learning even when the old fear returns."

A healthy response does not guarantee that another person will respond well. It does mean their response no longer has to govern our identity or dictate our obedience.

The four discipleship attitudes offer practical language for this journey:

- **Humility:** I am willing to have my understanding corrected.
- **Surrender:** I will entrust to God what I cannot control.
- **Responsibility:** I will respond to what God shows me.
- **Sacrifice:** I will release familiar comforts when obedience requires it.

***Returning fear does not have to produce a returning pattern. In Christ, we can learn a new response.***

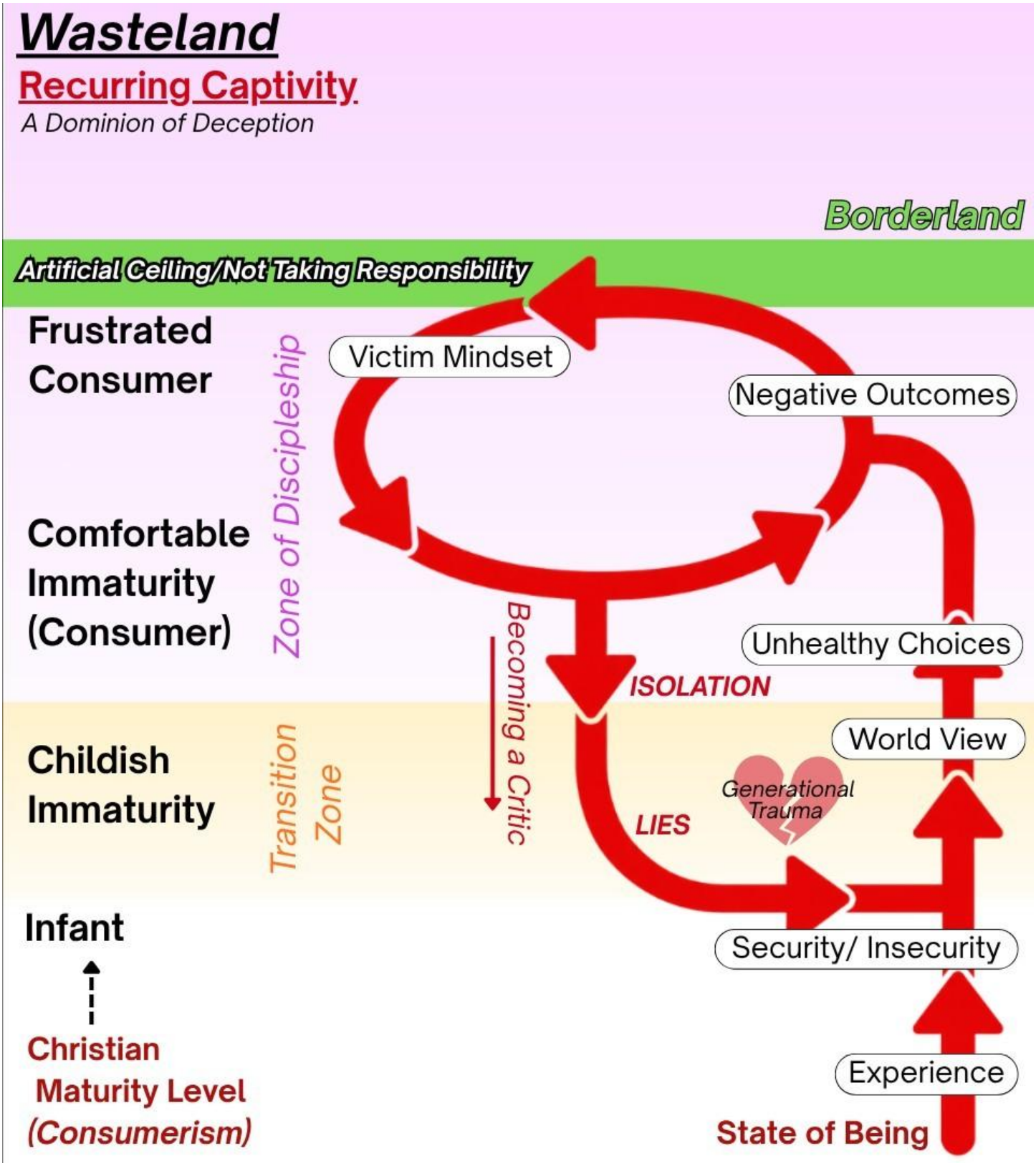
## CLOSING INVITATION

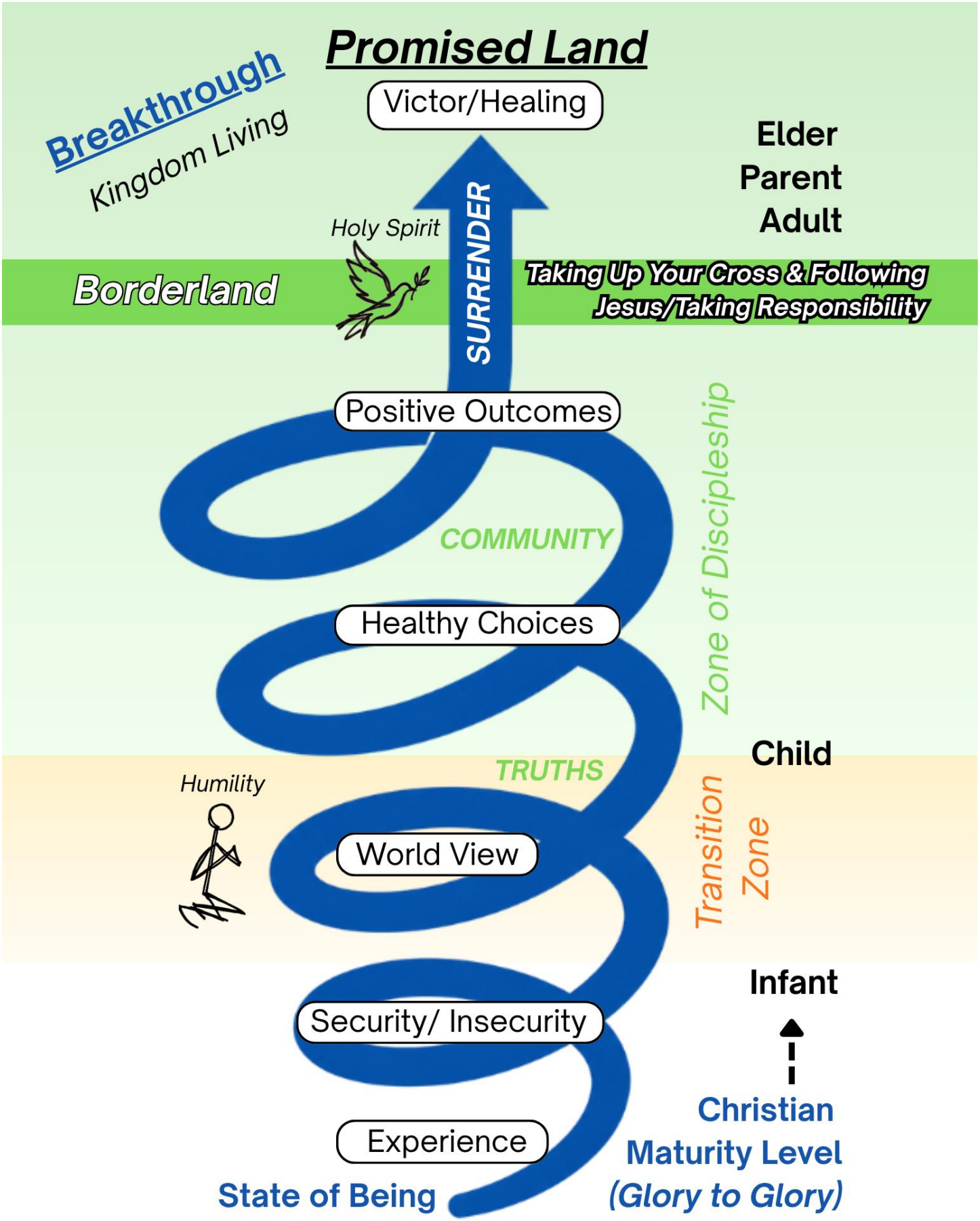
Where do you recognize your own recurring spiral?

Name one experience, one belief it reinforced, and one response that keeps following it. Then ask:
***"Jesus, what is true here—and what faithful step are You inviting me to take?"***

**Discussion questions:**

1. Where do I keep asking God for relief while resisting an invitation to change?
2. What conclusion about myself, other people, or God do I repeatedly treat as unquestionable truth?
3. What familiar response do I return to when obedience feels uncertain?
4. What step of obedience have I postponed while waiting for someone else to change?
5. Who can lovingly challenge my assumptions and help me take a faithful next step?


Wasteland
Recurring Captivity
A Dominion of Deception
Borderland
Artificial Ceiling/Not Taking Responsibility
Frustrated Consumer
Comfortable Immaturity (Consumer)
Childish Immaturity
Infant
Christian Maturity Level (Consumerism)
Zone of Discipleship
Transition Zone
Becoming a Critic
Victim Mindset
Negative Outcomes
Unhealthy Choices
ISOLATION
World View
Generational Trauma
LIES
Security/ Insecurity
Experience
State of Being


Promised Land
Victor/Healing
Breakthrough
Kingdom Living
Elder
Parent
Adult
Holy Spirit
SURRENDER
Borderland
Taking Up Your Cross & Following Jesus/Taking Responsibility
Positive Outcomes
COMMUNITY
Zone of Discipleship
Healthy Choices
TRUTHS
Child
Humility
World View
Transition Zone
Infant
Security/ Insecurity
Christian Maturity Level (Glory to Glory)
Experience
State of Being