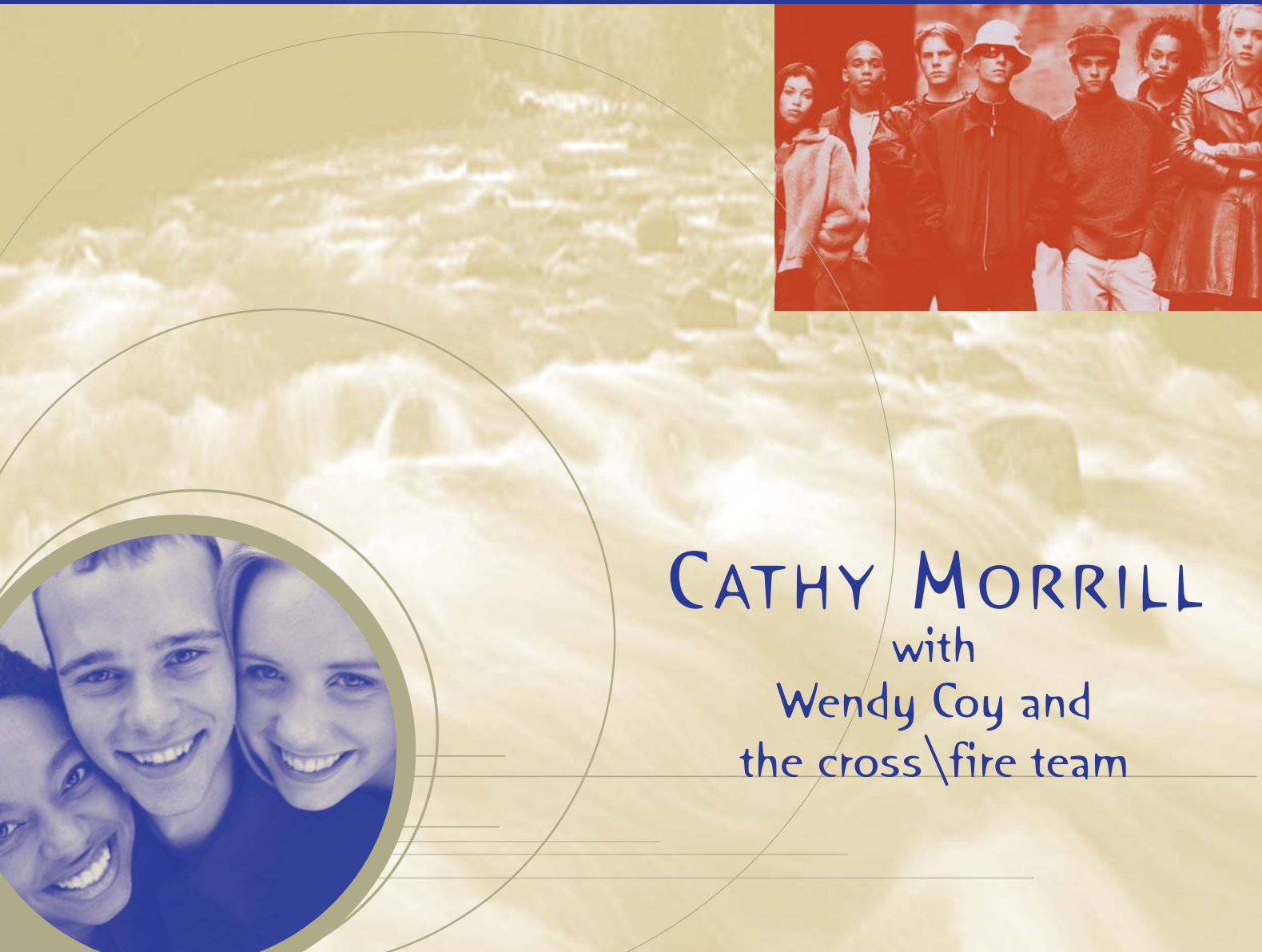


Solutions™

relational healing for the next generation™
for the next generation™



CATHY MORRILL
with
Wendy Coy and
the cross \fire team



SOULutions helped me in my understanding of myself and who I was created to be. I believe this material provides a good foundation that will undoubtedly bring healing and freedom for many. — Sean, age 19

SOULutions breaks down all walls. In the first chapters, I became aware that it is OK to have needs. I also learned that other Christians go through and deal with the same things I do, but they usually don't talk about it. — Sarah, age 18

SOULutions is a great lifelong tool in helping to have healthier relationships and restoring broken relationships. — Jen, age 21



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the cross\fire team

F O R E W O R D
B Y

Andrew Comiskey

P U B L I S H E D
B Y

DESERT **Stream**
P R E S S

SOULutions by Cathy Morrill with Wendy Coy and the cross\fire team

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Published by Desert Stream Press

P.O. Box 17635

Anaheim, CA 92817-7635

Web-site: www.desertstream.org

Publication Coordinators: Dale DeMarchi and Annette Comiskey

Creative Director: Bob Mack, Immanuel Communications

Cover Design: Ron Lara

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International Standard Book Number: 1-930159-00-5

Printed in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

Many people encouraged SOULutions along the way. They helped give it form and created the environment in which it could grow. Many thanks to all of them, especially to...

Andy and Annette Comiskey, for believing that God's hand was really in this project! For their support and contribution during the writing and editing process, for helping to shape the guidebook, and for allowing us to build on the Living Waters program.

The Desert Stream staff for their intercession and support along the way.

Phil and Wendy Coy for their willingness not only to believe that God wanted to do something in our midst, but for doing something about it. And for fostering creative expression and for the many hours of thinking aloud and fellowship together, and for their extensive editing work!

Matt Fairfield, Kim Milanovich, Claire Albright, Sherry Adams, Christine Wood, Holly Rankin and Kristin Kinser, Jim Fredericks, Dale DeMarchi and Mark Pertuit for feedback and work on SOULutions.

My home church, St. Stephen's, in Sewickley, PA for their faithful support.

The students and faculty of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry who supported and read SOULutions.

The students who have participated in our programs.

To the glory of God and the extension of His kingdom in the lives of the next generation!

CATHY MORRILL

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Forward

It's hard for me to walk down the street without seeing some evidence of brokenness in young men and women.

Maybe it's loneliness bordering on despair, maybe seduction (heterosexual or homosexual), maybe the dull, glassy-eyed gaze of a drug-user. The evidence of a generation uncentered in the Father's love is everywhere.

For many years I've had the privilege of helping men and women to receive the Father's love and to begin to grasp who they truly are as His sons and daughters. Such clarity in personal identity impacts one's sexuality and relationships - that has been and continues to be the essence of Living Waters, a program I developed for those seeking to love aright.

But Living Waters bears the mark of an adult expressing truths to other adults; its length and language is ill-suited for a younger generation, particularly those in their late teens and early twenties. To my delight Wendy Coy of Rock the World began to engage with us at Desert Stream about taking the Living Waters material and applying it to 16–25 year-olds.

Our collaboration with Rock the World deepened when Wendy's co-worker, Cathy Morrill, joined us as a staff intern at Desert Stream. The joy of coming alongside of Cathy was matched by catching her vision for youth and young adults. Unlike my generation, her peers were conceived in the rebellion and confusion, and perversion of our sexual revolution! They now bear its devastating effects in a variety of relational and sexual ways. I began to grasp the profound need for SOULutions.

Cathy released to me her rough draft of SOULutions in five-chapter blocks. In them, she demonstrated a profound understanding of the core biblical and psychological truths necessary for healing. At the same time, she conveyed a sensitivity to a new generation that had been honed through her own healing and through several years

of youth work, including her time with Wendy at Rock the World.

Cathy's take on the mother and father wound, on family brokenness, and the poor choices we tend to make in our emptiness rang true to me. And her firm reliance on the love of the Father, revealed through the Son, and released by His Spirit as we cry out for mercy together, made these truths liberating insights.

I especially appreciated her commitment to the local body of Christ as the place of liberation. Knowing the truth intellectually is one thing. Becoming established in the truth of who we actually are as His sons and daughters is another. SOULutions requires a context—the community of faith where we can discover our true selves through relationship with others.

In that way, SOULutions offers no magic solution. It is simply a collection of well-expressed truths and insights that serves as a guide to a new generation. It points to Christ and His Church, to the multi-layered effects of sin, and how we can be restored to our true selves and destinies. That destiny—to love others purely and well—is nothing less than the call of every Christian, and the hallmark of a redeemed community.

Above all else, I believe that SOULutions will be a mighty tool in God's hands for restoring a new generation. May its impact resound throughout the Church for all who seek His Kingdom!

ANDREW COMISKEY

Founder and Director
Desert Stream Ministries

Introduction

Welcome to SOULutions!

“Can God really heal wounds from the past?”

“Can He change how we see ourselves?”

“How can we have healthy relationships?”

“Is healing of relational and sexual brokenness real?” Yes, and SOULutions is a tool to help you answer these questions.

We all have brokenness, wounds and baggage in our lives. We all struggle to find good relationships and to know who we “really are.” Some of us struggle with issues like abuse, addiction or homosexuality. Others of us have issues that are more general, but we know that they have a big impact on our lives.

This book is for those struggling with big issues. It’s for those who want to understand why we do what we do and feel the ways that we feel. It’s for all of us who want to get rid of “the stuff” that keeps us from better relationships with other people and with God.

This book is for anyone interested in a deeper relationship with Jesus, and for anyone who wants to deal with the real issues beneath the surface.

God wants to reveal to us the things that block our relationships with Him and others. But He wants to give us more than insight. He wants to transform us.

Jesus was quite clear about His mission. He came to heal us and to set us free. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18–19).

Jesus is referring not only to financial poverty, physical blindness or actual imprisonment. He’s addressing our emotional poverty, imprisoned spirits and oppressed minds. He wants to touch the places where we feel most isolated, needy, misunderstood, abandoned, burdened, confused, and hopeless.

SOULutions is a tool designed to help you to meet Jesus in those places.

As you work through SOULutions we believe you will experience Jesus in deeper ways. Even more, Jesus wants to meet with you. Here and now. Just as you are. The God who created the entire universe cares about YOU. He cares about your questions. He understands your pain. He’s interested in your relationships. He knows your desires. He’s listening to you. And He has a plan to set you free.

I pray that as you meet Jesus in these pages, you will be changed by His love, His hope and His freedom.

In that hope,

CATHY MORRILL

How to use SOULutions

***Congratulations on picking up a copy of SOULutions!** We're excited about how God will meet you in the following pages. To help you get the most out of this book, we want to let you know what to expect and why we designed SOULutions the way we did.*

First, this isn't a book you simply read! SOULutions is here for you to interact with, make notes in, re-read as necessary, and respond to as it applies to your life. There is a lot of material in these pages and much of it may be new for you. Don't rush! Take some time to let the ideas sink in. Give God enough time and space to reveal Himself to you in these areas. We've included testimonies in each chapter, where people share their real struggles and the encouragement that God is at work. Prayers and questions at the end of each chapter both help you respond to the topic and explore the ideas even further.

Second, we hope you will be engaged and challenged. We designed the layout to encourage you to ponder the topics. Key points are highlighted and in each chapter testimonies, relevant questions, and related information are featured in boxes. Be sure to read them and not just pass them by! There is space to answer the questions at the end of each chapter but feel free to use other paper if you need more room. You may want to use a journal to record your responses and what God reveals during this time.

Third, expect God to move as you read SOULutions, answer the questions and pray the prayers. God wants to bring healing into your life in many ways and we know He will use this book to access and heal the hurting places of your soul. He wants you to know Him more. He is passionate about you being free to love Him, yourself, and others. So expect much! Be open to Him. Give Him permission to do whatever He wants with SOULutions in your life. You are at the beginning of an incredible time and you are not alone in working through these tough issues in your life. Trust God — He will be faithful!

Fourth, we suggest you invite a couple of people you trust to support you in prayer during this time. Whether a friend, pastor, mentor, or family member, you will benefit from knowing that others are encouraging you and praying for you. Tell them that you need their prayers as you look at these tough issues. Be sure to let them know how God is both revealing hurts and healing you along the way so that they can know your current needs.

Finally, you can use SOULutions on your own or in a group context. Both Desert Stream Ministries and Rock the World YouthMission Alliance offer programs that use this book to minister to teens and young adults. Contact information for these ministries is available at the back of the book.



What happened to my SOUL?

There's an ache inside of us. We want more. Perhaps we're looking for good friends, real community, the right relationship, a good school, a decent job, a little extra money, or the right look.

We are . . .

#1 Created in His image

We matter!! We are God's children, created in His image. And we are created to have a relationship with God. When we accept Christ into our lives, we enter into a relationship with God as His children.

Many of us have poor self-images. And there are many reasons for this. We'll be exploring these reasons throughout SOULutions. The truth is that we're God's children, and because of that, we are incredibly important. As children resemble their natural parents, so we resemble our spiritual Father.

QUESTION

Do you think God really has a good plan for your life?

- Yes, but I'm afraid I can't live up to it
- No, just look at my life so far
- People say He does, but I don't know what I really think
- Yes, and it is boring and strict
- I think _____

"So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Ge 1:27).

No matter how messed up we feel, or what our lives are like—boring, ordinary or traumatic, we need to know our true identity: we are His children, created in His image.

#2 Created for relationships

We need each other. Loneliness is painful because we are created for relationships! God lives in relationship (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). And we who are made in His image are meant to have close relationships.

And so we try to change ourselves and our relationships,

hoping to find what will take away the ache. But many of us know that "a little more" does not satisfy our souls. We've tried to fill the emptiness but still hunger for more. WE NEED A LOT MORE.

Jesus has more for us. Whatever struggles we have—broken relationships, confusion, loneliness, addictions, or the wounds of broken families or past hurts, Jesus wants to give us new life in those places.

Jesus said, **"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"** (Jn 10:10b RSV).

Whether we were abused or abandoned, whether we slept around, cheated and lied, or lived on the streets, God sees past our broken and extraneous outsides to the person He created and loves.

He sees each of us, full of gifts, purpose, and the capacity to love. Our lives are not just a random accident, or an ordinary, meaningless experience.



It is not GOOD for THE

“It is not good for the man to be alone” (Ge 2:18). That is what God said after creating Adam. So He created Eve. Our loneliness, like Adam’s, draws us into relationships. This loneliness is an aspect of our sexuality. Our sexuality is more than sex and romance. It’s a powerful and creative part of us that draws us into community and relationships in general.

#3 Created to be strong ♂ or ♀

It’s important to be secure and whole in our sense of ourselves as guys and girls. To not have this security can have crippling effects in our lives.

Gender (being male or female) matters. Created in His image, we reflect different aspects of God. Guys reveal particular aspects of God’s image. Girls, likewise, reveal unique aspects of His image. Together in our differences, we reflect a fuller picture of God’s nature. Richard Foster writes, “Strange as it may seem, our sexuality, our maleness and femaleness, is somehow related to our creation in the image of God.”¹

We need God and each other to be whole ♂ and ♀. He will show us how to form and maintain good relationships.

This is all fine, but . . .

There’s a problem. We live in a fallen world, and often our experiences don’t match God’s plans. Sickness, death, broken families, immorality, evil, poverty and violence are all part of our fallen state. We **sin** and rebel and are hurt by other people’s sin and brokenness.

We choose our own plans rather than following God’s plans. We choose self-sufficiency over dependence on Him.

This problem started in Eden (Ge 3:1–24). God gave Adam and Eve all they needed in the garden with one boundary. They were told not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil or they would die. This was the first boundary given to humans. Boundaries are limits that God sets, or that we set, in order to live and love freely.

Adam and Eve believed the lie of the serpent, that God’s boundaries really hindered them and “what could be.” So they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge.²

THOUGH WE HAVEN’T

lived in Eden, we yearn for it. We were created to live in that perfect place. In our disappointment, we turn to counterfeits to satisfy that longing for true love,

such as drugs, sex, food, or drinking.



#4 Created for a purpose

Our purpose is not just random relationships and odd jobs. We were created primarily to love God and others with everything we are. (Mt 22:37–40). Love changes lives; it is how we make a difference in the world. As we grow in Him, then we can love God and others. “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

God also gives us particular gifts, skills, missions, and goals. As we grow in our relationship with God, we will discover how we are uniquely wired to serve.

After receiving the “gift” of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve realized they were naked and they felt shame. Their full relationship with God and with each other was destroyed. Instead of reflecting His image clearly, they reflected broken images of Him.

Though we haven’t lived in Eden, we yearn for it. We were created to live in that perfect place. In our disappointment, we turn to counterfeits to satisfy **that longing** for true love, such as drugs, sex, food, or drinking. As a result we develop patterns of relational or sexual sin. Violence, eating disorders, isolation, self-hatred, and addictions, are some expressions of our brokenness.

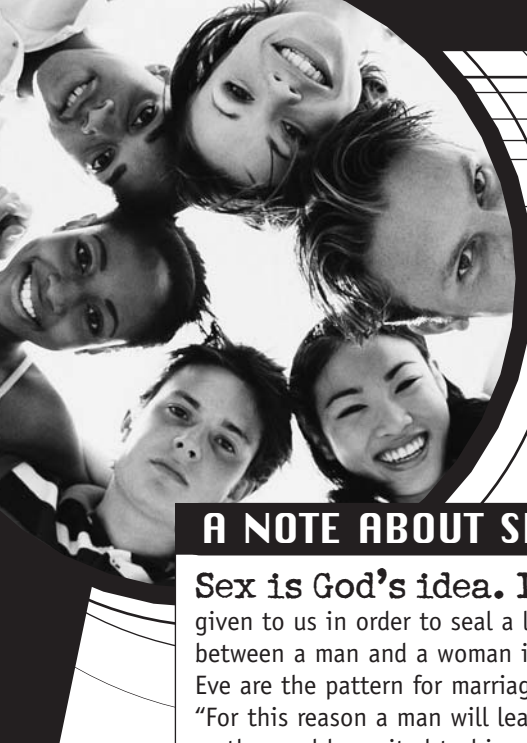
#5 Created to make Him known

All of us are enlisted in the global project of making His love known—beginning with “our neighbors,” and extending to all nations and to the next generation.

Being more whole enables us to more freely make Him known.

Sometimes we hope that the one right relationship will satisfy our longing for real love. Or we hope that the pleasure of sex will be “it.” But the short length of sexual pleasure does not satisfy the soul. We were created for much more.

MAN to be ALONE (Ge 2:18).



Encountering GOD

transforms our lives.

Healing happens when we encounter His life in our places of need.

A NOTE ABOUT SEX:

Sex is God's idea. It is a gift given to us in order to seal a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman in marriage. Adam and Eve are the pattern for marriage and sexual intimacy. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Ge 2:24-25).

Adam and Eve were able to be **naked and unashamed** because they had trust, intimacy and commitment, important elements which can exist fully only in marriage.

Sex outside of the boundary of marriage causes **confusion and pain**. Like a fire outside of a fireplace, it can destroy and burn out of control. Homosexuality, heterosexual brokenness, and unhealthy friendships are reflections of broken boundaries.³

Because of sin our souls are deadened and our ability to trust God and others is damaged. We need healing!

Is there a solution that is bigger than the problem? Yes. God sent His Son, Jesus, to save us from our sin, "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners . . ." (Isa 61:1).

Encountering God transforms our lives. Healing happens when we encounter His life in our places of need.

God heals!!

- "... for I am the Lord, who heals you" (Ex 15:26b).
- "He sent forth His word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave" (Ps 107:20).

Jesus' death on the cross made the way for us to be whole.

- "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed" (1Pe 2:24).

We are offered forgiveness and reconciliation with Him.

But how??

Jesus healed people in the Bible in many different ways. Most healing for our relational and sexual brokenness begins when we say yes to Jesus' invitation to follow Him and join His family. This is to be born again. When we turn to Him, we are made alive. Jesus said, "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn 3:3).

But when we are born again, we still carry sin and baggage, the effects of wounds and failures.

Throughout SOULutions, we will have the opportunity to ask Jesus to meet us in these places.

TESTIMONY

"When I was 16 I came to know

Jesus. And while I knew some freedom as a new Christian (the world made sense to me), I still had a lot of pain in my heart. Because I had this pain in my life, I felt like a failure as a Christian. I hoped that God would just come in and instantly fix things—I thought my family situation would instantly change. All of a sudden I expected to have the perfect boyfriend. None of this happened. Healing came as He showed me that He loved me right where I was, but that He would not leave me there!! He would unpack the mess I was in and He **WOULD** heal me."

Because of sin our souls are deadened and our ability to trust God & others is damaged. We need healing!

... for I am the Lord, who heals you (Ex 15:26b).

Jesus comes to us as **living water** for our thirsty, broken and aching souls. Jesus offered great hope to the adulterous woman at the well. "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:13-14).

Like the woman at the well, we can ask Jesus for this living water. And in His healing waters, we are freed from the hurts and wounds of the past. We can find joy, hope, victory, depth, truth and restoration.

Healing does not mean that life will be easy. We cannot even predict what healing will look like. Only in heaven will we no longer have pain or temptation. Here on earth, the wholeness we will find has to do with how wisely and consistently well we deal with our brokenness.⁴

Solutions for the SOUL

What is the soul? Made in the image of God, many have compared the soul to a house or container that holds God's Spirit. Our souls are made up of our mind and heart—including our will, emotions, memory, feelings, intuition, and imagination.⁵ That covers a lot!!

THE SOUL

Sound too mystical? What does it have to do with our brokenness? Keep reading . . .

Our souls are shaped by our experiences, both positive and negative by which our souls either grow or get damaged.

The Bible says that the soul was created with a longing for God (Ps 63:1). It is really **important**. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Mt 16:26).

Do you have any idea how awe-inspiring YOUR SOUL is? Author and healer, Leanne Payne says that our souls are bigger than our bodies! Theresa of Avila, a 16th century mystic, likens our souls to incredible castles that reflects God.

"I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions . . . I can find nothing with which to compare the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity . . . the very fact that His Majesty says it is made in His image means that we can hardly form any conception of the soul's great dignity and beauty."⁶

"I SOUGHT GOD BECAUSE EVEN AT 17

I was tired of the emptiness of my life, and especially of the gay youth subculture. I had strong homosexual feelings and I wondered if there was a way to change. I felt so different than other Christians,

as if my sin was so much worse. But God showed me that we each have our struggles and sins. In fact, as God showed me a lot of what was underneath my

struggle, I saw that other people in my youth group struggled with similar things. It's complicated, but there were several big hurts and insecurities that contributed to my struggle, like not having a good relationship with my dad. Jesus met me in a powerful way, and showed me how real His love is. I have experienced changes in my feelings. But my whole life is different. Jesus is changing every part of my life. Just like He wants to do in all of our lives, give us joy and freedom HIS WAY. It's not easy. I have to be willing to change and follow Jesus. But it is so worth it.

I want to encourage you, that Jesus is real and can change your life too."



Does your interior castle feel more like a cardboard shack?

Often we are more familiar with our sin, brokenness and wounds, than with the wonder of being made in His image. Often we see our sexuality more like an enemy or a weapon in a battle rather than part of the castle. But as we fix our eyes on Jesus and worship Him, He will transform us.

Worshipping God is essential to our healing. It cultivates our heart's true passion: God. Our other passions and desires, no matter how great or overwhelming they seem to us, pale in comparison to His true passion.⁷

As we worship, we meet with our powerful God, who tenderly loves us. In worship we look upon the face of God and we are **transformed into His likeness**. This is a basic principle: we will be shaped by whatever we focus on.

When we focus on our brokenness, our pain and our confusion, without primary focus on Jesus, we lack His transforming power. It becomes pretty overwhelming. It is hard enough to be honest and real with Jesus alongside.

But as we worship God, His life flows into us. He fills our souls with His love. And in our weakness and brokenness, His power shines through us so that the world can see His amazing grace. This—knowing and revealing God—is the goal of our healing. Paul writes about how God allows us to be broken vessels of His love:

*"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But **we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us**" (2Co 4:5-7).*

As we lay our lives down, we receive the life of JESUS. Are you ready for this radical, life altering, journey!?

*"For we do
not preach
ourselves, but
Jesus Christ
as Lord,"
(2Co 4:5)*



As we worship, we meet
with our powerful God,
WHO TENDERLY

loves us. In worship we look upon the
face of God and we are transformed into
His likeness.



#1

What struggles or brokenness prompted you to participate in this program/read this book?

#2

Have you asked Jesus into your life? How does that relate to your search for healing?

#3

How does knowing that you are made in God's image impact your view of yourself?

#4

Think about how you see your soul. If your soul were a house, how would you describe it? Is it more like a cardboard shack—broken and neglected—or more like a castle—beautiful and strong?

#5

IS WORSHIP a regular part of your life? How?

#6

Will you ask **JESUS** to come in and change you? How will you **COMMIT** to this growing process (be realistic and specific about attendance at the group, reading, prayer, keeping a journal, etc.)?

QUESTIONS?

Uncovering our NEEDS

Weaknesses, faults and honesty don't sell products. Advertisers know that. They train us, the consumers, to focus on the packaging and image. They appeal to our desire to deny weaknesses and needs—to live in a world of image.

need different aspects of love, such as protection, safety, consistency and nurture.

THE
NEEDS
OF
MY
HEART

God LOVE,
TRUST, Protection
Nurture, FAMILY
HEART ACCEPTANCE
friends, Security, freedom
others _____

Denying our weaknesses and needs is very appealing,

especially when we are aware of areas of brokenness in our lives.

Often we fear that God is not big enough, or that He is not really here with us. Perhaps we think that we need to come to Him with our best foot forward, to impress Him. **God knows our hearts** already. He is not surprised or overwhelmed by our souls. His love is tender, unending and powerful.

It's hard to admit that we have needs. But in reality, we can't fix ourselves; we need Jesus and others.

Jesus is waiting for us to invite Him (and often others) into the deep places. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

Underneath . . .

We have three foundational needs: 1. relationship with God, 2. meaningful relationships with others, and 3. significant purpose. This is how we were created.

Within these general categories we have many specific emotional and relational needs. We need different kinds of relationships, such as family and friends. And we

Problems? Needs? Not me!

Sometimes we think that we have no needs or problems. This is called denial. For example, an athlete with a painful injury wants to play in the game. He says, "Hurting? Who's hurting? I'm fine." His limp and dripping blood, however, indicate pain (and denial). As in this case, denial often serves a purpose; here it is to continue playing the game.

In the end, our needs catch up with us. At best we may do a good job covering them.

TESTIMONY

"I always thought that it was a bad thing to be needy. Not in the kingdom of God. That is just reality for all of us. I always wanted to have manageable needs that I could control. But I don't. I had a lot of pain in my life, and it came out in a bunch of ways, like depression and insecurity. At one point I was anorexic and prone to obsessing about lots of stuff. Later, I struggled with lesbian tendencies. All of these came out of my hurting heart. I was afraid of the roots of these struggles. Healing meant going through the pain I was avoiding. So I invited Him into those parts of my lonely heart, wounded by past emotional and sexual abuse. Jesus has been filling me with His amazing love and changing me from the deep inside. I am finding real freedom!!"



Adam hid from

We can run, but we can't hide...

Since the beginning, we have hidden from God and each other. Adam hid from God in the garden (Ge 3:10). Jonah ran from the Lord's call (Jnh 1:3). Peter denied Jesus three times, claiming not to know him (Mt 26:69-75).

Even though people in the Bible ran from God, they could not hide. Adam was "found" by God; Jonah went to Nineveh anyway (via the belly of the whale) and Peter repented for running from Jesus and became the rock of the church.

God pursues us too. If we run from Him we will continue to suffer from the effects of our brokenness and so will others. It's in our best interest to face the issues and pain in our lives with God. So, it is worth thinking about what we're afraid of, and what we gain from covering our needs.

Hiding our needs and weaknesses distances us from God. (In other words, it's sin.) Sin is not trusting God with our needs, it is taking our needs into our own hands. In the process, we place our faith in our own methods rather than in God. "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (Ro 14:23).

Andy Comiskey writes, "We struggle in vain to be whole apart from Him. At core our problem is pride, our own tendency toward self-reliance, as opposed to God reliance."¹

When we offer our needs to Jesus, He will meet them. And as we confess our sins, they will be forgiven. But if we don't acknowledge our needs, then sin patterns will continue to grip us.

WE CAN RUN, BUT WE can't hide...

Since the beginning, we have hidden from God and each other. Adam hid from God in the garden (Ge 3:10). Jonah ran from the Lord's call (Jnh 1:3).

Peter denied Jesus three times, claiming not to know him (Mt 26:69-75).

QUESTION

Think about your own life. Why do you run from admitting you have needs?

- "I am afraid of the pain underneath. It is overwhelming."
- "I am used to escaping from my pain. So I forget there's any reason to change."
- "If they knew about my struggle, they would reject me."
- "I don't believe this issue has to do with my needs; it is who I am: I am gay [or angry, or an addict]."
- "I'm a Christian, I'm not supposed to struggle with _____" (fill in the blank).
- "When I run, it feels like the problem doesn't exist."
- "I really don't have a clue about what my needs are."
- "I don't want to depend on other people, or God, for that matter."
- "I know I have needs, but I don't know how they can be met. Isn't it too late?"
- _____

Shame, self-hatred and pride cover needs.

Shame

We all feel the urge to hide when we mess up and when we don't want people to see our hearts. This desire to hide is called shame. Just as Adam and Eve hid behind fig leaves in the garden, we also hide.²

There are two kinds of shame.

#1 There is a healthy shame which is the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit. This healthy shame points to God and prompts us to restore our relationships through reconciliation. It brings to light particular sin rather than creating feelings of general badness.

Sometimes we don't feel this healthy shame because we dull our hearts to the Holy Spirit's prodding. The psalmist said, "today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts**" (Ps 95:7-8). This good shame will sensitize our hearts to know when we have sinned.

#2 Toxic or unhealthy shame, on the other hand, drives us away from God and from Christian fellowship and toward self-hatred. Often a person experiencing toxic shame feels like he or she cannot look someone in the eye.



GOD in the **GARDEN** (Ge 3:10).



We are primarily God's

children, created by Him. Our sin is secondary and forgiven in Jesus.

Robert McGee writes

in *The Search for Significance* that this toxic shame is a “deep sense of inferiority,”³ experienced as overwhelming feelings of general “badness.”⁴ He writes, “feelings of inferiority can result from prolonged patterns of failure, or they can stem from only one or two haunting instances.”⁵

Major roots of shame

#1 Childhood abuse

When we’ve been abused, we usually feel tainted or marked. As children we’re unable to understand that someone we thought we could trust would hurt us. And so, often, we blame ourselves. In this way, someone who was physically abused might believe, “I must be really bad because he would not have hit me unless I deserved it.” Sometimes we were told that the abuse was our fault, that we deserved it, or asked for it. This belief of “being really bad” is the core of toxic shame.

#2 Continual relational or sexual struggles

When we have persistent relational or sexual struggles we often have a lot of shame. We may feel alone and set apart from other “normal” sinners. If we struggle homosexually, we may feel that we are categorically gross, or perverted.⁶ If we struggle with an addiction to masturbation, or have a hard time relating with the same or opposite sex, we may likewise feel shame.⁷

It can be helpful to remember that everyone needs Jesus. Even the most carefree or seemingly perfect person needs Him. We all “fall short of the glory of God” and stand in need of being saved (Ro 3:23). Some of us, though, are more aware of our needs and sins than others.

What are **the effects of shame**? There are many. Shame can cause us to be passive, to be afraid to try new things, afraid to make commitments, afraid of failing or afraid of being found out as bad.

Another effect of shame is the loss of creativity. Robert McGee writes, “When we are ashamed of ourselves over a period of time, the cutting edge of our creativity atrophies. We tend to become so preoccupied with our own inferiority that we are unable to come up with new ideas.”⁸

Those who struggle with shame also often struggle with self-hatred.

Self-hatred

“I’m so stupid.” “I hate my body.” “Why can’t I do anything right?” “I’m so ugly.” “No one will ever love me.” These are a few of the many lines of self-hatred.

When we struggle with self-hatred, it becomes very familiar, almost as if it’s a friend. It can often seem more right than wrong and can even appear stoic or humble. It is good to hate our sin but not who we are!

Self-hatred rejects God’s love for us. “Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Isa 64:8). Who are we the clay to dislike what the potter has made? He created us and was pleased. And he restores us through Jesus.

We are primarily God’s children, created by Him. Our sin is secondary and forgiven in Jesus. Self-hatred is NOT humble. It’s not a Christian concept, and it doesn’t please God.

Self-hatred is sin; **it hates what God made**. It is destructive and leads to death in our hearts. It also can lead to suicide or other forms of self-destruction.

We all fall short of the glory of **God**... (Ro 3:23).

We tend to become so preoccupied with our own inferiority that we are unable to come up with new ideas.

Sometimes we think that self-hatred will lessen our pain or brokenness. For example, hating yourself because of an addiction will not cause it to go away. Only seeking Jesus brings lasting change as He heals, forgives, and teaches us to have healthy relationships.

Humility is the opposite of self-hatred. Self-hatred is very self-absorbed. True humility, on the other hand, is so **absorbed in the love of God** that the self is forgotten. Our eyes are lifted off of ourselves and we are free to see God and others.

We need to confess our self-hatred as a sin before God. And then we need to renounce it. To renounce is to disown something. It is to say that we did own it, but that we no longer own it. God's love and power can separate us from it. Self-hatred often dies slowly, so continue to confess and disown it. And since it is an expression of our wounded hearts, we need Jesus to heal the deeper hurts.

Pride

We all struggle with pride. We want our own way, and think we can find a better way than God's plan. In our pride we try to justify our sins and weaknesses.

Sometimes we throw out His rules about seeking Him first, about sex, or other things. "But this relationship is different." "But the gay community is so loving." "But everyone else says it's okay."

Sometimes we, also out of pride, refuse to see ourselves in need. Or we feel that God "owes us" because of how rotten life has been. Or we become full of self-pity, and absorbed in our problems in such a way that we refuse to walk forward with Jesus.

Those who do not know Jesus think pride helps them keep their heads up as they move through life. But as Christians, pride keeps us separate from God, although often subtly.

So, about those needs underneath

If a baby needs something, he or she makes it known! Our souls are the same way. If our needs are not met, in one way or another, we express it.

This is true for our needs today, and it is also true of our needs from the past. If our needs were not met in the past, that may effect how we see ourselves and the world around us, and how we relate.

For many of us our brokenness is our own sinful attempt to meet these deeper, past needs—whether in addiction, depression, homosexuality, promiscuity, or violence, among other possible expressions.⁹ Underneath, our hearts are crying out because we're lonely, empty, anxious, hopeless, insecure or angry.

As we understand the needs underneath, we can begin to connect the causes and effects.

"I THOUGHT THAT MY MAIN PROBLEM WAS OVER-EATING.

Now I understand that I have used food to comfort myself, to cope with ***pain and loneliness. My whole family did this. And when my mom died, I was overwhelmed with sadness and fear. So I turned to food, feeling like I was all***

alone. This is where God is meeting me. As I grieve the loss of my mom, I am learning to not turn to food."



It can be scary to get real about the brokenness in our lives.

God will meet us as we offer Him our needs and weaknesses.

Andy Comiskey writes, "God loves our weaknesses; we hate them. He [wants] to shine through the holes, the gaps, and the frailties of our fallen humanity.

We, on the other hand, want the gaps closed up for good." We tend to think that God wants to work with our strengths, and get rid of our weaknesses, but God, "seeks to make us free for Him in our weaknesses."¹⁰

**God
desires
to use the
"cracks" in
us to allow
His life
to shine
through.**

In Jesus, there is power in weakness.

God sees our needs and weaknesses as opportunities to love and transform us. Paul wrote that we are like cracked jars of clay, broken vessels through which people can see that the power within us is from God and not our own (2Co 4:5-7). God desires to use the "cracks" in us to allow His life to shine through.

In fact, God said to Paul, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9). In our weakness we need to depend on Jesus. Jesus longs to have us depend on Him, so He works powerfully when we come to Him in our weakness.¹¹

Response:


You can pray something like this . . .

if you struggle with self-hatred:

"Lord, I confess my self-hatred to you as sin. Thank you God for making me in Your image. I renounce (disown) self-hatred in Jesus' name. Thank You that this dark hatred no longer has control over me. I receive Your love. Touch this wounded part of me. I want to live in Your amazing love which lives inside of me."¹²

to acknowledge your needs:

"Thank You that Your love is deeper than my needs, and that You never leave me. You really can meet my needs. Holy Spirit I invite You to come and show me the needs of my heart. I open my heart up to You, Jesus. I place my needs in Your care. I confess the sinful ways I cover my needs. Teach me to come to You instead. I ask You to take away my shame. I know that it is just a cover that separates me from You. Come deeper into my life."



Jesus longs to have us
depend on Him, so He
WORKS POWERFULLY
when we come to Him in our weakness.

QUESTIONS?



#1

Do you, your friends, church, youth group, or family value people's appearance and the results of what they do (even if it's just being good) more than being honest, real, and authentic? How?



#2

Have you been ashamed of (and covered up) your brokenness? Have you hated yourself because of a particular struggle? Do you struggle with self-hatred? If so, how?



#3

Has pride made it difficult for you to admit your brokenness? If so, how? (For example, I can't admit I struggle with _____ because I am a Christian leader, etc.)



#4

What are the needs in your heart? How do they relate to your relational and/or sexual struggles?



#5

How do you run from or cover up your needs?



#6

Where is JESUS right now in relationship to your **NEEDS?**

GOD the FATHER

Knowing God the Father will be ESSENTIAL to this healing process. Why? Because it is His voice we need to hear. It is Him we need to trust. It is His empowerment we need. We need to know that He values us and that He will meet our needs and answer the cries of our hearts.

His love and power really can change our lives.

You might be asking why we call God, "Father." This could be a long discussion, but in very simple terms, we call Him Father because He IS like a father to us and because Jesus called him "Father." Jesus prayed to His Father and taught us also to pray to our Father: "Our Father in heaven ..." (Mt 6:9).

Do you wonder how we can know that our heavenly Father is trustworthy when we have not seen Him? Jesus said, "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Jesus' compassion, healing, forgiveness, and love mirror our heavenly Father.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (Jas 1:17).

You might find this topic painful if...

- you have a bad relationship with your father
- you don't have a relationship with your father
- your father is emotionally distant
- you have been abused (especially by a man)

Hang in there!! God is not like those people, and He wants to show you His perfect love!

What is God the Father like? He loves.

- "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness" (Jer 31:3).

He listens and responds.

- "I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Ps 40:1-3).

He is close.

- "O, Lord you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar" (Ps 139:1-2).
- "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths You are there" (Ps 139:7-8).

He gives hope.

- "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer 29:11).

He gives freedom.

- "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2Co 3:17).

He leads.

- "In your unfailing love You will lead the people You have redeemed. In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling" (Ex 15:13).

He disciplines.

- "And you have forgotten the word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you ...'" (Heb 12:5).

He is a good father and He loves revealing the truth about His character.

I have LOVED YOU WITH

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus gives us a picture of a radically loving father welcoming his rebellious son home (Lk 15:11-32). This father illustrates the kind of **extravagant love** God the Father has for us. The father was not too busy or preoccupied with work. When he found out his son was coming home, **he ran to meet him**. When the child returned, the father did not even care about the son's apology. The father immediately embraced him and gave him his best robe. He was not ashamed of him even after the son had left him, had squandered all of his money and had associated with the lowest of the low. The father threw a party, wanting everyone to know that his son was back. His son was honored and welcomed back into the family.¹

It is important to look honestly at our relationships with our fathers.³ If our fathers (or mothers) were distant, absent, abusive, insensitive, uncaring, passive, cold, too busy, never satisfied with what we did, harsh, mean, controlling, condemning, critical, or hypocritical - our image of God will be distorted. We usually believe that God, too, is like this. We need to have our image of God our Father transformed by drawing closer to Him and letting Him father us.

Our relationship with God the Father will be shaped by our relationships with our earthly parents and other significant authority figures. God designed us this way. He wanted our moms and dads to model His love and point us to Him.



“FATHERS, DO NOT EXASPERATE YOUR children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”
(Eph 6:4).

Children or orphans?

Before Jesus died, He told the disciples, **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”** (Jn 14:18).

We will always be His little children, and we will need His fathering throughout our lives.

God wants us to know Him as our loving Father. When we receive Jesus into our lives, we are born into God's family. However, often we continue to live as if we still are spiritual orphans because we can't relate to God as our Father. We don't know the empowerment and blessing that come from knowing that we are children of the God of the universe and that He cares intimately.

Our relationship with God the Father will be shaped by our relationships with our earthly parents and other significant authority figures. God designed us this way. He wanted our moms and dads to model His love and point us to Him. **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”** (Eph 6:4).

From our parents' love, He hopes we will know that we can trust Him, that He is faithful, that He is generous to us, that He delights in us, that we always have His attention, and that He loves us unconditionally.²

TESTIMONY

“I hated the idea of calling God Father. It felt really fake and formal, and yet somehow I knew I needed Him. My father and I had a very distant relationship. But, often, when I saw him, he looked to me for help and advice. Sometimes I felt like I was the parent. It was draining, uncomfortable, and made me really angry. So when people called God “Father,” I would get that same drained feeling. As I brought my feelings about my dad to God, I had a sense of God putting His hand on my back and encouraging me forward, giving me hope of moving ahead, of being able to forgive my dad and to receive from God. This has become the hallmark of my experience of God as my father. He was not going to take from me but rather give to me!! I really need Him to father me. I need His steady and pure love encouraging me.”

an EVERLASTING love . . . (Jer 31:3)



A father communicates "you can do it"... which becomes "I can do it!"

What fathers give us...

Fathers are essential in the life of a whole family. We often minimize their importance because in our culture so many fathers are absent, emotionally, if not physically. Fathers provide an important protection for a family. These are other key qualities of a father that reflect God's character: kindness, empowerment and affirmation.

Kindness

When a father is kind, a child will grow strong and confident that his father loves him or her. This tender care takes into consideration our need for encouragement and affection. If we experienced kind love from our fathers, it will be much easier to experience our heavenly Father in His kindness.

Dads uniquely impart affirmation and empowerment. These are essential aspects of God's character that we need in life.

Empowerment

A father who is patient and consistent communicates "you can do it" to his child. This instills a confidence which becomes "I can do it!" This kind of empowerment enables us to be strong in the midst of difficulty, and to deal honestly and patiently with weaknesses. Our will, the ability to choose to do the right thing, is activated by a healthy father's empowerment. If we feel weak, are unable to follow through on even small commitments or have little willpower, we need God to strengthen us.

God can heal our wills (our ability to choose Him) by giving us His strength when we are weak. We can then stand in His power (Col 1:29). God the Father wants us to be strong and empowered people.⁴ This means that we need to have **strong wills to choose God and other good things.**

Affirmation

Fathers also affirm their children as they become young adults. Young women need fathers to affirm that they are attractive, that they have great value, and that they are to be treated respectfully by guys. Teenage guys need fathers to show them how to be men, how to treat women, and how to stand in the world.

We all need our fathers' affirmation. Without it, we can suffer in a variety of ways. These are just a few of the possible consequences of lacking this affirmation:

- feeling like we have to prove ourselves
- lacking confidence in our own opinions
- unable to make decisions
- (girls) looking for this affirmation in a boyfriend
- (guys) being super macho, trying to look like a man on the outside, but insecure inside
- (guys) struggling with homosexuality, sexualizing their need for fatherly, masculine affirmation
- finding affirmation and a sense of empowerment in gangs or cults

No one, except God, can give us what we did not receive from our fathers. Other godly father figures can affirm us,

No one, except God, can give us what we did not receive from our fathers.

DADS uniquely IMPART AFFIRMATION and empowerment.

but they cannot replace real fathering. Only God can do that. And as we ask Him, He loves to father us.

Response:

If you want to know more of God the Father, you can pray something like this . . .

Father, I need You. There are ways I don't see You clearly. Sometimes I have ignored and rejected Your fatherly love. I want to live fully as Your child, not as an orphan. I want to know how good it is to be a child of the King of kings. I cry out for Your touch, for Your voice of affirmation, and for your words of blessing to me as Your son or daughter.

I give You the ways I've been wounded by my father. (List them.) In each of these places I need to hear Your voice of love. Please show me how You are different. Give me a fuller and more intimate picture of You as my father. Show me your kindness.

I deeply need the affirmation of a father. I give to You the sinful ways I have looked for that affirmation. Beneath my brokenness I am a spiritual orphan.

By Your Spirit give me a hunger for Your

empowering, Father. I want to be empowered to choose You, to choose life, and to choose Your ways. I receive Your Spirit now to strengthen my will, to be able to walk in Your authority.

For those who were abused or who fear masculine power, this is a general prayer. Pray what is appropriate for you:

Father I confess my fear of power and masculine strength. I often associate it with abuse or with being overpowered. I haven't known a father's strength that protects, empowers and restores. Instead, I've known power that causes destruction and despair.

Thank you that You are trustworthy and that You draw close to me. I invite You into these painful and wounded places. Cleanse my mind and heart from the bad images of father and men. Give me new images of You as my Father. Deep inside I want to be able to call you Abba, Daddy. I want to experience Your strong fatherly love. Thank You that You are my true Father.⁵

**Read Appendix 1: "The Father Heart of God," by John Dawson.

"...WHEN I WAS AT THE PARK

with my father, he would throw the ball as hard as he could. If I failed to make contact, he would scream at me to "Choke up on the bat!" Upon further failure he would spout

"You big sissy, don't be afraid of the ball." ...I would then begin to cry and my father would slap me to make me stop and

comment that only sissies cry. He would say it in such a way that I would feel physically stabbed in the gut . . . His verbal and emotional abuse misnamed me for years. At the slightest hint of failure, those words would reinforce my belief in myself as a failure. Unable to complete things, fearful of failing, I was proving my father to be right in his assessment of me. Broken and wounded, I tried for years to soothe my wounds by "performing" for others, including God. But He pursued me. Time after time He would reveal himself to me, until I was able to begin to grasp how wide, long, high and deep was His love. He began to fill my deep hunger for love and affirmation. Gradually my picture of God changed and the false words my

father had spoken over me lost their power. I began to live as one redeemed by Christ, no longer under the condemnation of my father's words. In intimate union with my heavenly Father, I found healing."



TESTIMONY

QUESTIONS



#1

How is your relationship with God the Father?



#2

How did your father (and/or other father figures) model the love of God to you? How did they **NOT** model His love?



#3

In what ways do you need affirmation, empowerment and blessing from God the Father?

Responding to His love

Have you noticed how much parents and friends can love a child before she or he is born? Parents and friends talk about and look forward to the arrival of the little one. The baby has not earned this kind of love, she or he has not even had a chance to be cute or good. The parents and friends love the child simply because she or he exists and is connected in some way to them.

Likewise, there is nothing we can do to

earn God's love. His love for us was established before we were born, before we could do anything good or bad. His love is not conditional, based on what we do, it exists because He created us. He nurtures and cares for us simply because we are His children.

This love is modeled (although imperfectly) through the love of a mother. A mother instinctively nurtures and gives life to her child. God likens His love to that of a mother: "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isa 66:13). And God gathers His children, "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Lk 13:34).

Abiding in Him

Like little babies, in response to God's unending love, all we can do is receive His love. In his first letter, Peter wrote that Christians should, "like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk" (1Pe 2:2a). We can do nothing apart from Him. Scripture says that we love only because

He first loved us. All we can do is pass on the love that He gives to us.

We need to learn to receive God's love and to remain in it. The Bible talks about this in several ways.

God wants to come and make His home in us.

"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23).

We, like branches, need to be attached to Him, the vine.

"Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (Jn 15:4 NAS).

To abide in Him is to enter more deeply into relationship with Him and to know peace and rest with Him. **Abiding is the capacity to sit and "be"** before the Lord, to receive from Him, and to listen to Him. In relationships with others, our ability to abide enables us to bond and to relate meaningfully.¹

Psychologist Henry Cloud writes, "If we are to grow and thrive, we need to be 'rooted and grounded in love.' We are literally to drink from, and draw our life from His love. This will change us and cause us to grow. We cannot put a plant in a cardboard box in the garage and expect it to blossom. The plant would not make it for very long. To grow, it must have sunlight, water and nutrients."² God, through the Bible, prayer, worship and other Christians, is the sunlight, water and food we need.

Two models of abiding³

Mary of Bethany, in the story of Mary and Martha, illustrates abiding with Jesus. Jesus valued Mary's ability to receive and to engage with Him. He valued her being in relationship with Him. Perhaps, Martha, who was busy working, thought that if Jesus knew the work that needed to be done, He would have said something to encourage Mary to help her. Martha suggested that. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Lk. 10:40). But Jesus said that Mary had chosen the better place — engaging with and receiving from Jesus.



ABIDING is the CAPACITY

Likewise Mary, the mother of Jesus, models “being” in her response to God.⁴ When the angel appears to her and reveals that she will be the mother of Jesus, she responds, “I am the Lord’s maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as You say” (Lk 1:38). And at Jesus’ birth, Mary “treasured up all those things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

We all need to be able to abide in the Lord and connect meaningfully with others. It is out of abiding that true obedience and true authority come.⁵ **How hard is it for you to be still, to ponder, to receive from God, to listen and then to obey?**

Three things that can cause the breakdown of, or prevent, our developing a sense of being:⁶

#1 Our culture

There are many ways that our culture does not value “being.” “Being,” as opposed to “doing,” can be seen as weak and unproductive. It is hard to “be” in a culture where people move frequently. Community and family relationships become second priority to jobs. Personal interaction and commitment are often replaced by impersonal cyber-relating.

GOD’S DESIGN IS FASCINATING.

***A mother uniquely gives her child nurture, identity, the ability to rest and to abide—
“to be.”***

**Her love is set into
her child’s heart.**

To be

The ability to abide is closely linked with having “a sense of being.” This sense of being is foundational. On the deepest levels it is feeling that, “I am loved; it is good to be alive; I am safe, I am okay and I am secure.”

HOLES IN OUR SOUL?

Without a sense of being, it feels like ...

- there are holes in the bottom of our souls; the love of God and others leaks out quickly. We might receive prayer, but then feel that what was poured into us quickly leaked out
- the lights are on but no one is at home
- we have a deep sense of **emptiness, anxiety or loneliness**
- we are a shell with nothing solid inside
- it is a struggle to take hold of the truth and to live in it
- it is hard to process and to name emotions

#2 Abuse

Violence and abuse can rob us of our sense of well-being and security. The world may seem like an unsafe place. Abuse can erode a solid sense of security.

#3 Nurturing in the early years

A sense of being is first given to us through our mothers, beginning in the womb. Then as we grow, we are able to bond naturally with God and others. Without this bonding (which usually comes through mom but can come from someone else), abiding in God’s love will be very difficult.

God’s design is fascinating. A mother uniquely gives her child nurture, identity, the ability to rest and to abide—“to be.” Her love is set into her child’s heart. The child will feel loved and safe deep inside, and will be able to receive love from God and others more easily. This is foundational.

Dr. Henry Cloud writes, “God has ordained the mothering process to literally ‘call the infant to life.’ The connection of their spirits woos the child into the land of humanness, and the child develops a sense of belonging to the human race.”⁷

to SIT and “be” ...



Through mom's touch,

voice and warmth,

the mother imparts life to the baby. As a newborn looks into his mother's eyes, he can see his own reflection. From this he gains a sense of his own self.

As an infant, a baby

is unable to differentiate himself from anyone else. The baby, who is one with mom before birth, initially continues to feel one with mom after birth. Through mom's touch, voice and warmth, the mother imparts life to the baby. As a newborn looks into his mother's eyes, he can see his own reflection. From this he gains a sense of his own self. This is amazing: the distance a newborn can see is only the distance between mom's breast and mom's eyes. God intended it this way.

In *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, the authors write, "Everything a woman does and says to her infant after birth—all the seemingly purposeless **cooing**, hugging, stroking and even looking—have one specific purpose: to protect and nurture her child."⁸

Especially today, with broken families and many demands on mothers, **this process can break down**. Circumstances in early childhood, such as illness, death, grief, or separation of mother and baby, can interrupt this bonding.

A mother might have been overwhelmed, depressed, unhappy in her marriage, sick, unable to breast-feed, abused, an alcoholic, narcissistic or totally stressed out. Her emotional state affects her baby.

In turn, a baby may feel fearful, unsafe, or like she or he is "too much to handle." Babies can become angry and resentful toward mom when mom isn't there for them. Any of these situations may result in a baby not receiving a sense of being.

This process of bonding can also occur with dad or another person. While it is most natural that this would happen with the mom, the important thing is that the baby attach and bond with someone.

So what are the effects?

Without this primary attachment, it is hard not only to receive but also to form meaningful relationships.⁹ Many have described this lack of bonding as a deep and insatiable hunger. Dr. Henry Cloud writes, "People who can't make emotional attachments live in a state of perpetual hunger. They have a crying need that's not being met."¹⁰

This hunger can fuel addictions or can fuel a strong need to be held. For others, they fear being alone and look to find their sense of being in someone else.

Sometimes people experience very deep needs erotically. If a woman's deep need for mother-love and feminine touch is sexualized, she may develop lesbian tendencies. A man's need for mother-love can contribute to an addiction to pornography and/or an addictive and insatiable longing for women.¹¹

For either sex, a lack of infant bonding with mom can result in a deep love/hate relationship with women.

Restoring a sense of being

Most people do not have clear memories of, or knowledge of, wounds from their infancy. Perhaps you identify with some of the symptoms or have an intuitive sense that you lack a sense of being. The Holy Spirit may reveal to you the root cause in prayer, though clear knowledge of the root isn't necessary for God to heal. If you are aware of difficult circumstances or particular wounds in the first two years of your life, offer them to God in prayer.

"Everything a woman does and says to her infant after birth . . . have one specific purpose: to protect and nurture her child."

Lord, teach ME how to just
"be" with YOU.

God loves to minister to us in these deep places. God not only fathers us, He also mothers us. He nurtures, comforts and cares for us. While we were just little babies, Jesus cared for us. He will give us a sense of being, that deposit of love that will enable us "to be," to abide.

The Holy Spirit can come and fill any empty places.

The Lord will fill in all of the gaps in our lives with His presence. "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:22-23).

Response:

You can pray something like this:

Lord, I want to be able to abide in You, to sit at Your feet and to listen to Your voice. Lord, teach me how to just "be" with You. I long to be able to abide in You.

If you lack a sense of being, pray the following prayer as appropriate to you:

Father, these are the ways I feel deep inside. I feel incomplete, inadequate and desperately hungry. I feel abandoned and unseen. Come into this pain and emptiness. Father, where I am fearful, or angry, or hurting, come and comfort me. I need Your wide shoulders, that I can be little and rest against your chest.

I invite You into my earliest memories and into any empty, hurting or needy places within me from the first couple of years of my life. Would You provide the love and nurture that I need? Come Lord Jesus and cleanse my heart. Let Your healing waters flow into those places of wounding and need. I choose to look to You now to meet these needs. I forgive my mom for not meeting my needs. Lord Jesus come and show me how You hold me and care for me. Establish in me a sense of being. Establish in me a deep knowledge of your unchanging and everlasting love for me, and of the safety and security of being in your arms.¹²

(Allow time for the Holy Spirit to do this creative work.)

"'BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, GOD!

You don't understand my need.' I was so desperate. I was lonely and aching for love.

And I was looking to fill the hole in my heart with a relationship with a man. But he was married. I knew it was wrong. But I HAD to have him and I sacrificed my integrity to try and fill the hole. But it didn't fill anything. In fact in the end I felt abandoned and rejected, even more than when I started. In desperation I cut off the relationship.

The pain disappeared for a while as I met and dated the man I later married. But soon attractions like the previous ones surfaced again. The

strength of the desire and need scared me. I never gave into my desires, but I struggled with shame and horror about my secret fantasies.

Later I realized this relationship 'I couldn't live without' was covering a huge hole in my heart. I was born about three months early and spent those first three months in an incubator. No one thought I would live. I wasn't even named for three weeks. Tubes snaked around and into my tiny body so that I could breathe and eat. Mom and dad couldn't cuddle and reassure me.

Though I had known this, I didn't realize the connection to the emotional hole in my heart. My pain was the buried pain of an infant, scared and touch-deprived, longing for the secure arms of mom or dad. Only God could uncover this pain and begin to fill the hole. And this was not an overnight, one-prayer healing. But as I sought God, received prayer, and formed healthy relationships, the hole gradually grew smaller. The thing I was most ashamed of became the door for more and more intimacy with Jesus."



QUESTIONS



#1

What about God's unconditional love is hard for you to believe?



#2

Do you have difficulty abiding in and just being with God? If so, why?



#3

Do you feel that you lack a sense of being?

Remember, without a sense of being, we may feel unable to contain love. We might receive prayer, but then feel that what was poured into us quickly leaks out. We might feel like "the lights are on but no one is home," or we might feel a deep sense of anxiety, emptiness, etc.



#4

Do you know of anything that interrupted your early relationship with your mother (first 2 years)? Do you see ways in which this might have affected you?



#5

To grow in your ability to receive from God, plan a time to just "be" with God.

(Pick a time and place, like in the park on the way home, perhaps try for 30 minutes or whatever would stretch you. Pick a verse to help you focus, perhaps Romans 8:38 or John 15:4. Share your heart and then spend time just receiving His love.)

Getting real with God

God is totally, utterly pure and holy.

Moses asked God to show him His glory. God replied, "I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence . . . But, he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live'" (Ex 33:20).

God's holiness does not compare to our own goodness.

I can jump a couple of feet high. An athlete might jump substantially higher. But in comparison to the standard of reaching the moon, neither comes close. Likewise our efforts fall way short if we try to be good enough to reach God. Some of us may have more sin in our lives than others, or less, but all fall far short when compared with God's holiness. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro 3:23a).

We are not pure and holy. In fact, we actively turn our backs on God. When we are really honest, we prefer to be self-reliant and self-centered. This inevitably involves hostility toward God. This is sin, and **it separates us from God and others.**

So, our Father sent Jesus. He bridged the gap between us and God. Because He was fully human and fully God, **Jesus did what we could not.** We are now able to stand before God, inheriting Jesus' right relationship with His Father, when we place our faith personally in Jesus.

Jesus was totally human

He felt pain and joy. He made friends. He ate and drank. He faced temptation. He was abused. He was abandoned and rejected by his friends.

When we look to Him, we look to one who knows human suffering. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin" (Heb 4:15).

Because Jesus was human, we see that God likes and values our human nature. In fact, **God loves our humanity — it is our sin which is the problem.** Realizing this, being human becomes full of possibilities rather than limitations ("I'm only human"). Religions throughout the ages have thought that our humanity has kept us from God. Not so with Christianity. But some Christians have found it hard to believe that Jesus loves our humanity; they have tried to repress their sexuality or deprive themselves of all earthly pleasure. Those who struggle with sexual or relational brokenness also can find themselves thinking that their humanity is their problem. This is not the case.

And fully God?

Yes. Jesus was also fully God. He was not just a compassionate man. If that were all He was, he also would have been a liar because He claimed to be God's Son. If Jesus was not God, He would have been a little crazy to think He was the savior. He was the Son of God on a mission to save sinners.

When people interacted with Jesus, they were interacting with God. When Jesus wept over Lazarus' death, God wept. The God of the universe knows what it feels like to be tempted, to suffer, to be mocked and ignored. When Jesus passionately spoke truth in the temple, God did too. Jesus loved the children, and God loved the children. When Jesus was a baby, God in some way was a baby, too. That is a lot to think about.

Because He was fully God, Jesus never sinned. He was totally loving, truthful, faithful, and obedient. He was also a servant. "The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

God Loves



The cross

Jesus' suffering was far greater than any suffering a mere human being will ever know. His pain, particularly at the cross, went far beyond "just" the humiliation and agony of a crucifixion. Jesus was **separated from His father for the first and only time in eternity.** "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46b).

As He physically suffered hanging on the cross, He bore all sin for every single person who ever lived, or will ever live. Everything wrong that ever was done, or ever will be, was accounted for when Jesus died on the cross. This is incredible. Think about it. In fact, feel free to pause and tell God how awesome it is.

In His death, Jesus took our sin on Himself so that we would not have to die. He died in our place. In His death, He put to death our sins and triumphed over evil. "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10b). It was a high cost to Him.

He died for us because He desperately desires us to have life and relationship with Him. The goal was to free His children for life and freedom. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, **we can be restored as God's children.**

Christ's death not only frees us from our own sin, but also, **it frees us from sin done against us by others.**¹ We should NOT confess others' sin against us as if it is our own sin. For example, we do not confess as sin the way we were abused. It is not our sin! However God does take away the sin done against us and its effects. This is called healing!

Confession—just ask

Confession is the act of bringing our sins to Jesus at the cross. It is an important part of the path to true freedom and healing. As we confess our sin to Jesus, He instantly forgives and cleanses. Andy Comiskey writes, "Confession to Christ is sin's one-way ticket out!"²

Step 1 Coming out of denial

The first step toward real confession is to come out of denial and hiddenness. Often we don't confess sin because our sin seems small and insignificant. ("It really wasn't

such a big deal." "It's just a little lie." "But we didn't sleep together.") The sin may not be the biggest deal now, but sin grows in the dark. As we bring it into the light, we, as Christians, will grow. Paul instructs the Ephesians to bring their sin into the light. "Have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph 5:11).

CONFESSION IS THE ACT

of bringing our sins to Jesus at the cross. It is an important part of the path to true freedom and healing. As we confess our sin to Jesus, He instantly forgives and cleanses. Andy Comiskey writes,

"Confession to Christ is sin's one-way ticket out!"



Step 2 Naming sin

As we confess sin, our hearts interact with the power of God found in the cross, and healing comes. Thus, we need to name our sins specifically. St. Gregory of Nanzianus, in the fourth century, wrote, "That which Jesus has not assumed (or taken upon himself), he cannot heal."³

We are used to confessing our sin broadly: "Father I have sinned against heaven and against earth." It is important to be specific! In this process, some may become too introspective and, as a result, become depressed. That is not the intent of confession. Remember that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Ro 2:4b). Others may need a nudge to go ahead and look at their sin. Both tendencies exist in most of us. We need the Holy Spirit to guide, prod and direct us as we look at our sin. He will search our hearts.

"Remember that time when . . ."

Time doesn't cancel sin or its effects. C.S. Lewis wrote, "We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sins. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were no concern of the present speaker's, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of sin. The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ."⁴

our HUMANITY—it is our sin which is the PROBLEM.



Therefore, confess your sins

to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
(Jas 5:16a)

So, it is good to go

back in our life histories and confess past sins which we have not yet brought to Jesus. If a sin pattern, for example, stealing, started six years ago, it would be helpful to confess the history of a sin (ie: 6 years). If the stealing started as a result of losing a job, prayer for comfort and the love of God in that place would bring healing to the wound. (We confess sin. God forgives sin and heals wounds.)

To one another

Often we need to confess our sins to another Christian. **"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed"** (Jas 5:16a). By sharing our sins, the power of shame is broken. We learn that others don't hate us because of our sin. We can see God's love and acceptance through their responses. As we confess to others, we consciously choose to show others our weakness and sin. We surrender our image and self-sufficiency. We are **freed to walk in the light**. (Note: It is important to confess your sins to people you trust, such as Christian friends, a youth leader, counselor, or pastor. They should also be people who will be able to pray for you.)

Our culture has almost no sexual standards.

Hmm, sexual sin?

Our culture (and especially the youth culture) has almost no sexual standards. It places a very high value on sexual exploration as long as we "don't hurt anyone." We view having sex as a personal right for anyone past puberty. Often even as children, we were exposed to inappropriate and destructive expressions of sexuality.⁵

As a result **our perceptions of purity are often distorted**. Consider what boundaries our culture suggests for a dating relationship, or for differentiating friends from lovers.

According to the Bible, any sexual union outside of marriage is sinful. It is a violation of holy boundaries (even if only in the mind). It therefore, has very definite destructive results in both people, even if they are both consenting adults.

Lust breaks holy emotional and spiritual boundaries. Matthew 5:28 says that lust is adultery of the heart. We want what is not rightfully ours. Lust begins in the imagination and moves from there. Sexual lust can easily move to the use of pornography and other ways of fulfilling fantasy. We need to confess lust and its effects as sin.

Lust is a counterfeit version of true desire, whether sexual desire or otherwise. **C.S. Lewis writes, "Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering, whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed."**⁶

If we confess and turn from our sin, God can cleanse our polluted imaginations and can rebuild boundary lines.

Step 3

Taking our sin to the cross

As we confess our sin, Jesus takes it from us. "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29 NASB). With the eyes of our hearts, we can imagine our sins being taken into Jesus on the cross.

**WE ARE freed
to WALK in the light.**

Sin gives Satan an invitation to deceive and to oppress the soul. By taking our sin to the cross and asking our Father to rebuild our boundaries, we take back territory that had been stolen by Satan.

Step 4 Receiving forgiveness

In exchange for confessing our sin, we receive forgiveness. Not a bad deal. We can savor God's words to us: forgiven, no longer guilty, by Jesus' name. Meditating on these words so that they sink in deeply helps our hearts to really grasp God's love. ". . . As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12). Forgiven, we can walk as the person God has made us to be, unburdened by the weight of our sins.

We have the privilege and power to be vessels of God's forgiveness to one another. He has given the body of Christ a part in the process of forgiving sin and releasing forgiveness. Jesus said to his disciples,

"If you forgive anyone his [or her] sins they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn 20:23).

Often we can receive God's forgiveness more deeply through the prayers of another.

Step 5 Cleansing

God not only forgives but also cleanses our hearts, minds and bodies from the effects of our sin. In the Bible, water is a frequently used symbol of cleansing.

"... Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:22).

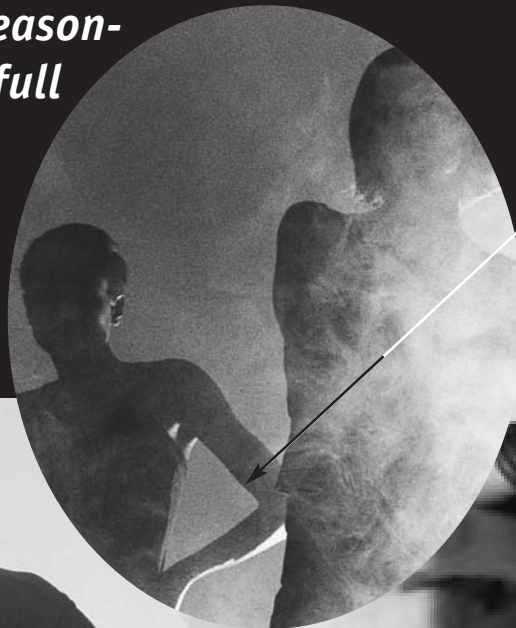
"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" (Eze 36:25).

"I FOUND A LOT OF FREEDOM IN CONFESSION.

For many years, I justified sexual fantasy and experimentation; I felt like I deserved that escape.

In general it was really hard for me to own up to doing something wrong, because as a kid I was berated and punished unreasonably. But I felt dirty and full of shame, knowing that it was wrong and that God knew everything.

In confessing my sins to others, I realized that God was kind and full of forgiveness. I finally felt what it was to be forgiven, to have a clear conscience and freedom from shame. Confessing to others was key to breaking these patterns."



Step 6 Blessing the true self

Christ died and rose to set us free for love. "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free" (Gal 5:1a). We are free, having received forgiveness and cleansing, to grow in our restored relationships with the Lord and with other Christians. **We can take our places as true sons and daughters of the most high God.** We can thank God for our humanity in all of its facets and ask that our true desires be strengthened.

The power to restore was released through Jesus. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that frees our true self from the grip of sin and evil. This power enables us to stand upright and to hear the Father call out our true names.

TESTIMONY

"I have tasted how much richer community can be when we can be open about our sins and encourage each other. Now I want to find a prayer partner with whom I can regularly confess my sin."

Response:

You can pray something like this . . .

Jesus, I come into Your holy presence and acknowledge the reality of Your crucifixion. With the eyes of my heart, I see You, Jesus, nailed to the cross. I admit that I often try to take care of my sin on my own, but it still weighs me down. The reality is that I can't save myself in any area of my life. I bring my sins (be specific) to the cross. Jesus, apart from Your death on the cross, I can't find freedom. Thank You for forgiving me now. I receive Your forgiveness. Create in me a clean heart. Wash my mind, heart and body from the effects of my sins. Thank You for restoring me. I want to walk in Your ways and in Your blessing. Use me, Lord, to reach those around me who do not know how wonderful it is to be forgiven and free from shame. I love you Jesus, for dying to give me life and freedom.

Asking for forgiveness

A significant part of our healing involves the willingness not only to confess our own sin, but also to acknowledge how our sin has affected and often damaged others. Jesus wants us to make every effort to be reconciled to those we have wounded (Mt 5:23-24).

As we come to terms with the ways that we have wounded those that we love, in humility we should ask them for forgiveness.


If another person is not aware of our sin against them, it may be harmful to reveal it to them. Sometimes, though, when the damage has been obvious to both us and to the other person, it is important to ask them for forgiveness. We can ask the Lord if there are people we need to go to. (A small group leader or youth leader may be able to offer helpful guidance.)

A few additional comments

If you are wondering if certain things are sinful, or if you know that the Bible says something is wrong (like sex outside of marriage), but you aren't sure if you really agree with it, take your questions honestly to God and others (such as your youth leader).

The use of Christian symbols

Many people find it powerful to look at or hold a crucifix or cross to better understand and imagine the work of God. Some sprinkle water to symbolize God's cleansing power. Anointing with oil can be used to symbolize healing and restoration for those who have received forgiveness.



The power that raised Jesus
from the dead is the power that
frees our true self from the
grip of sin and evil.

#1

What difference does it make in your life knowing that God became human (in Jesus)?

#2

How is what **JESUS** did on the cross relevant to us finding freedom, healing and forgiveness?

The cross is a symbol of...

#3

Is it hard for you to confess your sins to another person? What good can come from confessing our sins to someone?

#4

What are the specific sins (against God, yourself, and/or others) that you need to confess?

Ask the Holy Spirit to show them to you and ask Him to show you the ways your sin damaged you or someone else, or both.

#5

How has the lack of standards of sexual purity in our culture affected you? What do you think of God's standards? In question 4, did you list the ways you have sinned sexually?

#6

Are there people you have wronged of whom you need to ask forgiveness?

Temptation

We all face temptation. grrrr!! Thankfully we do not face ALL of our temptations every day. Each of us has our own.

Perhaps they include . . .

- gossip
- striving for popularity
- fantasy
- lust
- lying
- using people to get what we want
- excessive or underage drinking
- sex outside of marriage
- other
- jealousy
- overeating
- drugs
- pornography
- cheating

The list, of course, goes on. Temptation, simply defined, is an enticement to do something outside of God's plan.

A temptation offers us pleasure, but the pleasure offered blocks our relationships with God and others.

Adam, the first man, gave in to the temptation to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Jesus, the new Adam, was tempted, too. But Jesus, unlike Adam, didn't give in to temptation. The supernatural life of Jesus has made a way for us, too, to resist temptation.

**OUR
DESIRE for GOD is OUR**

Where does it come from?

Is it our fault? Can we blame our culture? Temptations have three sources, namely:¹

The flesh: When Paul talks about "the flesh," he does not mean our literal flesh and bone. He is referring to the remaining sinful part of us that remembers how to please itself. In "our flesh" our individual temptations will differ, depending on our personalities and personal histories (Gal 5:24, Col 3:9).

The world: This refers to the sin found in the present culture and those who follow the ways of that culture (Jn 7:4,7; 12:31).

Satan: Satan targets our vulnerabilities and wants to distract and discourage us (Lk 4:1-13).

Should I confess it?

No, temptation is not, in and of itself, sin. Temptations are not wrong, they simply exist. Even Jesus was tempted. But temptations ARE warning signs of opportunities to sin. Therefore it's definitely a good idea to share your struggle with a prayer partner or small group.

TESTIMONY

"I was on vacation at the beach.

It was so great. But then I found myself totally attracted to this guy. I felt so guilty. I thought that God was really healing me of my homosexual struggles. But here I was attracted to this person. I started to apologize to God, but then I realized that I had not done anything wrong. It was a temptation. I had not lusted. I turned to Jesus and quickly called on Him for help."

Sexual temptation, including homosexual temptation, is not sin. But lust, fantasy and actions are. This distinction is important.

In the Bible, James differentiates between temptation and sin. "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (Jas 1:14-15 NASB).

OUR "RADAR" IS SENSITIVE

*to the desires of our hearts.
The solution, though, is not to
kill off all desire.* ←

Desire is great— God created it. **Desire causes us to
seek after God and love others.**

**DO
YOU
WANT
TO BE
STRONG?**

**RESIST
temptation.**

**Strength is born
in adversity.**

Our internal temptation radar

Whatever our temptations are, when we are feeling weak, the temptations will seem to be everywhere, whether in the grocery store, mall or park. **We tend to be sensitive to the most subtle presence of our temptation.** It is as if we have internal radar which detects its presence.

If we are tempted to gossip, our radar will locate those with whom we can share it. If our temptation is to lust after tall, blond women, they will seem to be everywhere. If we are tempted to look at pornography in "normal" bookstores, we will quickly spot it when others will be oblivious to it.

Our "radar" is sensitive to the desires of our hearts. The solution, though, is not to kill off all desire. **Desire is great— God created it.** Desire causes us to seek after God and love others.

But not all of our desires are good, such as the desire to murder or steal. We also try to fulfill some good desires in sinful ways, such as the desire to be loved, held, known by others, understood, or needed. As we walk with Jesus, He will grow our God-given desires.

To have ongoing victory over persistent temptations, it is helpful to understand the emotional wounds and needs that fuel these temptations. As we bring our temptations and the underlying wounds into His light, we will be transformed by His healing presence.

Satan

Satan wants to twist our desires that God intended for our good pleasure. Satan uses temptation to lure us away from God. This excerpt from C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* shows how Satan uses temptation to corrupt what God made. In this quote, a senior demon gives advice to a junior demon on how to tempt a Christian. "The enemy" refers to God.

"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden."²

Greater desire

God created us to desire many good things. In order to face our temptations for lesser things, **we need to cultivate our true desires** for greater things. Andy Comiskey writes about overcoming temptation: "The key is seeking the object of greater desire, not waiting for the fleshly desire to go away."³

Our desire for God is our primary and greatest desire. There is so much to discover about Jesus, our Father, the Holy Spirit, His people, the ones who do not yet know Him, and creation. There is always more of Him. We need to cultivate our desire for God and good things so that our minds are captured by Him. Growing in our desire for God is the greatest weapon we have in the face of temptation.

C.S. Lewis writes, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."⁴

PRIMARY

and greatest DESIRE.



In the face of temptation,

Jesus used the weapon we all have available, the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit,

TESTIMONY

“The major persistent temptations in my life can be summed up as the temptation to focus on my pain and difficulties. I really want to be Jesus-centered and able to give to others. So when I am tempted, I think about how I am created to give and not to be overly introspective. Then I can look to Jesus and focus on Him. Calling a friend, doing something creative, or helping someone out—these all help.”

We can resist temptation

By focusing on Jesus, we can resist temptation! **Because Jesus lives inside of us, we have His authority.** “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1Jn 4:4). As we grow in Jesus, we grow into our authority as His children.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,

when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;

though war break out against me, even then will I be confident” (Ps 27:1–3).

When you focus on the temptation at hand, it is a slippery, quick slope from temptation to sin.

The LORD

is my rock,

MY fortress

AND MY deliverer;

In the face of a temptation, what you choose to do matters. Your options are:

1. To focus on the temptation at hand
2. To put your eyes on Jesus

Option 1 is lethal

Let’s say you have a problem overeating when you’re stressed. You’ve had a bad day and really want a piece of chocolate cake. It is right in front of you. As you look at it, your desire grows. “Just one bite,” you reason to yourself. So, you take one carefully chosen, large bite. You want another and you remember that there are always second chances, and that many people share your weakness, so you take another bite, and then another. Having finished the cake, you feel sick, guilty and ashamed. You feel far from God.

When you focus on the temptation at hand, it is a slippery, quick slope from temptation to sin.

Option 2 works

Rather than focusing on the cake at all (or whatever the temptation is) you need to **run from it and look to Jesus**. Think about God’s strength and love. “I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge” (Ps 18:1b–2a). Picture yourself under the shelter and power of the cross. He promises to provide a way of escape.

MY GOD...

(Ps 18:1–2a).

In the Bible, Joseph is a good example of responding positively to temptation. "He prepared himself before the temptation by pursuing his relationship with God."⁵

He fled when Potiphar's wife made sexual advances toward him. He counted the cost of sleeping with her, and said no.

He still had to suffer the consequences of her lies, but his conscience was clear. God was upon him and provided for him. "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1Co 10:13b RSV).⁶

Jesus, too, was tempted

This qualifies Him to help us in our temptation. "Because [Jesus] himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:18).

In the desert, Satan tempted Jesus three times to misuse His power as the Son of God. In the first temptation, Satan said, "If you are the Son of God,

tell these stones to become bread" (Mt 4:3b). After forty days of fasting this would have been a great temptation. But Jesus stood firmly in the truth of God and responded, "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). In the face of temptation, Jesus used the weapon we all have available, the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit.

Declaring war

We're in a spiritual battle and God wants to teach us to fight with the weapons He has given us. Soldiers would be in great trouble if they were sent to war and did not know how to use their guns or forgot their protective clothing or helmets. Paul describes our armor in Ephesians 6:11-17. It consists of the following:

- the belt of truth
- the breastplate of righteousness
- our feet shod with readiness, the gospel of peace
- the shield of faith
- the helmet of salvation
- the sword of the Spirit, the word of God

Andy Comiskey writes that we are to "fight lustful fire with holy fire."¹⁰

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MASTURBATION.

Is it a sin? Good question. What does the Bible say about it? Directly, nothing. There is a natural process of discovering our sexuality, and we

meant for sexual intercourse, will feel the tension of not having an outlet. But for most teenagers and adults masturbation is much more than a purely physical, occasional release. It usually leads to (or is accompanied by) sexual fantasy (which is clearly sin). It can also become a way to release tension, stress, anger and other feelings we need to deal with in a better way. Some compulsive masturbation starts in childhood as a way to alleviate anxiety. Have you noticed how a little child will hold his or her crotch when he or she is upset or anxious?⁷ Tension that is held in the genitals from early childhood can lead to early masturbation.

Remember, our sexuality is meant to draw us into relationships. The very orgasmic urge to merge with someone is frustrated and intensified by self-stimulation. We start out alone and end up alone. As an expression of sexuality, masturbation is like being alone on an island.⁸ We need to be honest about it, and allow the Holy Spirit to purify us and draw us into healthy relationships. As real friendships are developed that alleviate the loneliness, the desire not to masturbate—and the ability to choose not to masturbate—will increase.



We need strong wills to stand and fight.

Strong wills enable us to say yes or no and stick with it. Strengthening the will was first mentioned in relationship to what fathers give their children (Chapter 3). As young adults, we need to look to our heavenly Father and ask Him to empower our wills, so that we can choose His ways.

Like soldiers, **we are in training.** The more we turn to and focus on Jesus, the easier it will become. In the beginning turning to Jesus may feel entirely unnatural. Choosing God is indeed unnatural to our sin nature, or flesh.

God allows temptation and uses it to strengthen our character and to produce passion for Jesus and dependence on Jesus. Our true nature in Jesus will grow as we choose Him.

Temptation serves to purify our love for God. Without being tested our love for God remains merely a theory. Temptation offers the choice to serve either God or ourselves.

Also **like soldiers, we never win wars by ourselves.** Soldiers are part of a carefully designed army. Each individual has a part to play, but all are interdependent. Likewise we cannot survive solo as Christians. We need each other. In the face of temptation, we need to reach out to a trustworthy Christian friend or leader and ask for help.

Thinking practically

We need to avoid places where we'll face many temptations. Be aware that when we're under a lot of stress, we'll probably encounter more temptation. We need to plan ahead for it in our time with God and others. Plan ahead! During stressful time, we can protect ourselves by scheduling time with God and others.

We may experience more temptation as we practice turning to Jesus. Remember, God is full of grace, mercy and compassion. "When he (a righteous man) falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand" (Ps 37:24 NASB). If we fall, we allow Him to pick us up and set us on His path again.

Response:

You can pray something like this ...

Father, I ask You to fill me with more desire and passion for You. I do not want to settle for "mud pies in the slums." I want to know the good things You have for me. Please come and strengthen my weak will. You alone can enable me to stand in the face of temptations. I give to You the temptations I face now. I put on the armor of God and focus on You. I want to experience every good thing that You have for me. Come and fill me with Your love and strength anew. Give me passion for You.

Temptation serves to purify OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

Without being tested our love for God remains merely a theory. Temptation offers the choice to **serve either God or ourselves.**

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength

(1Co 10:13b RSV)





#1

Consider each of the following for the temptations you face.

A What temptations do you face?	B What are you looking for when you feel tempted? (Love, acceptance, to pass a test, pleasure, relief of pain, etc.)	C How do you feel when you face a temptation? (Panic, fear, thrill, shame, dread, self-hatred, helplessness, etc.)	D What are practical ways to deal with (avoid) it? How could someone else help?



#2

What will you gain from resisting temptation?



#3

How can you cultivate your relationship with God and others so that you can turn to them when you are tempted?

Addiction

Addiction

We were created for Eden, the perfect garden. Somewhere deep inside, we remember this. We long for more of God and better relationships.

Paul expressed this longing for MORE. “For while we

are in this tent (or body), we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2Co 5:4-5).

We are responsible for what we do with our real and deep longings and needs.

- We can ignore them.
- We can identify them, and ask God to meet them.
- Or we can fill them with people or things which can lead to addiction.

What’s an addiction?

We form addictions when we think that something or someone can meet the deepest needs of our heart. We attach to someone or something, hoping that we will feel better. Unlike good habits, based on love and freedom, addictions are based on compulsion and bondage.

Sexual and emotional addictions are very arousing but leave us feeling empty. Andy Comiskey defines sexual addiction as “a persistent preoccupation with a fantasy, behavior or powerful romantic/emotional feeling of infatuation.”¹

Filling this deeper ache...

Anything that we use to fill the deeper aches of our souls CAN become an addiction. We will want more and more of it, but we will not be satisfied.

Here are some of the many things that we can become addicted to. Most of them are taken from Gerald May’s book, *Addiction and Grace*.

Some things we can be addicted to:

I NEED...

chocolate, coffee, depression, drinking, drugs, eating, exercise, fantasies, food, friends, anger, approval, attractiveness, being good, being right, being taken care of, cars, causes, gambling, gossiping, guilt, hobbies, humor, images of God, intimacy, Internet, jealousy, lying, marriage, masturbation, memories, money, music, nail biting, parents, pornography, popularity, romance novels, revenge, sex, shoplifting, shopping, sleeping, sports, television, tobacco, winning, and work.

Some things we can be addicted to avoiding:

I CAN’T STAND...

airplanes, anger, animals, being alone, being judged, being overwhelmed, being fat, being thin, blood, boredom, bridges, bugs, closed-in spaces, commitment, conflict, crowds, darkness, dentists, dependence, dirt, disapproval, doctors, embarrassment, failure, illness, pain, people of different beliefs, people of different culture, class, sex or race; people who are fat, thin, ignorant, neat, messy, rich, or poor; public speaking, rejection, responsibility, sex, tests, tunnels, and vulnerability.²

Underlying an addiction:

“I’m not okay.”

On the outside we may look together or even confident, but most addictions cover insecurity.

“No one would love me if they really knew me.”

Most people try to hide their addictions. What brings freedom is knowing that we are loved even in the midst of our struggles.

**NOW IT IS GOD
Spirit as a**



TESTIMONY

“I was addicted to pornography and smoking pot. I thought that if others really knew me, they would humiliate me. I had been sexually abused as a child and experienced a lot of rejection by my older brothers as I grew up. As I met Christians who were real with each other and loved me, I experienced God’s unconditional love.”

Stage 2

A Habit Formation

In this stage, we repeat the activity, unaware that it is becoming a way of coping with our stress and needs. When a stressful thing happens, we want to feel better. Our brains say, “Remember doing this (i.e. watching TV)? When you did it, you felt better.” Our brains start to make the connection that when there is pain, or an uncomfortable feeling, doing “it” will make us feel better.

ANYTHING THAT WE USE

*to fill the deeper aches of our souls
CAN become an addiction. We will
want more and more of it,*

but we will not be satisfied.

TESTIMONY

“I was doing well in college and was in a great sorority, but inside I felt like I was coming apart. I was afraid no one would like me and that at any moment I would start failing in school. To cope with my fears I exercised all the time and was obsessed with my weight. And frequently I would drink too much and was totally obsessed about my grades. These addictions began to rule my life. Jesus took a far second place until I got desperate and finally surrendered to Him.”

Those of us who struggle with sexual addictions, such as pornography, promiscuity, or masturbation, often believe that sex is our most important need, or that it is one way to secure love. And our bodies can reinforce these beliefs, craving arousal or affection, because we become conditioned to these thought and behavior patterns.

How we get hooked...

Psychologist Gerald May describes how addictions form in the following stages.³

Stage 1 Learning

In the first stage we discover that a certain activity or thought pattern gives us pleasure. For example, when we watch television, our bodies and minds are distracted, stimulated and relaxed. Our brains then associates this activity with relaxation and pleasure.

B Repeating

By this point the habit has a routine place in our thinking. And under stress, it is likely we will turn to it. Even without stress, periodically, we will do “it,” just to “check in.” We’re hooked.

Stage 3 Struggle

We have this habit, but then something gets in the way. If our habit is eating, drinking, or drugs, the supply might run out. If it is sex, the other person may not be available. If it is pornography, maybe we can’t get access to the Internet. If the addiction is a relationship, maybe he or she withdraws. If it is dieting, of course, grandma just baked her best apple pie.

Panic. Fear. We must have more. The interruption of our habit only intensifies our desire for “it.” When we try to cut back or quit, and impose our own interruption, the same thing happens. If it is a true addiction, our desire will intensify. If we try to quit, we will probably find another addiction to take its place.

Addictions demand more and more of us as they progress. Smoking pot may progress to other drugs which offer more intense highs. Soft-core pornography (i.e. Playboy) may lead to hard core pornography and acting out sexually.

... who has **GIVEN** us the
DEPOSIT, ... (2 Co. 5:4-5).



We need to learn what

triggers our addictions in order to short-circuit the cycle. This is the temptation stage. This is the time to look to Jesus,

It's a vicious cycle⁴

Addictions are predictable and cyclical. First, they are triggered by some stressor or pain. These are red flags, and we need to pay attention to them.



If we ignore the red flags, we will probably find ourselves on a well-worn path toward our addictive behavior.

We need to learn what triggers our addictions in order to short-circuit the cycle. This is the temptation stage. This is the time to look to Jesus.

If we ignore the red flags, we will probably find ourselves on a well-worn path toward our addictive behavior. Usually this path starts as we simply think about how good it would feel. If we are addicted to alcohol, it could start by contemplating a trip downtown with some friends to a bar.

Even thinking about the tempting possibilities engages the addictive cycle. We start to feel some amount of pleasure even as we prepare for it. Our focus becomes doing the activity and stopping becomes nearly impossible.

It is then a slippery slope to the activity and to the anticipated release. Our fellowship with God is broken and we bear the guilt of our sin. We also may reap tangible

consequences, such as loneliness, sickness, arrest, a DUI, or a sexually transmitted disease.

Often the guilt or other consequences triggers pain and we find ourselves considering doing it again. Thus we are back at the beginning.

Here are some hard questions to ask yourself about your addictions.⁵

- Does it take away the pain or stress?
- Does it empower or belittle you?
- Do you feel fulfilled, less worthless, better equipped to face the realities at hand?
- Are you more alive to the true desire of loving God and others?

Breaking free

In the beginning, we have a habit; by the end, the addiction has us. Our desires become focused and attached to this behavior. The addictive patterns break as we cultivate our true desire for Jesus.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).

In order to break the power of an addiction, four elements are necessary: the presence of God, pain, patience, and the fellowship of other people.⁶

#1 Presence of God

Jesus invites us to enter into His rest. God intends for His children to find true rest in Him. He created us to need it.

It is for FREEDOM that CHRIST has set us FREE... (Gal 5:1)

As we call on His presence, we are able to let God into the desperate places of our hearts. **Our hearts finds their true resting place in the Father and cease their restless striving for more.** A godly contentment comes as we receive His love. We allow His love to wash over us. We can open our grasping hands and receive the One true love. Being still before Him, we develop a taste for what is pure and holy. We can stay in that abiding place, even as we face the pain we were avoiding.

#2 Pain

Our body may experience withdrawal symptoms. We may feel a physical and/or emotional ache as we do not give into the addiction. The underlying emotional pain which fueled the addiction will surface. Andy Comiskey writes, "Pain causes us to attach to pleasurable objects." We need to face this pain underneath the addictions. Usually we try to break an addiction when we feel badly about it. However, before we are able to feel better, we will need to experience the pain of the unexpressed and unmet needs underneath.

#3 Patience

Our mind and body do not quickly forget what they have learned. How many of us forget how to ride a bike once we have learned? The same applies to addictions. We have trained our hearts and bodies to respond to pain through addictions. When we want to choose differently, our bodies and minds will fight for their routines, for what they are used to doing. We need to be patient with ourselves as we break addictive cycles. And, we need to be quick to confess failure and receive forgiveness and grace.

#4 People

We need other people to help us. Often we have been secretive about our addictions. We need to bring them into the light. We need accountability. And because addictions usually stem from loneliness and keep us from true intimacy, we need to cultivate honest, caring, sharing friendships.

A WORD ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

One of the more common addictions, especially for men, is pornography. Sexually suggestive images are everywhere. (Men are more vulnerable to becoming addicted to pornography because they are more sexually stimulated through visual images than women.) Looking at sexually stimulating images can lead to a particularly damaging addictive cycle. It takes more and more to satisfy and arouse curiosity. What starts out "in private" eventually affects real life relationships.

"I was exposed to pornography as a teenager through some friends. It was exciting and led to erotic fantasy and sexual release through masturbation. I had learned about masturbation on my own prior to puberty as a way of dealing with the tension that I felt. I only associated masturbation with sexuality after being exposed to pornography. The problem was that because

I was connecting to unreal images of women, I had trouble dealing with real relationships. The air-brushed, perfect fantasy woman was always accommodating and never put any demands on me. As a result, I would withdraw from real relationships and await my fantasy world for sexual release. I also began seeing in every woman a reminder of an image from pornography which was locked in my mind. I was unable to see them as real people to be valued. I needed Jesus to heal the deeper issues causing tension and to cleanse the unholy images stored in my mind. Then I was freed to value a real relationship in three dimensions rather than two."



QUESTION

How do I avoid giving in?

1. Know your vulnerabilities and identify times when you'll be tempted to pursue your addictions.
2. Practice the presence of God. Worship God; talk to God; listen to Him in the quiet and allow Him to fill you. "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good" (Ro. 12:21).
3. Ask yourself what is underlying the need. Are you lonely; tired; in need of love; or angry? And then ask yourself and God what will really meet that need.
4. Call a friend or choose to do something more constructive.

If you fall, confess your sin and ask God for forgiveness. Spend time receiving His love and practice His presence. Check in with an accountability friend, counselor or youth leader who knows about your struggle. Ask for prayer.

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Father, I give to You the addictions in my life. (Name them.) I am powerless to stop them. I need Your help. Come and break the power of these addictions. Lift me up into Your presence and teach me to worship You. I am so hungry for more of You. Show me any wounds that I am running from, or unmet needs that I am trying to meet in these empty addictions. Teach me to lean on You in my weakness.

***Jesus
invites us
to enter
into
His rest.***

**Our hearts finds
their true resting place in the Father
and cease their restless
striving for more.**



#1

What things do you struggle with that may be addictions? What seems addictive about these activities?

#2

Have you experienced negative consequences of addiction in your life? Have you ever felt like a habit controls you?

#3

What longings or aches in your heart do your addictions cover up?

#4

What are red flag stressors in your life that indicate when you are about to start down the road to sin?

#5

What could you do at this point to avoid the cycle?

QUESTIONS?



? WHO Am I? ?

Apart from our sins, wounds and struggles, what else is there? And, is what remains too fragile and small to survive in the harshness of the world?

When we lost relationship with God in the Garden of Eden, we also lost our true identities, as those made in His image. But through Jesus' death and resurrection, our relationship with God is restored and our true identities are revealed.

The amazing power of God displayed in raising Jesus from the dead raises up the true self. The true self is not only rooted in God before the beginning of time, but also is redeemed and resurrected from its sinful state at the cross.

The cross: key to restoration

The cross is the place where everything that belongs to the unreal, false self—our masks (what we hide behind), our idols (what we look to instead of God), and our sin - dies. As we lay down our sin, the old sinful, false self is crucified with Christ. The true, real self is raised through Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The power of God at the cross cleanses us and reclaims the true self. There is no shortage of supernatural power to topple the lies we have believed about who we are.

Our old false self diminishes each time.

We go to the cross, and the true self increases. Leanne Payne emphasizes the difference between the new and old nature. "We must differentiate between the self that collaborates with the principle of evil and selfishness, and the self that abides in Christ and collaborates with Him. That is the true self ... The former self we deliberately and continually die to; the other we joyfully and in great humility and thankfulness accept."³

Jesus calls out the true self. He shows us who we really are. He did this over and over in the Bible. Consider Jesus and his disciple Peter. Peter often put his foot in His mouth and often didn't understand Jesus' ministry. But Jesus saw through Peter's partial understanding and sin. He saw Peter's calling and real self: who Peter was in Christ, the rock of the church!⁴

Most of the time we would answer these questions by

looking inward at what remains. This would seem logical. However, as C.S. Lewis writes, "your real self will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him."¹

What remains after shedding our sins, wounds, and struggles is the true self, the soul in union with Christ.² And indeed it is not small. It contains the character, power, glory, honor and love of God.

Don't believe the lie...

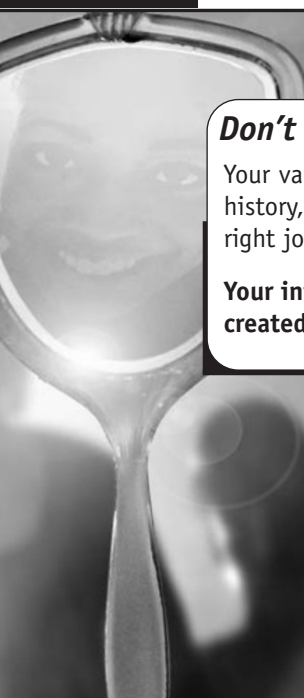
Your value is not determined by your grades, sexual history, looks, connections, popularity, getting the right job, success or failure, past sin or past abuse.

Your infinite value was determined when God created you and is reclaimed by Jesus.

Uncovering the real self

Our true self exists fully formed within us already. As we seek God, He will heal and transform us, and increasingly the true self will emerge. This is the careful excavating work of God uncovering and repairing the soul.

Self-acceptance is



Likewise, with the woman at the well, Jesus broke all of the social rules in seeking her out in conversation (Jn 4). He invited her, knowing she was an outcast woman with too many men in her past, to be a worshiper of His Father. Her sin and place in life did not intimidate Jesus or keep her from receiving this incredible revelation from Him. Through this simple interaction Jesus called forth her true self while acknowledging and revealing the false, sinful self.⁵

What God sees

God, while fully aware of our sin, delights in us. We are His kids. He doesn't merely tolerate us because He has to. **He looks at us and sees great possibility.**

Self-acceptance

When we are secure, we stand in our true selves and the image of God radically shines through. Our Father intends for us to live out of our true selves, as strong and empowered men and women in Christ.

This involves a deep acceptance of ourselves as men and women.

Self-acceptance is foundational. Leanne Payne writes, "the act of self-acceptance is the root of all things. I must agree to be the person who I am. Agree to have the qualifications which I have. Agree to live within the limitations set for me . . . The clarity and the courageousness of this acceptance is the foundation of all existence."⁶

God's acceptance of us

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps 139:13-16).

We need to apply this acceptance to our . . .

bodies	talents
personalities	personal limits
minds	weaknesses
circumstances	

When we accept ourselves, we can humbly let God be the potter and us the clay He molds and shapes.

"But I hate my . . ."

How do you see yourself? Do you focus on the negative parts?

"Oh, I hate my nose."

"I'm so stupid."

"If I only had more friends."

"If only I was smarter."

"If only my family had money."

"If only my parents had not gotten divorced."

ANYTHING IN US THAT WARS

against self-acceptance needs to be confessed as sin. Self-rejection and perfectionism need to be surrendered as do any

"if only I had . . . if only I did . . . if only I were . . ." statements.

We can resist accepting ourselves in any number of ways. Some people dislike the size or shape of some part of their bodies. Others struggle with a more general dislike or even hatred of themselves.⁷

Anything in us that wars against self-acceptance needs to be confessed as sin. Self-rejection and perfectionism need to be surrendered as do any "if only I had . . . if only I did . . . if only I were . . ." statements.

These statements are often based in faulty beliefs. One faulty belief, legalism, is that what we do pleases God. The truth is that our value doesn't lie in what we do for God, but in who we are in Him. Other faulty beliefs are that we would be happier if we had more talent, more stuff, less hassles, etc. Beating ourselves up doesn't improve us, or our relationship with God.

Labels

Incorrect labels are another barrier to self-acceptance. Whether we want them to or not, labels powerfully can shape the ways we feel and think about ourselves. Sometimes as a result of others' criticism, we internalize their voices, even thinking they are God's voice.

Labels come from peers, parents, siblings, teachers, and other people. And we, of course, label ourselves. There are countless possible labels. Some of the most damaging labels are those that name us by a condition or weakness, such as addict, abuse victim, homosexual, lesbian, or an eating disorder.

the **ROOT** of all things.



Our different spiritual gifts build up

the body of believers. Some of them are teaching, prophecy, healing, administration, serving, preaching, giving, evangelism, and hospitality,

These labels and the

ways they have shaped our thinking need to be brought to Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our minds can be cleansed. We can reject the false words and labels and listen for God's loving voice.

Through the cross, our self-image becomes clear. No longer distorted, we can see clearly and straight into the heart of God. Secure in His love, we can then love all that He loves, including, but certainly not limited to, ourselves.

When we confess our self-rejection, we can receive His mercy and love. Andy Comiskey writes, "We sin by refusing to give grace to those aspects of our personal lives where we need grace the most. Confess to the Lord how you have been tempted to reject your own worthfulness due to this troublesome aspect of yourself. Submit that part to the Lord, as many times as is needful. Ask Him to give you the grace to accept that part of yourself, and to incorporate it into the greater whole of your redeemed personhood."⁸

We are wonderfully made . . .

Regardless of our language, age, culture or personality, all Christians share similar characteristics.

We ALL...

- are new creatures in Christ (2Co 5:17).
- are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19).
- are rooted and built up in Him (Col 2:7).
- are qualified to share in His inheritance (Col 1:12).
- are chosen to proclaim His praise (Isa 43:21).
- are complete in Him (Col 2:10).
- have the mind of Christ (1Co 2:16).
- have the peace of God which passes understanding (Php 4:7).

For more scriptures, see appendix 2

Uniquely made

Each one of us is also a unique creation. God forms our personalities and gives us gifts and talents, such as humor, creativity, academic ability, musical talent, dramatic talent, athletic skill, love of science, love of nature, leadership ability, and many others.

Paul writes, "Each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1Co 7:7b). Our different spiritual gifts build up the body of believers. Some of them are teaching, prophecy, healing, administration, serving, preaching, giving, evangelism, and hospitality.

Our personalities, talents and gifts are part of our true selves.

God created us to enjoy Him and His creation. And He placed us in a particular place and time for a particular purpose. Being created as male or female is also an intrinsic part of who we are in Jesus.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our minds can be cleansed.

GOD created us to enjoy HIM and His creation

As we abide in Jesus, we discover more of who we are in Christ and what His purposes are for our lives. Identifying and using our gifts and talents is another way we gain self-acceptance and grow in who we are in Christ.

Hearing our Father's voice

We need to cooperate with God to become all He created us to be. Pastor John Wimber described how we can do this: **"Feed what you want to grow and starve what you want to kill."**⁹

We need to listen to God's voice in order to grow in our real selves. God is consistently, constantly speaking words of truth and love to us. The question is, are we listening?

Learning to listen for the voice of our Father speaking to us is essential to our healing. He speaks in different ways, through scriptures applied to our lives, through impressions or words given in prayer, and through other Christians. **It is not as important how we hear God's voice but THAT we hear Him.**

In order to build the true self, we need to listen for the 'still small voice' of the Lord.¹⁰ Other words that feed our false selves come into our minds loudly and constantly, but God speaks gently, deeply and consistently to His children.

Our true selves also grow in community as we share God's love and truth together. We need friendships that strengthen our true selves and speak God's words into our lives.

If we don't listen to the Lord, and if we lack Christians who call forth our real selves, we can forget who we really are.

Does God speak to you?

- No, He only talks to special people.
- No, we're not on speaking terms.
- Maybe, but He talks too quietly and I can't hear Him.
- Yikes, are you saying you hear audible voices?
- Yes, and the last thing He said was

Yes, like this: _____

"SOMETIMES WHEN I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME WITH

my non-Christian friends, I start to forget who I really am in Christ. I start to think that maybe I am gay, and should be living it out. I need to build my friendships with Christians who can remind me of reality and who I really am."

TESTIMONY



TESTIMONY

“I am learning to listen for God to define me. I grew up with parents who defined me mostly by what I did, and I never felt like I did it well enough. If I was doing well in school, I felt like it was not quite good enough. I always compared myself to other people and usually fell short. It became second nature to criticize myself. I felt like a failure. I need to hear God’s voice. I need His truth to penetrate my hard heart. As I learn to be still and meditate on God’s truths about who I am, God helps me see myself through His eyes. He speaks to me about what it means to belong to Him — that I am loved not for what I do, but for who I am. And He tells me that He has created me to do cool things for His kingdom. He has a purpose for me, and He won’t let me fail.”

Both alone with Jesus and in community we need to listen for God’s affirming words. And then we need the boldness to believe them and allow them to mold us. We need to practice believing God’s words about who we are and what we are to do. Otherwise, we will be like one who looks in the mirror, “and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (Jas 1:24).

Response:

Read the appendix, “Who I Am in Christ.” Pick one truth from among the list of verses. Meditate on it, let it sink into your heart and mind. Then go onto another. This is a great way to spend time with God. In order for our true selves to grow we need to spend time listening to Him and soaking in His truth.

Our true selves also grow

in community

as we share God’s love and truth together. We need friendships that strengthen our true selves and speak

God’s words

into our lives.



DISCOVER YOUR IDENTITY?



#1

Read the Appendix, "Who I Am in Christ." List two characteristics of the true self that are particularly meaningful to you and why. (Example: washed white as snow, because I never thought I could be cleansed of my guilt after having an abortion)

- 1.
- 2.



#2

On a scale of 1 to 10, how are you at accepting your _____?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> body | <input type="checkbox"/> personality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mind | <input type="checkbox"/> circumstances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> talents | <input type="checkbox"/> human limits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> weaknesses | <input type="checkbox"/> feelings |



#3

Are there specific aspects of yourself you dislike? Are there specific labels you wear? Where did they come from?



#4

Is listening for God's affirming words easy or hard? Why?



#5

Who shapes my identity?	Do they point me toward Jesus?	Am I becoming more of who God created me to be because of them?
<input type="checkbox"/> parents	YES NO	YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> friends	YES NO	YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> youth group/church	YES NO	YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> teachers	YES NO	YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> significant other	YES NO	YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____	YES NO	YES NO



#6

Do you have other Christians who speak God's encouraging words to you?

9 *Authenticity, honesty and realness were hallmarks of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was shaped not by what others thought of Him, but by God alone. Protecting His reputation did not concern Him. He was able to weep with those who wept and to speak the hard truth to those who needed to hear it.*

Authenticity, honesty and realness are part of God's

nature. And as we follow Jesus, we grow in these qualities.

Yet, within us, there is a tension between a need for honesty and a desire to hide. We hide behind masks and roles that we use to shape how people see us.

In order to grow more into His image, particularly in authenticity and vulnerability, the masks that we construct need to be dismantled. His image can not freely shine through our masks—they are part of the false self. Our masks get in the way of building solid relationships.

Why we hide...

Masks and roles cover our hearts and minds. They keep people out or attempt to protect us in some way. We create them for specific reasons:

- We want others to be impressed by us
- We are afraid of being rejected
- We are afraid of being seen as weak
- We want to hide or deny our emotions
- We want to keep others at a distance

We are most likely to put on a mask when someone has hurt us and when we are wounded. **The kinds of masks we create relate to our fears and wounds.** A mask covers pain and insecurity. It helps us to deny our inadequacy, hurt, disappointment, or longing for love. We create it, hoping to avoid being hurt again.

Often, masks cover the pain of rejection. We want to be accepted by others, but we're afraid of being vulnerable; so we hide our hearts behind an image that will help us fit in.

Rather than going to the cross and to our Creator with our fears, wounds and quest for identity, we put on masks and play roles.

Masks do not fix our problems, only Jesus can. With Jesus, we can lay them down and acknowledge our inner fears and wounds.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30).

Hiding behind what?

We can hide behind almost anything in our lives, particularly our gifts and talents. An athlete can hide behind his or her training or accomplishments. A compassionate person can use caring for others as a way of covering his or her fear of not being needed.

Masks can help us stand out in a crowd if we want to present an exaggerated image, such as "the best boy/girlfriend," "the perfect body," "the super Christian leader," "the most beautiful," or "the best student." Other masks might be "jock," "prep," or "goth."

Sometimes people hide behind depression, or act as if their life is in perpetual crisis. These masks are quite obviously tied to the ways that the people are hurting and wounded.

Come to me, all you
give you REST



Playing roles

In life, like in drama, we can play different roles. Someone might be “the clown,” being funny to avoid getting close to people. Another might be “the silent one,” quietly withdrawing to avoid getting hurt again. Another still might be “the rebel,” getting into trouble and wearing a tough outer shell to avoid revealing vulnerabilities.

In most families, people take on certain roles. Dr. Frank Minirth writes, “For persons in a dysfunctional family situation, though, the roles become a coping mechanism, a way to get through life with a minimum of upset.”¹ And so we can become stuck in certain roles, unable to operate out of our true selves.

hide behind a homosexual or bisexual identity. All of these belong to the false self.

Using our sexuality to control or manipulate others is called seduction. This manipulation can look very playful and innocent. But when we act seductively we tempt other people to worship us, and we seek to take the place of God in other people’s lives. When we use our sexuality to draw another person away from God, we collaborate

OFTEN, MASKS COVER

the pain of rejection. We want to be accepted by others, but we’re afraid of being vulnerable; ←

so we hide our hearts behind an image that will help us fit in.

Common Roles

Victim	the wounded one, expects bad things to happen
Mascot	always fun to be around, cracks jokes, liked by everyone
Scapegoat	the one who gets blamed, even if not at fault
Lost child	withdrawn, unknown, distant
Caretaker	the unofficial counselor who needs to be needed
Good boy/girl	lives up to all the rules and expectations
Party boy/girl	nothing is serious, everything is superficial
Tough boy/girl	aggressive, best defense is a good offense

There are any number of roles we can play to avoid showing our real needs. For example, a caretaker becomes wrapped up in caring for other people and their problems to avoid their own problems. Caretakers love out of their need to take care of others. Although it looks caring, it is actually born of neediness and insecurity.

Sex as a mask

Our sexuality can also be used as a mask. We can use it to create an image of ourselves as attractive, sexy, flirtatious, or seductive. This image can include how we dress and talk, and how we express our sexuality. Some people

with Satan. This collaboration creates ties to the demonic realm and causes oppression in our souls. If this applies to you, you need to confess seduction as sin and renounce your collaboration with Satan in your seductive behavior.

Jesus wants to redeem and make pure our sexuality. It is a gift from God.

Narcissism (när-sə-si-zəm)

Some people feel like their masks are the total of who they are. This is called narcissism. Many people go through times of feeling this way. Others feel this way all the time. Narcissists are obsessed with their image. “Narcissists love their image, not their real self. They have a poor sense of self... Instead, their activities are directed toward the enhancement of their image, often at the expense of self.”²

Narcissists have very little sense of inner life. The roots of narcissism can be very early childhood rejection or abandonment and indicate a lack of a sense of being (see Chapter 4). Sometimes narcissists can be very seductive.

Where we wear masks

We often wear different masks with different groups of people, such as our friends, our family, our coworkers, or our youth group.

**who are weary and I WILL
... for your SOULS. (Mt 11:28-29).**



Masks take a lot of emotional

energy to maintain because they are not REAL. . . masks are “a defense against reality. . . The only safe self is one that can be created and controlled,”

Likewise it is difficult to receive love while wearing a mask. We become pre-occupied with trying to keep the mask in place. When we have a mask on we become afraid of being vulnerable. We can become controlling and afraid to reach out to others.

Masks take a lot of emotional energy to maintain because they are not REAL. Andy Comiskey writes that in fact, the masks are “a defense against reality. The real self is unacceptable . . . It represents to him or her the sum total of rejecting experiences. The only safe self is one that can be created and controlled.”³

Our adequacy comes from Jesus. He is our strength and security.

The true self underneath

In order to grow into who we are meant to be, we need to surrender our masks. **But because our masks serve a purpose, giving them up is costly.**

We will be able to take our masks off as we trust God’s love and acceptance of us. We no longer need our masks because we have the powerful love of our Father, even in the depths of our fears or wounds.

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Col 1:21-22).

We have been given the privilege of being face to face with our Creator, Father and the Lover of our soul.

Our masks will come off as we learn to trust others. As we seek to love others we will relate with people face to face rather than mask to mask. This honest and authentic relating is nourishing. It is also risky. When we expose who we really are in relationships, we make ourselves vulnerable to criticism or being hurt. But, as we build relationships in which we are truly known, our true selves emerge and we are increasingly free.

“Christian” masks?

Christian masks are harder to name and also often harder to lay down. Religious masks often cover judgmental or hypocritical attitudes. Interestingly it was those who wore religious masks who felt threatened by Jesus.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean . . . You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Mt 23:25-28).

Jesus is not impressed with our religious masks; he is concerned with the heart. He wants to clean “the inside of our cup,” so that the outside reflects the inside.

The side effects...

Masks hide our true selves and limit our ability to love others. Think about what it would be like to kiss someone with a big Halloween mask on. It would be hard to kiss as well as to be kissed. That’s what it’s like trying to love someone from behind a mask.

Jesus is not impressed with our religious masks; He is concerned with the heart.

OUR ADEQUACY

comes from JESUS.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2Co 3:18).

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Father, I confess that I have created these masks. (Name them.) I confess the ways I lied, boasted, compromised the truth, and was self-centered in hiding behind my masks. I bring these masks to the cross. I turn from these false identities.

I confess, too, the way that I have played roles, rather than being who You have made me to be.

Please make me aware of when I am tempted to hide behind them again. I turn toward You, who will free me to live in my real self. Father, I need the courage to be my true self in my relationships, without masks and roles. Help me to be honest with my friends and in all my relationships. I confess that I prefer to hide. I ask for Your love to flow through me, that I would be free to love.

Father pour out your love and acceptance into the deep places in my heart where I've felt rejected.

(Wait upon the Lord to minister His love here.)

If you have used your sexuality as a mask, you can pray something like this:

(Pray this with a leader or accountability friend who can pray for you.)

I confess the ways I have used my sexuality as a mask to attract and keep friendships and lovers and to feed my pride. Forgive me for using my power to seduce and control others. I confess how I've let Satan use me. I acknowledge how I have seduced others and drawn them to me sexually and emotionally. I confess and turn from the sin of seduction and renounce any spirit of seduction. Cleanse me God and set me free to really love others from my true self.

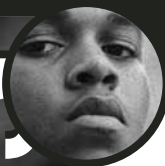
"I REALLY AM TERRIFIED TO LET GO

of my mask. I worked so hard to build it and put it in place. I always need to look like everything is totally together. I am afraid that if people really saw what was underneath, they would see me as a loser. And underneath I honestly don't feel like much is there. This is where

I am currently really wrestling with God. God showed me that I need more healing underneath before I can fully give my mask to Him . . . so we are working on it together."



QUESTIONS



#1

What masks do you wear and/or roles do you play?



#2

How does wearing masks and/or playing roles benefit you? Have you submitted these masks and roles, and their benefits to **Jesus**?



#3

Why do you wear these masks? What wounds or fears do they cover up?



#4

How does not liking parts of yourself relate to wearing certain masks?



#5

Have you used your sexuality as a mask? If so, how have you used it to control others?

Idols are an ancient tribal thing, right?

We imagine people dancing in a circle around a carved pole. But we, even in our techno-cyber worlds, create idols too.

Some people acknowledge that they worship other gods,

like New Age earth gods, or the earth, or that they practice witchcraft, Hinduism, paganism, Buddhism or other spiritualities. But we can make idols out of anything, such as money, pleasure, looks, weight, sex, a person, goals, stuff, work, community, cars, or a certain group of people.

God longs for us to worship only Him, the one true and living God. He knows that we have the capacity to worship other gods.

In the Old Testament, Israel was tempted to worship other gods. All around Israel, pagan nations created idols from precious metals to worship other gods. God was pretty clear about what Israel was to do:

“The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction” (Dt 7:25–26a).

“This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Dt 7:5-6).

When Moses brought The Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, first God reminded His people who He was: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,” and then God said, “you shall have no other gods before Me. . . . You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down and worship them; for I, the Lord Your God, am a jealous God” (Ex 20:2–5a).

Identifying idols

An idol is any person or thing we worship. We fill our hearts with and give our hearts to him, her or it. Idolatry is “filling our need for love with something or someone God has made rather than with God Himself.”¹ This might remind you of how we described addiction. The things we get addicted to become our idols.

Many times the things we make into idols are good, in and of themselves. Doing well in school is a good thing. However, if it begins to determine our self-worth and if it takes precedence over our relationship with God, then these are indications that it has become an idol. Watching television is not necessarily a bad thing. But if it determines our schedule and dominates our lives, then it has probably become an idol. Serving God in ministry is a good thing, but even ministry can become an idol. It becomes an idol when we serve because we need recognition or we need to bolster our fragile self-confidence.

We wouldn't create idols if they didn't give us something in return. They provide a temporary fix for the longings of our hearts. We can bolster our self-worth through getting good grades or through ministry. We can distract ourselves from loneliness and pain through watching television. We can temporarily fulfill our desire for intimacy

you shall have NO

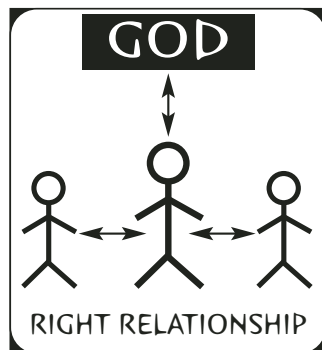


through an emotionally dependent relationship. But these paybacks are temporary and eventually we end up more empty, lonely or fragile than before.

Idolatry prevents us from being all that God created us to be. Idolatry limits our ability to grow as His people. Rather than bringing our needs to God, we create shortcuts and attempt to meet them in our own ways. This stunts our growth and limits our ability to worship God, know His peace and love others. Our purpose on earth, to know and worship God, is damaged. Idols belong to the false self and often cover feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, sadness or neediness.

In right relationship with our Father, worshiping Him, we stand upright before God. We can listen to His voice.² Then we are free to be in healthy relationships with others. We can form deep friendships without losing ourselves in them.

In right relationship with God, we are secure in His love, free to love God and others. Our hope is in Him.



When we are not in right relationship with God, we form false gods — people or things. They become the ones we worship and listen to. We are bent and unable to relate clearly to God or others.

When we make an idol out of another person, we bend into him or her, and the other person takes God's place. We are unable to receive and respond to God freely. We are overly dependent on that person and he or she becomes our hope and identity.

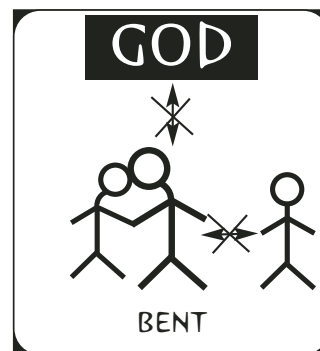
Emotional dependency

Bending into another person is a form of idolatry called emotional dependency. Lori Rentzel, author of "Emotional Dependency," defines it as the condition "when the ongoing presence and nurture of another is believed to be necessary for personal security."³ It is looking to another person for what only God can give.

WHEN WE ARE NOT IN right relationship with God, we form false gods — people or things. They become the ones we worship

and listen to. We are bent and unable to relate clearly to God or others.

Emotional dependency is a grasping and needy love. We see a lot of it in our culture. Think about the name of the popular cologne, "Obsession." It evokes a link between love, relationships, and having or being an obsession. Many songs glorify unhealthy, dependent romantic relationships.



These relationships are often characterized by exclusivity, jealousy, control, feeling able to speak for the other person, idealizing the other person, reacting constantly to one another, or causing others to feel uncomfortable by displaying public affection.

An emotionally dependent relationship is initially attractive because it looks like it will meet all of our needs. For a while, the relationship feels like it offers a new and intense kind of security. It feels like there is finally ONE relationship we can count on and that we really do belong to someone. Perhaps it feels like the family we never had. Our need for intimacy and warmth is filled and we feel needed, even if there are an AWFUL lot of ups and downs.

Usually we come into intensely unhealthy, idolatrous relationships because we did not receive the nurture and love we needed growing up. So we look to another person to fill unmet needs that are very, very deep.

other gods before ME....

(Ex 20:2-5a)



When we cast down our idols

we need to come to God on His terms. We need to ask ourselves, do we really believe what God has revealed in His Word for how we should live?

Emotional dependency

can happen in romantic relationships or simply in friendships. Sometimes it is obvious that a person leads us away from God. But often, when we're in the relationship, we're the last one to see the emotional dependency and the sin. We become blind to the ways he or she separates us from God. Sometimes, we think this person is actually key to our spiritual growth in Christ. (As you read this chapter, ask yourself, are you open to God showing you unhealthy, dependent patterns? Are you open to the input of those around you?)

The most common dating idolatry is thinking that romantic love is one's salvation. **"If only I had the right boyfriend/girlfriend . . . then my life would be ok."**

Many who struggle with homosexual tendencies also tend to form emotional dependencies.

One of the specific factors in homosexual attractions and relationships is what Leanne Payne calls "the cannibal compulsion." Cannibals, she learned from a missionary, eat those only those humans whom they admire and whom they desire to become like. They hope to acquire their good characteristics by consuming them. When we struggle with homosexual attractions, we, too, desperately hope to become complete by consuming another person emotionally and sexually. Often we seek the masculinity or femininity that we lack in ourselves.⁴

*Our Father
will empower
us to stand.
This power
comes through
spending time
with Him.*

Sex has been an idol for a really long time.

In ancient cultures, there were specific sex idols. Israel would disobediently leave God and worship them. Through worshipping idols of sex (and it does not take much to figure out what a worship service would consist of), Israelites were oppressed by specific demons associated with sexual perversion. Likewise people today become oppressed by demons because of sexual sin, whether in fantasy or acting out. See Appendix 3, "Demons, Idols, and Sex."

TESTIMONY

"I was a quiet guy, and had a hard time expressing my opinions. I was shy and felt awkward. Consistently I was attracted to men who were really loud and outspoken. I was attracted to certain characteristics which I thought I lacked. Now, as I become more secure as a man, I am less taken in by these men."

Soul ties

One of the side effects of emotionally dependent and sexually intimate relationships is that our souls become tied to our partner(s). If we have been involved with someone sexually, then we have become one flesh with them. Even after the relationship is over, this connection remains. It is important to pray and ask God to cut these soul ties.

Smashing idols God's way

We are invited to smash our idols. As we do, we are reclaiming God's territory, His kingdom, in our hearts. This is not a task for the faint-hearted.

When we cast down our idols we need to come to God on His terms. We need to ask ourselves, do we really believe what God has revealed in His Word for how we should live?

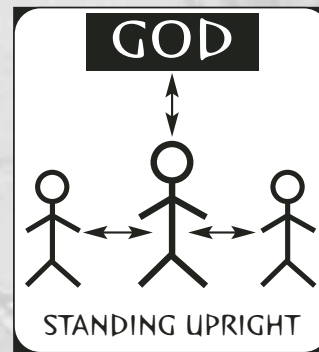
GOD'S territory, HIS
KINGDOM, in our hearts.

Do we say we believe it because we think we should, but then reserve a part of our hearts to keep our own plans for how to have fun, find love, build relationships, or get by in life, just in case God's way doesn't work?

In the places where we are double-minded, we need to humbly confess our own plans and desires that fall short of His plans and desires. Then we can truly worship God alone (Ro 8:12-14). Do not be surprised if forsaking our own ways feels like death, because it is a process of dying to our own false self to make room for our true self in union with Christ. In this process, we become intensely aware of our need for Him. He makes more room in our hearts for of His life to live in us and heal us.

Empowered to smash

In this process, we need to know Him as our advocate — the one who is for us. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future" (Jer 29:11).



Knowing God is for us, we can stand.

Our Father will empower us to stand. This power comes through spending time with Him. As the Holy Spirit dwells in us, our wills become shaped to be like His, and we will be able to hear His voice (Jn 14:16-18).

We need this strengthening by our Father to cast down our idols. We can pray as Paul did for the Ephesians "that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen us with power through His spirit in our inner being" (Eph 3:16).

"I HAD A SERIES OF EMOTIONALLY

dependent friendships. In fact, until I got some healing, most of my friendships were at least somewhat emotional dependent. But God is showing me the way out. They all had a pattern like this one: I was in college and really lonely. I met a new friend.

I felt like she alone understood my pain and struggles. I desperately needed her and planned my schedule around my phone calls to her. If she was cool on the phone to me, or busy, I felt SO rejected. I became jealous of anything more important to her than talking to me. Our closeness was very intense, and for me, very dependent. Other friends commented on how they thought it a bit unhealthy, but I insisted that they just didn't understand. With great pain, Jesus enabled me to look to Him instead of to her. My deeper needs were not met instantly, but God began the process of filling my heart, a process that was blocked when I had

been looking to my friend. Eventually, I was freed to remain in this friendship as a whole person, not looking to find myself in her."



Standing upright, we are then able to set appropriate boundaries with other people. We can look to God first to meet our deep needs rather than looking to others. In setting boundaries, it may be helpful to picture the cross as the boundary between the other person and us.

Response:

Prayer to cast down our idols:

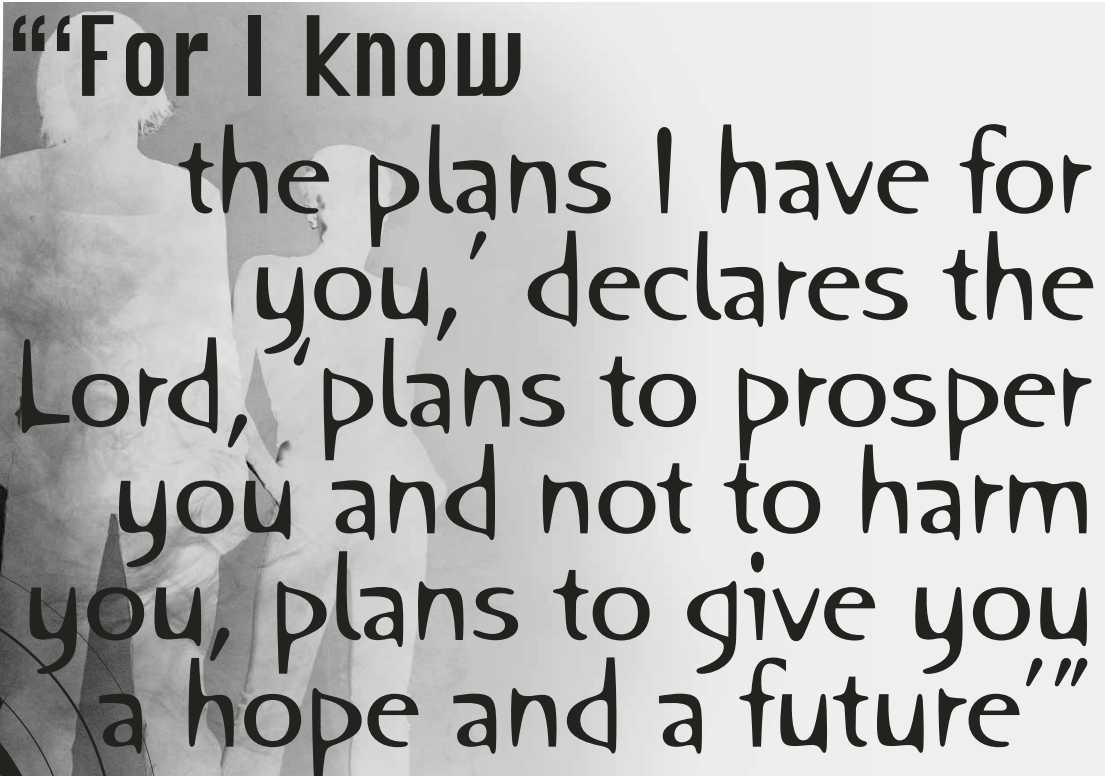
Father, I confess that I have worshiped other people and other things instead of You. I have given my heart away. In my dependencies, I confess the way I have mistreated others through envy and jealousy. I acknowledge my weakness. Father, come and out of your glory strengthen me with Your power in my inner being. I need You to empower me to choose You and to stand upright before You.

Father, bring up the pain of my idolatry and cleanse me. Fill in those deep empty places with Your healing presence. With my eyes on You alone, I choose to smash every idol. And I

renounce any spiritual stronghold. I thank You for Your sweet mercy. Come and fill me, Lord.

If a person was an idol, and/or if you were sexually involved, you need to break spiritual ties. The following prayer can be prayed:

Father, I come to You with my relationship with _____. I enter now into the presence of Your Son, Jesus and lay _____ at His feet. I confess this relationship as sin and idolatry and ask that You would absorb the darkness created by this relationship. In agreement with Your will and by the power of the blood of Jesus, I break the power of this union. Jesus, come now and establish Your cross between us. I worship You alone. Help me to see _____ as she or he really is and to release him or her to You. I forgive _____ for not meeting my needs and for the pain of the relationship. Lord I receive Your forgiveness for looking to _____. Lord I want to know what it means for You alone to be the desire of my heart.

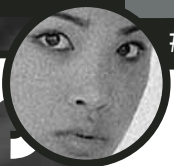


**“For I know
the plans I have for
you,” declares the
Lord, “plans to prosper
you and not to harm
you, plans to give you
a hope and a future”**

(Jer 29:11).



QUESTIONS?



#1

Are there people or things in your life that have become idols? If so, who or what are they?



#2

Have you bent into someone? How so? Do you envy him or her? Are you jealous? Do you idealize the other?



#3

Is it difficult for you to stand upright in relationships? If so, how?



#4

GOD wants you to disown and destroy the idols in your life. This is not a one-time thing, but something we continually need to do. Are you ready to do this? What, if anything, makes this process hard? What could make it easier?

11

TOOLS

TOOLS

Unless you pull up a weed by the roots, it will grow back stronger

and will spread. The trick is to water the soil and to use the right tools to deal with the whole root system. This is also true in our hearts. Sin patterns and brokenness grow like weeds. If we are constantly trying to change our behavior without addressing the deeper issues of our hearts, our sins and struggles will grow and spread like weeds.

Just as there are tools for gardening, there

are tools for dealing with the weeds in our lives. We have already worked with some of them: confessing sin, living in the truth of who we are, relating with our heavenly Father, receiving God's love, and learning to stand in the face of temptation. The next tool to consider is healing prayer.

Essentially, healing prayer is inviting Jesus to deal with the roots of our brokenness and sin. Here are some aspects of healing prayer.

#1 Transformed by His Word

God often speaks and heals through His words in the Bible. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2Ti 3:16-17). The Bible has

unique authority to speak to us, to shape us and to transform us.

All of the other ways in which He speaks to us—in our intuitive minds, in pictures or words, through music or art, in relationships—will be consistent with His words in the Bible.

Making time for God

It is important to spend daily time with God. This helps us to hear Him throughout the day. It sets our minds on Him and tunes us in spiritually. But what does time with God look like? It is not as hard as it sounds. This is a suggestion for how to incorporate some basic components into your regular time with God. Set aside 20 minutes a day. Many people prefer to spend this time either at the start or the end of the day.

- P Pray.** Invite the Holy Spirit to come.
- R Read** the Bible. Perhaps read through a book, such as John, reading a part of a chapter each day.
- A Adore** God. Tell Him how good He is.
- Y You:** Tell Him what's on your heart. Confess sin and ask Him for what you and those you love need.
- E Expect** God to answer. Listen for Him. Did He speak to you in His word, a picture, or a thought?
- R Respond.** What do you need to do in response to this time?

The power to heal

God is always at work. And as we worship, read the Bible, pray, or invite the presence of the Lord, we can encounter His healing. But there are also times when His power to heal is present in a special way. Luke, writing of Jesus teaching in a synagogue, writes, "The power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick" (Lk 5:17b). We can ask for this power to be present when we pray.



ALL SCRIPTURE is GOD —

#2 Wisdom + Understanding = Getting to the roots

Part of our healing is identifying the roots of our struggles. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can understand the ways we were sinned against and the ways family dynamics have contributed to our brokenness.

Sometimes this is clear. More often, it's a process of discovery. God may help us make the connections through journaling, talking to wise friends, learning from other people's stories, reading, counseling, or simply asking Him in prayer.

Understanding how and why we do the things we do enables us to "connect the dots" between causes, effects and Jesus. Insight is a gift from God that helps us to avoid repeating patterns in the future.

Andy Comiskey writes, "Self-understanding permits the mercy and power of Jesus to be applied specifically to the roots of our sexual and relational confusion."¹ Self-understanding opens the door for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Insight alone, however, doesn't heal. We need to take the insight to the Lord and ask Him to heal the root.

As we ask Him, God can reveal Himself to us in our memories. The Lord will bring His presence and minister to us in the situation. He can comfort, hold, play, protect, or provide whatever we need. Where we did not receive what we needed, He can give it to us. He "calls things that are not as though they were" (Ro 4:17b). We can receive His love and can extend forgiveness in that situation.

After meeting Jesus in the wounded places in prayer, we then are increasingly free to walk forward in our true identities in Christ.

GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK

And as we worship, read the Bible, pray, or invite the presence of the Lord, we can encounter His healing. But there are also times when His power to heal is present in a special way. Luke, writing of Jesus teaching in a synagogue, writes,

"The power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick" (Lk 5:17b).



#3 Prayer for healing of painful memories — meeting Jesus at the roots

Sometimes there are specific memories from our pasts that need healing. What does it mean for God to heal a memory? Do we forget the past? No, God obviously does not change history. God heals pain from the past by allowing us to experience His presence in those places.

Even if we had not been walking with Christ as our savior and Lord, **He has been with us throughout our lives.** Often, though, we did not know it, and we could not sense His presence.

The healing PROCESS

Are we there yet? How much longer?

Process is a key part of our healing. Usually we don't see 100% change overnight. Often we ask, "why is this taking so long?" "Why doesn't Jesus change me faster?" God is at work. And He usually is doing much more than we are aware of at the time.

In Exodus, God promised to kick out the enemies of the land, to give the land to His people, and to bless them. Here, He says why He didn't give the land to them all at once: "But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land" (Ex 23:29-30).

In this passage, we can see some spiritual principles for God's work in our lives. As God did not clear out the land at once for His people, so He doesn't come and immediately take out every wound and problem. He heals us as we are able to incorporate real change into our lives. He knows how to tend to our souls.

—breathed and is useful...

(2Ti 3:16)



The blood of Jesus COVERS

not only our own sin, but also the sin from past generations. Therefore, we have the authority in the spiritual realm to break these ties,

#4 Breaking the power of generational sin — severing long roots

We are influenced not only by past events but also by the spiritual ties that have been passed on through the generations. We see how both blessings and curses are passed on from generation to generation in the Bible.

“And [God] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations’” (Ex 34:6–7).

“...for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex 20:5b–6).

We inherit spiritual baggage from past sins in our families. This contributes to our own bondage to certain sins. This is particularly true for those whose families were involved in the occult, perverse sexual activity, abusive relationships, suicide, alcoholism, other addictions, or mental illnesses.²

The blood of Jesus covers not only our own sin, but also the sin from past generations. Therefore, we have the authority in the spiritual realm to break these ties.

How to pray to break the power of generational sin:

It is helpful to do this in the context of a small group or with someone who will be able to pray with you. Often God speaks through others in this process.

1. Make a list of sins that you know are in your family lineage.
2. Pray and ask God to reveal any sins that you are not aware of. You may want to ask Him about the past four generations or wait on Him to speak concerning each generation.
3. Begin the time of prayer by thanking God for calling you to Himself. You can pray something like this regarding each sin area: “By the authority of Jesus, whose blood cancels the power of all sin, with the sword of the Spirit, I confess the sin of _____ in my family line. I break any demonic ties whether spiritual, sexual or psychological. I ask that the blood of Jesus would cover any sin or vulnerability in me. I ask that You would bless this cleansed area in my life and in the generations to come.” Pray for specific blessings and for the Holy Spirit to fill this area.

We inherit spiritual baggage from past sins in our families.

...for I, the Lord your **GOD**,
am a jealous **GOD** ... (Ex 20:5b–6)

#5 Choosing life—severing roots of death

Our culture is particularly familiar with death. Unprecedented youth violence, abortion, abuse, and other destructive forces have created an unhealthy familiarity with death. Suicidal thoughts or attempts, self-destructive patterns, chronic hopelessness, chronic illness, depression, the death of friends and family, or violence may have stirred a fascination or preoccupation with death.³

This familiarity with death affects our minds, forming cynical and distorted beliefs about God and the world. Our spirits also can be infected with the influence of the demonic. Satan wants to keep us from knowing abundant life. But Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10 NRSV).

We can renounce death and its grip on our lives and be set free to choose life. God said to His people, **“I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...”** (Dt 30:19b).

Because Jesus broke the hold of death when he rose from the dead, we too can choose life.

A prayer for choosing life:

Father, thank you for the gift of life. Thank You for creating life and for giving me eternal life. I want to know what it means to have abundant life! I want to be free from any attachment to things that produce death. I confess my sins that have produced death in me. And I name the things done to me (and in my communities) that have worked death in me. I renounce (disown) death, with the authority of Jesus, who broke the chains of death at His resurrection. I choose to embrace Your life without fear. Thank You that You want to give me abundant life and abundant joy.

Practicing God’s presence

Because it is easy to forget that God is with us, we need to practice living in His reality. It doesn’t come naturally, but we’ll grow into His reality as we practice His presence. We can call to mind the reality that Jesus lives in us, and that we live in Him, as He lives in the Father: “I in them and you in me” (Jn 17:23a). We are never alone: Jesus lives in us. We can listen for His voice and look for His presence around us. This is key to our ongoing spiritual health and to the healing process: **Jesus in us** is growing and changing us. How to practice this:

1. Thank God that Christ lives inside of you. Take a minute and let this sink in.
2. Then consciously look for signs of God’s presence around you.

“WHEN I WAS ELEVEN YEARS OLD, and everyday for the next five years, I came home from school to an empty house. I was a latch key kid. I was so lonely. I felt abandoned and angry.

Recently, I got together with a couple of people to pray because I have been struggling a lot with depression. As we prayed, the Lord showed me that when I was eleven years old was when I first felt depressed. This was the root. As we continued to pray, and as I recalled being alone in the house, Jesus showed me that He was there.

I felt His presence, and in the picture in my mind, He came and sat with me. His presence filled the whole room and I started to cry with relief and joy. As a result of this prayer time, I felt freedom from a deep sense of aloneness.”

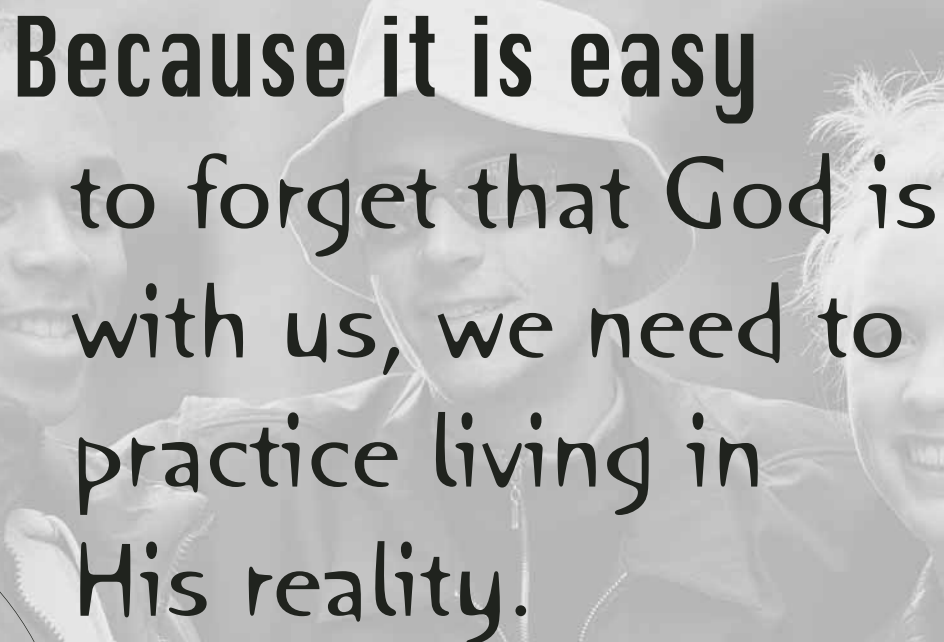


Response:

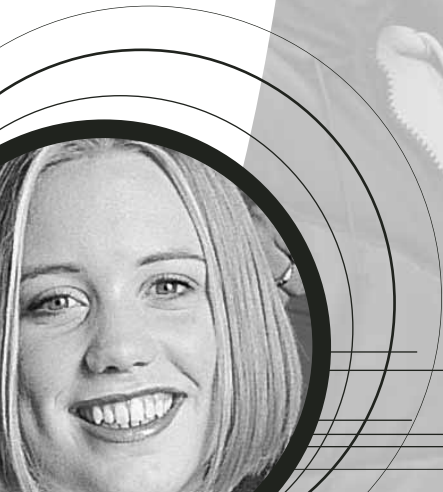
You can pray something like this . . .

Lord, I offer to You this healing process. I know that it is Your work; help me to trust You in it. Draw me into greater intimacy with You. Please feed me with Your Word, so that I will know You better. I (re)commit to spending regular time with You and in Your Word. I long to hear Your voice.

I need Your wisdom and revelation in my life. I trust You in this process to give me understanding about my own heart and the brokenness in my life. Father God, I thank You that You are able to heal painful memories by bringing Your presence into them. I ask You to show me any painful memories that You want to heal. Thank you that You have always been with me in my life. And I pray that You will show me the generational sin patterns that hold me back from walking in Your love and freedom. Jesus, I invite You to reveal Yourself to me.



**Because it is easy
to forget that God is
with us, we need to
practice living in
His reality.**



QUESTIONS



#1

How is the quality of your “quiet time” with God?



#2

Are you growing in understanding and insight into your life? If so, give an example.



#3

As you think about your life, are there specific painful memories that you would like God to heal? What are they?



#4

Make a list of the sins that existed in the past generations of your family. Do you see any patterns?



#5

Stop and practice the presence of Christ. How can you build this into your life?

Intro to gender

Girl-guy relating is a challenge. It has been said that we are from different planets. Friendships, not to mention dating relationships, can be frustrating, hurtful, and confusing. Don't you think it be easier if we were all the same?

God's design

Perhaps it would be *easier*, but God's design is *better*. Do you remember how in the beginning God created everything: the heavens, the earth, every animal and flower? Then He created, in His own image, the first man, Adam. Soon after, because God wanted Adam to have a partner, He created Eve. She, also created in God's image, was different from Adam and complemented him. They were together, sharing their humanity and complementing each other in their differences.

Their maleness and femaleness (gender) were rooted in God's image. So is ours.

The story continues. Together Adam and Eve ruled over the earth and lived in a great relationship with God. But they sinned and there were grave consequences. Their togetherness was lost, and their relationship was filled with strife. In the fall, the image of God was distorted. Their differences became liabilities. Man would forever strive in his work. Woman would try to find her identity in her husband. Their newfound self-knowledge was not a good thing. This was not part of God's plan.

Since Adam's and Eve's rebellion there has been a breakdown in relationships. We may

experience this breakdown in our relationships with the opposite sex, in our relationships with others of our own gender, or in our own sense of security as men and women.

QUESTION

Where did you learn about what guys and girls are like?

- Your parents
- Your brothers and sisters
- Your friends
- TV and the movies
- (other) _____

But this is not the end of the story. God not only created us, but He also restores us to be men and women who reflect His image. As we identify with Jesus' death and resurrection, He raises up our true selves.

So, what does it mean to be a secure man or woman? What does it mean to be masculine? To be feminine? The answers to these questions are rooted in God's design.¹

We see answers to these questions as we look at the unique roles men and women have as parents. By looking at the way that God designed us to function as parents, we gain insight into what is unique to men and women.²

Uniquely feminine

Only women carry and bring new life into the world. A mother's body is the baby's first home. She provides the secure, nurturing place for the unborn child to develop. In special ways, she makes a home and nurtures the baby. This particular kind of nurture and the ability to receive this new life is a unique experience to women. In this, we see the essence of the feminine: nurture, responsiveness and relationship.³

An extension of this ability to nurture is woman's often greater relational capacity. Women tend to be particularly sensitive to relational dynamics. It is usually teenage girls who stay on the phone for hours analyzing a five minute interaction.

GOD restores us



There are also distinctly feminine ways of thinking associated with this relational dynamic. These include, among others, intuitive understanding, discernment, and wisdom.⁴

God needs women to reveal these aspects of His image to the world. All women have the capacity to express their femininity, but each will express it differently, depending on her personality, talents, and culture. Women can be athletic, quiet, loud, creative, and administrative.

Our culture has distorted images of women. Often we define femininity by the latest trends in fashion magazines. And sometimes we are told that girls aren't any different than guys. Both views are wrong and very damaging.

TESTIMONY

“I want to know more of what it means to be strong and secure as a guy. I grew up without a dad. I love my sisters and my mom, but there is a big hole inside. I know really well how to relate to girls, but I feel like I am lacking something. I don't know how to connect with other guys. I often feel competitive and insecure around them. And as a result I feel alone in a really deep way.”

MEN AND WOMEN NEED

both the feminine and masculine, in balance with their gender. We all need to be responsive to the Lord and to other people. ←

And we all need to take initiative and bring order to our lives.

TESTIMONY

“Fashion models were my image of what real femininity was. They looked cool, collected and beautiful. They were also usually twig thin. I didn't understand that my being a woman was more than skin deep. Inside I was so insecure. I tried to gain confidence by being really thin. I became obsessed with my looks. But I still felt really bad inside. Looking a certain way didn't take away the reality that I had no idea what it meant to be a woman.”

Distinctly masculine

Guys reflect the image of God in their masculinity. We can understand this by looking at the unique role of a father in a child's life.

When a child learns to crawl it is usually from mom to dad. It is dad's masculine strength that equips the child to encounter the world. Dad uniquely gives his child identity separate from mom. Dr. Daniel Trosch writes, “Mother is a circle and father is the one who draws us away from that circle.”⁵

Andy Comiskey defines masculinity as “the power to act (lead, initiate, shape, form) . . . The true masculine involves the power to prevail in the face of adversity—to stand strong and not compromise oneself or the truth.

Radical obedience involves the true masculine. It is a posture worthy of honor, out of which one is able to recognize and defend what is true. Masculine ways of knowing include the rational and analytical.” (emphasis added)⁶

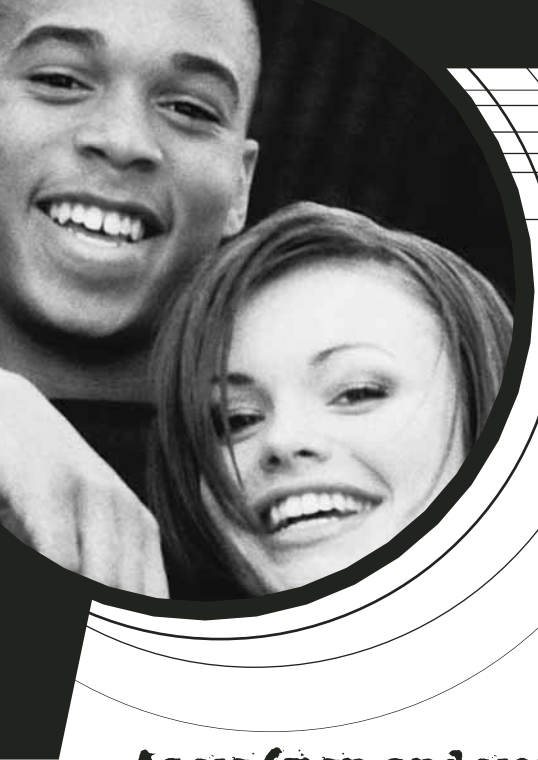
Men uniquely reveal and impart this masculinity. It looks very different depending upon a man's personality, interests, talents and upbringing. Within this wonderful diversity, men need to be strengthened in their masculinity and in their identities as men.

Men in our culture face what Leanne Payne calls “a crisis in masculinity.” Most men are isolated and need relationships, especially with one another. They often live the cultural myth of the Marlboro® Man: the rugged individual, conquering new territory alone. If guys have not had good role models of masculinity, they may feel insecure about themselves as men. Some men feel at a loss for how to express their masculinity in light of the great value placed on more feminine characteristics, such as sensitivity and being relational.

This is critical . . .

Men and women need both the feminine and masculine, in balance with their gender. We all need to be responsive to the Lord and to other people. And we all need to take initiative and bring order to our lives. Men need to be able to receive and think intuitively, exercising the feminine within them. Likewise women need to be able to bring order and strength, exercising the masculine within them.

to reflect HIS image.



We all need the true masculine,

balanced by the true feminine. Otherwise, without both operating in our lives, the imbalance will express itself in several ways,

As we (men and women) spend time together, working, playing and learning, we learn from one another and become more balanced people.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "There ought spiritually to be a man in every woman and a woman in every man. And how horrid ones who haven't got it are; I can't bear a man's man and a woman's woman."⁷

The false and counterfeit

So, does an abusive, macho man just have too much masculinity? And does a woman desperately seeking after Mr. Right have too much femininity? No.

These are examples of a false version of real masculinity and real femininity. False masculinity can be a power-hungry desire to rule; a tough, macho shell; or an emotionless workaholic. Both guys and girls can struggle with false masculinity.

We all need the true masculine, balanced by the true feminine. Otherwise, without both operating in our lives, the imbalance will express itself in several ways.

Without the good of the true masculine, we may have trouble making decisions, bringing order, speaking the truth, or taking initiative.⁸

There is also a counterfeit version of true femininity. This can look like an over-dependence on other people, leading to care-taking or unhealthy relationships.

The lack of the true feminine may result in the inability to receive, be still, intuit, know one's heart, or share in relationship. This can be true for women and men.

Women who lack the good of the true feminine may feel insecure about themselves as women. They may come across as weak and insecure, or as having a hard, tough outer shell.

Please tell me I'm okay

To be able to have good relationships we need a foundational security that we're okay as guys or girls. When we don't have this basic security, we often look to others, asking them to tell us that we're okay.⁹ Sometimes we lose ourselves in relationships. Or we seek needy people to take care of. Sometimes we make our significant other into an idol, or demand that we be the idol.

Sometimes, rather than bending into another, gender insecurity provokes shame and isolation, which prevents any real relationship. We may settle for fantasy (perhaps accompanied by pornography or masturbation) as a way to avoid risk to our fragile self.

People with homosexual tendencies struggle with gender insecurity. Such tendencies indicate that we are not reconciled with our own gender and with the opposite sex. Homosexuality is an attempt to create peace in our gender identity. But it is a false peace.

In all of these examples the image of God is hidden.

Solid inside

Security in our gender comes through our parents, other significant caretakers, our peers and siblings. Insecurity can come through a breakdown in these relationships, our culture or abuse.

To be able to have good relationships we need a foundational security that we're okay as guys or girls.

Both GUYS and GIRLS can struggle with FALSE masculinity.

God wants to make us secure as men and women. He wants us to be strong and empowered men and women, passionate for Him and His people. **When we are secure as men and women, our passion for Him and others is strengthened and purified.**

And God is not only the creator of our gender but also the redeemer. No matter how distorted the image of God is in us, God can reclaim what is essential to our femininity and masculinity. He blesses us as His sons and daughters.

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Father, I want to be secure and sure of myself as a man (woman). I am tired of fighting with my own insecurity. I have a hard time separating what others say I should be like from who I really am. I have tried to act like I was really confident when I wasn't. I confess that I have looked to other things but not to You for my identity. I lay down all of who I am, especially how I see myself as a man (woman). (You might want to list these things.) I ask that You would raise up what is pleasing to You. Father I need Your affirmation and blessing upon me as a man (woman). Come and strengthen me from the inside out to be a man (woman) who loves and reflects You.

A few words about homosexuality...

Homosexual behavior is an attempt to fulfill normal, legitimate needs for love, acceptance, and identity through sexual intimacy with someone of the same sex. Although the factors that contribute to the development of sexual orientation are complex and subtle, one of the deepest roots of homosexuality is a break in relational bonds, which stunts the development of the individual's ability to healthily connect with others throughout life. The security of a child depends on the three-way bond of mother to child, father to child, and the often under-emphasized bond between the parents. Any break, real or perceived, in these bonds can produce insecurity in him or her and thus a lack of that sense of belonging and affirmation which is so vital in the development of gender identity.

If the child has an absent or an emotionally distant mother or father, he or she will feel a certain amount of vulnerability, a vague longing for closeness and protection that the parent has not been able to fulfill. In addition to this, if the young person has been subjected to sexual molestation, especially at the hands of a trusted adult such as a teacher, babysitter, or relative, then the impact upon his or her ability to bond with others will be all the more devastating. In the face of this sense

AND GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR

of our gender but also the redeemer. No matter how distorted the image of God is in us, God can reclaim what is essential to our femininity and masculinity. He blesses us as His sons and daughters.



of exposure, the child may detach from the parent and other significant adults to one extent or another in order to avoid any further hurt and disappointment. This tendency to withdraw produces fear of intimacy, isolation from others, and envy on account of what is missing; it also adds to the weight of the heart-felt unworthiness and rejection that the young person is already carrying.

This leaves him or her with tremendous needs for affirmation and affection. In most instances, the attraction for the same sex begins before the age of ten; it is emotional, non-sexual, and involuntary. With sexual maturity, these needs become eroticized; sexual intimacy becomes a primary means for feeling loved and affirmed.

Hence, sexual activity offers some sense of being truly accepted. What seems to be love is received, the person extending this love is idolized, and the pain becomes covered over with pleasure. A momentary sense of self-esteem emerges bringing a temporary relief from the confusion of identity.

Finding completion

Thus, the homosexual condition is a result of the many hurts, real or perceived, that the child has suffered in the wake of a breach in relationship, overt or subtle, with a significant adult, usually of the same sex. The homosexual behavior is the activity that emerges as that "hurt child" seeks to fulfill these unmet love needs.

The result of these efforts to meet one's needs homosexually is that ultimately the loneliness remains, and the individual is left more fragmented and ill-at-ease than ever. In addition to this emotional unwholeness, the person often blames God for his hurts and for creating him homosexual. This hinders his or her ability to trust God, and experience the intimacy with Him that provides comfort and strength in the face of unmet inner longings.

Are "they" born that way?

The teaching of Scripture is that God intended for men and women to experience relational completion, an easing of aloneness through union with a partner who is sexually distinct from them, and who can thereby be a true helpmate and

companion in life. "So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them. The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Ge 1:27, 2:18 NIV). Homosexuality is a relational brokenness that scripture reveals as contrary to God's creative intent for man's sexuality. In light of this, one can be sure that whether homosexuality is the result of developmental causes or inborn characteristics, it is not the result of an act of creation by God.

But is it inborn? Much research has been done to explore potential genetic or hormonal contributions to the origins of homosexuality. No conclusive evidence has yet to be found. The exploration continues, with most experts citing a variety of influences that include: culture, family of origin, biological factors and one's own reaction to these influences. We believe that biological factors influence the formation of personality. Our personalities in turn will partially determine how and why we act and react to the influences around us. Some personality types may be more prone to developing homosexual tendencies.

Is there hope for healing?

Homosexuality is clearly a two-fold condition. A fallen world imposes wounds, fears, identity confusion, and alienation; people react with sinful choices in an attempt to restore what has been broken and gain consolation in the midst of pain and need. Yet the goal remains unreachd; the promise of real, lasting fulfillment proves to be all too elusive.

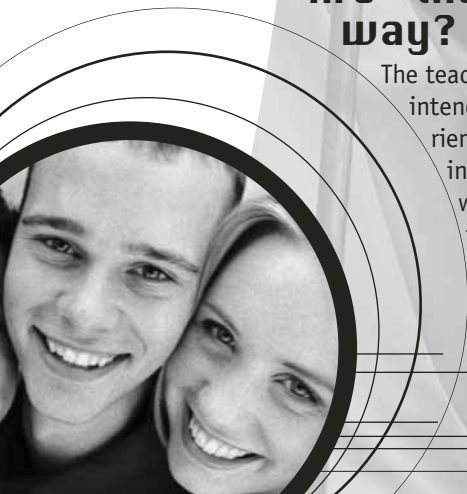
His grace is sufficient, for His strength is made perfect in weakness. He provides the mooring point for a new identity, the center out of which a true sense of well-being can be enjoyed. As we draw close to Him, we are enabled to reflect His image in our humanity more and more fully.

The goal of our growth is the freedom to love aright: freed to relate intimately but non-erotically to the same-sex, and able to address the opposite sex as a needed counterpart without fear or disinterest. As we believe such love is Christ's intent for us, we affirm His capacity to carry it out in our lives, and in the lives of those who seek to be free from homosexuality.

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DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES

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#1

Who or what has shaped your views of guys and girls, men and women? How so?

#2

Have you felt insecure about being a guy or girl? If so, how?

#3

What are examples of false masculinity or false femininity in your life?

#4

What is one way you want to grow in your identity as a man (woman), and in your masculinity or femininity?

QUESTIONS

?

?
?
?

13

Not the Brady Bunch

Every family has a story. Chances are we could all tell funny or quirky stories about growing up in our families. These stories are important. Families help to form us—the good, the bad and the ugly. But in order to appreciate the funny, quirky and good parts of our family life, we need to deal with the unhealthy, ugly and hurtful aspects.

Sometimes it is hard to remember anything

good about our families in light of the painful parts. It is important to face the truth about the pain and wounds we carry and about the ways that our families impact our self-image and relationships. As we face them with Jesus, we can make peace with the past and extend forgiveness. We will be freed to love and build healthy relationships.

A child's universe

More than anyone else, our parents (or parental figures) have the greatest impact on our early and most formative years. They help establish our foundational identities.

Most of our parents did the best that they could. But often they were stressed and struggling with their own problems. Or they may not have had good parental models to follow themselves. Sometimes they were just unaware of what we needed. Whatever the case, we need to acknowledge how they affected us in order to find healing.

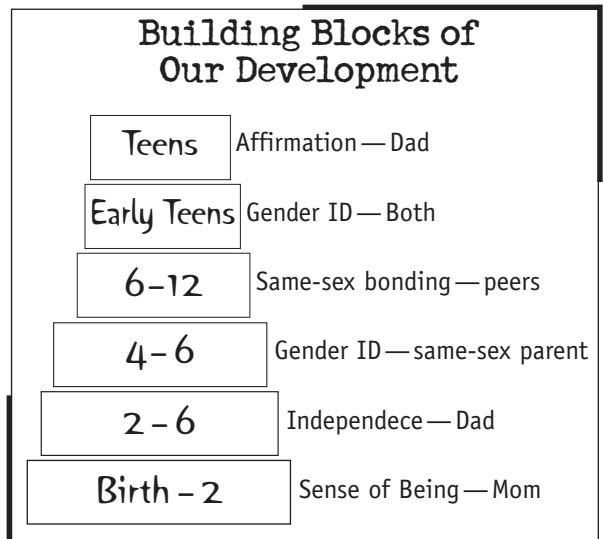
The basic building blocks'

Our primary sense of being is developed through mom in the first couple of years of life. In this stage we learn to trust mom and the world in general. We learn that we are safe.

The next stage begins in the "terrible twos." We learn that we are different from mom. In this stage dad is particularly important; he encourages us to step out of the safe place with mom to discover the world. We learn that we can make choices and set boundaries, hence our favorite word, "NO!" But we also learn that other people set boundaries for us, they say "no" to us (grrr!!).

Hmm...we're different

Between ages 4-6, we discover that boys and girls are different. Girls look to mom as the model of being a woman. Little girls love to imitate mom as they play dress-up and house. They might watch her put on make-up or perfume and copy her. Dad is likewise important as boys look to dad as the model of what it means to be a man. How many little boys copy dad's shaving?



OUR PARENTS

Our peers (and siblings)

At about age six, we begin to discover that the world is bigger than our family. We start to make friends, particularly with the same sex.

Boys do “troop-bonding” — boy-things together. They often find girls “yucky,” as they secure their BOY identity. After this identification with dad and other boys is established, they are ready to befriend girls.

Girls usually prefer to play with other girls, often finding boys “yucky.” They are developing a sense of being a GIRL. Then, having found acceptance with mom and other girls, they are ready to encounter boys.

Kids can be incredibly mean to each other. Significant peer rejection can leave us with a huge fear of rejection or with feelings of inadequacy.² This can last well into adulthood. Often parents do not equip and empower their children to survive the to-be-expected trials of name-calling, competitiveness, and jealousy that kids encounter. If we were sensitive children or if we had already been emotionally wounded, we were more likely to internalize the mean words or actions of our peers. Jesus wants to heal these wounds.

Siblings and step-siblings are important. They teach us about living in community. We can learn to play and share with all of the negotiating that this requires. Siblings also can deeply hurt one another. These wounds can include intense jealousy, hatred, or abuse (verbal, physical or sexual). Jesus can heal these wounds, too.

The teen years

Puberty is a universally awkward time. At this time, we really need the affirmation of our same-sex parent. Later in the teen years, both guys and girls need their fathers’ affirmation. Fathers bless their daughters as capable and valuable young women who are to be honored by guys. They bless their sons as able young men and teach them how to interact with and respect women.

By the time we are teenagers, we usually see some of the imperfections in our families, particularly in our parents. Some of us may err on the side of seeing only the bad in one or both of them. Some err in only seeing the good. Most parents, like most people, are a mix of good and bad. Appreciating the good and moving toward forgiving the bad will help us to grow into healthy and forgiving adults.

Hungry for love and affirmation

Many of us did not experience the blessing and security of having two parents who could give us what we needed. As a result, we were not affirmed while growing up.

There are many things that could cause a breakdown in our relationships with our parents: illness, neglect, abuse, death of a parent or sibling, separation, divorce, a parents’ emotional instability, depression, emotional or physical absence, or any number of other factors.

KIDS CAN BE INCREDIBLY

mean to each other. Significant peer rejection can leave us with a huge fear of rejection or with feelings of inadequacy.

Jesus wants to heal

these wounds.

Guys have a particularly hard time finding security today. Fathers, who are the primary model of what it means to be men, often are absent or weak. Some guys respond by building a strong masculine facade, but they feel weak and insecure inside, lacking focus and direction. For guys, an unmet need for fatherly, masculine love can result in those needs becoming sexualized. One of the outcomes can be homosexual desire.

Dad and daughter

Good fathering gives girls a firm foundation for healthy relating to guys — we can see men clearly for who they are. A broken father-daughter relationship “can range from the devastating effects of incest to the more typical lack of affirming fatherly presence.”³ In response to an abusive and violating father, a daughter might have a great fear of masculinity, or she might see all men as abusive. Her dad, instead of protecting and empowering her, overpowered her, betraying her trust and undermining her security.

A girl who lacked the affirmation of a father may be particularly hungry for male affirmation. This can lead to promiscuity or unhealthy, dependent boyfriend relationships. Lacking a father, a girl might remain inordinately close to her mother. She may be uncomfortable in relationships with men.⁴

have the greatest
impact on OUR early years



Today, more than ever before,

families are broken and isolated. Only 54% of American teenagers live with both biological parents, married to each other,

Mom and son

Good mothering gives boys a firm foundation for relating to girls. It helps them to accept women and femininity in general.

There are many variations of broken mother-son relationships. One type involves a mother smothering her son emotionally. While it might look like love, she is actually looking to meet her own needs. The son may be put in the role of spouse, as mom looks to him for support and masculine presence. Her behavior might involve manipulation or be guilt-provoking. Another type is when a mother communicates the message that men are bad, or that the son shouldn't be like his dad. In this way, she may damage his sense of being okay as a male.

In response, a son may see her as untrustworthy and unworthy of respect, back off and run away emotionally. He may replay this pattern in relationships with other women.⁵

Family dynamics

Today, more than ever before, families are broken and isolated. Only 54% of American teenagers live with both biological parents, married to each other.⁶

Most parents, like most people, are a mix of good and bad.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY FAMILY LOOK LIKE?

These are a few markers of healthy, functional families.

- Communication is open. Family members talk to each other. Kids are able to talk to their parents. Members can disagree and their opinions are valued.
- Parents set limits. They set rules and they discipline reasonably.
- Parents love each other and communicate love and trust to their children.
- Parents have their own support system and can offer guidance to their children.
- The family can relax together and enjoy life.
- Parents model and teach their children how to deal with relationships and conflict.

These are a few corresponding markers of an unhealthy family.

- Family members don't communicate well. Maybe one person is always right; a difference of opinion is dangerous. A child may learn it is better to be quiet. Sometimes children are told to not tell the truth about what happens at home.
- Parents set inconsistent limits. There may be no rules. They might be too controlling or totally inconsistent.
- Parents are consistently at odds with each other or live totally independent lives.
- Parents look to their children for their own emotional support. The children become like adults, emotionally, by taking on adult responsibilities at home (like paying the bills), or taking primary care of siblings.
- The family is in constant crisis.

LATER in the teen years, **both GUYS and GIRLS** need their fathers' **AFFIRMATION.**

Divorce

There are many effects of divorce and growing up in a single family home. We feel some of them immediately. Other effects will not be felt until later.

Through the divorce or separation of our parents, we can have many losses. The following are just a few.

- loss of family unity
- loss of a stay at home mom
- loss of a home and/or neighborhood
- loss of friends
- loss of financial security or lifestyle

Loss is also experienced through custody issues and even in the change in relationships in gaining a step-parent or family. And we lose our primary model for how men and women relate in marriage.⁷

2 common responses:

I NEVER WANT TO BE LIKE THEM

One response to our parents' brokenness goes something like this: "I never want to be like him (or her)."

There are parts of our parents' behavior and attitudes which we do not want as part of our lives. If dad was angry and critical, it is natural for us to not want to be like him in those ways. But often in this process, we build fortresses of judgments in our hearts that keep out the good as well as the bad. This is called defensive detachment.

If we defensively detach from the same-sex parent, we also cut ourselves off from our source of identity as men or women. Guys can detach from their own masculinity if dad was a poor model or absent. Likewise, girls, having a mom who was weak, abused, or abusive, can reject their mothers and in turn reject their own femininity.⁸

TAKING IT TO HEART

We can also internalize what we saw or experienced in our families. If a guy was physically abused by his father, he might believe that he deserved it, take it in, and struggle later with self-hatred. If a dad treated his wife or daughter poorly, a son or daughter might also have a poor view of women.⁹

Girls are particularly sensitive to her mom's wholeness or brokenness. A girl who is criticized a lot by her mom can take in the weight of the critical words, believing that her mom was right. (This can occur at the same time she says that she never wants to be like her mom.) A girl whose mom struggles with self-hatred or a bad self-image can inherit a poor view of women and/or a poor view of herself as a woman.¹⁰

"THERE WAS NO WAY ON EARTH THAT I WANTED TO BE LIKE MY MOTHER

when I grew up. I constantly tried to adjust my personality to be as unlike her as I could. She was emotionally unstable and incredibly self-centered.

My mother consistently cut me down with her words, and I ended up listening to all of her problems and taking care of her a lot. I thought just not wanting to be like her would be all I needed for the future. It never occurred to me that I would later need God to give me what I didn't get from my family, particularly from my mom."



TESTIMONY

Testing our wings

It is tricky figuring out who we are apart from our families. Adolescence is a time of testing our wings so that we can successfully fly on our own as adults.

Every teenager and young adult needs to answer these questions of identity. Answering these three questions is one of the primary challenges of adolescence.¹¹

- **Who am I?** (How do I think? What do I like? What do I value? What do I believe?)
- **How can I establish intimate and committed relationships?** (Who do I like? How do friendships grow?)
- **How can I make good decisions for the future?** (Do I have goals? Hope? How can I invest in my future career or education? What do I do with the rest of my life?)

In ways, the answers to these questions will be similar to the values of our families. But there will also be differences. Healthy parents are able to encourage us in this process. They allow us the freedom to become our own individuals, able to make our own decisions and lead our lives separate from theirs.

God's heart...

God cares a lot about families. The Bible gives instruction about the importance of family and how parents should raise kids. "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or

they will become discouraged" (Col 3:21). "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Pr 22:6). God longs to see family members growing in their love for one another.

Those who are without families (emotionally, physically or spiritually) are special to the Lord. "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (Ps 27:10).

He is able to provide for our needs and to fill in the holes left from broken family relationships.

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Father God, I need You to come and do a deep work in my heart. Father, as I see the patterns of brokenness, I cry out to You. You alone can fill in the gaps. You alone can change my responses. I ask that You would soften my heart. Mold me and make me into Your image. I ask You, Lord, for revelation and insight into the important ways my parents and family have impacted my self-image and relationships. Come and change me. Work into my heart Your heart toward my family. Set me upon You, the solid rock, that I can make good choices and receive Your wisdom and affirmation as a woman (man).

God longs to see family members

GROWING IN THEIR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.



QUESTIONS



#1

What is your relationship with your mom like? How do you respond to her?



#2

What is your relationship with your dad like? How do you respond to him?



#3

Were there traumas (divorce, death, loss of parent's job, abuse, etc.) in your family? How do they affect you?



#4

What unhealthy relational patterns do you see in your family? How do you want to change them in your own life?



#5

How did you answer the questions listed on p. 90, "Testing Our Wings?"



#6

In what ways are your answers to these questions different from your family's values?

ABUSE

Abuse is a painful topic.

It might bring to mind

our own abuse. Or we

might realize for the first time that the way

we were treated was abusive and WRONG. Or it

may be painful because we see how abuse has

effected the lives of people that we love.

All of us can benefit from knowing how to deal with

abuse. It is the same way we deal with pain in general. And we all have experienced some wounding and pain.

Dan Allender calls this "lower-case a" abuse.¹ Jesus cares about all of the hurts we have experienced and has provided healing at the cross.

Some hurt we have experienced is considered "upper-case A" abuse. So, what makes a hurtful action Abuse?

Abuse is when someone older or stronger uses his or her power to hurt someone; abuse is always destructive. Abuse assaults a person's dignity. Rather than caring for the person, an abuser is more concerned about venting anger, control, demeaning opinions, or lust. It's all about satisfying his or her own needs.

Abuse breaks into our souls uninvited and leaves confusion, pain and fear. It causes emotional, spiritual and sometimes physical damage.

Often as victims we think that what the abuser said was true or that what happened was our fault - that we deserved it. The TRUTH about abuse is that it is NEVER the victim's fault.

4 kinds of abuse:²

#1 Verbal or emotional abuse

definition: belittling, profanity, manipulation, or name-calling directed toward a child

#2 Physical abuse

definition: being struck on an area of the body other than the buttocks, or regardless of the part of the body which was struck, where the force of the blow left long-standing marks on the body

#3 Sexual abuse

definition: any act of sexual power (overt or covert) that is forced upon a child under 18 years old

This could include someone touching your genitals, getting you to touch his or her genitals, having you look at sexual pictures or making you pose for sexual pictures, exposing himself or herself to you, finding ways to see you naked, leering at you, touching your body in ways that make you uncomfortable, or talking to you about sex in ways that make you nervous, or talking to you about your body or other personal things in ways that make your stomach tight.³

Sexual Abuse Statistics⁴

1 out of 3 girls will be sexually abused by someone outside her family by age 18.

1 out of 4 girls will be sexually abused by someone inside her family by age 18.

1 out of 7 or perhaps as many as 1 out of 5 boys will be sexually abused by age 18.

#4 Neglect

definition: receiving inadequate supervision, lack of medical care, inadequate nutrition, or lack of affection expressed verbally and/or through physical contact.

Abuse and other wounds can tear through the necessary and God-given boundaries around the heart. In tearing through these boundaries, abuse deadens parts of the heart and mind.

Abuse ASSAULTS a person's DIGNITY.



HOW MUCH DAMAGE WAS DONE? *That depends on...*

> **Age**

How old were you at the time of the abuse? The younger a child is, the less formed he or she is, so the effects of the abuse are more destructive. The older a child is the more his or her emotional worlds and boundaries are formed.

> **Relationship**

Did you know the person? What was the relationship? More often than not, the abuser was someone known. The closer the relationship of the abuser (such as a family member or caretaker), the more damaging the abuse will be. Abuse by someone you were supposed to be able to trust will greatly damage your sense of security and safety. If your abuser was a person in authority, such as a teacher, pastor, or parent, your view of authority may be distorted.

> **Frequency**

Did the abuse happen more than once? The more frequently the abuse happened, the more damaging the effects. In cases of repeated abuse you may not see or feel the weight of the destruction because you will be desensitized to the abuse. It may even seem normal.

> **Response of others**

Who was the first person you told about the abuse? Were you believed? Did they do something to help you? Responses can vary. Not being believed can be very damaging. It causes more confusion and shame. It is important to tell someone who can help you.

Common reactions to abuse⁵

There can be as many different responses to abuse as there are victims who are abused. However, there are a number of common reactions.

- 1. Shame and self-hatred**— We usually interpret abuse as being our fault. That it was something that we did. Or that we deserved it. Rather than blaming the abuser, we often blame ourselves. We take the responsibility rather than putting it on the abuser. Hating ourselves can be easier than facing the effects of someone else's evil.
- 2. Fear**— We may be afraid of being vulnerable or feeling out of control. Certain places or types of people may strike deep chords of fear in us. We may have many fears and may approach life expecting to be hurt.
- 3. Emotionally stuck**— We often have a hard time expressing our feelings. This is because we often had to stuff our feelings at the time of the abuse. Then, in order to get on with life after the abuse, we closed the door on our feelings, and perhaps even on the memory itself.
- 4. Repeating**— Sometimes we were abused in a number of relationships. For example, if a girl was physically abused by her father, she may find herself in a relationship with a guy who is also physically abusive. There is both a psychological and spiritual component to this pattern. Psychologically, we are drawn to what is familiar. Spiritually, the enemy has a foothold in places where we were victimized. Until we can renounce this stronghold, this pattern will continue. Renouncing this stronghold will break the pattern and help us to choose healthy relationships.
- 5. Sexualizing love**— Sexual abuse victims often confuse love and sex. If our families were emotionally distant, our need for real love went unmet. When masked as care, we can perceive perverted and lust-filled abuse as love. As adults, we may continue to confuse sex and intimacy as one and the same.
- 6. Secrecy**— Many of us never told anyone about the abuse. Maybe our lives were threatened, or we were told that horrible things would happen if we told anyone about the abuse.
- 7. Addictions**— Many of us numb our pain through any number of addictions: smoking, alcohol, relationship addictions, drugs, food, etc.
- 8. Running away**— Often victims of abusive families run away or leave home early.
- 9. Food issues**— Overeating is another common way to numb our pain. In addition to trying to feel better by eating, getting bigger (or being overweight) can be a way of trying to protect ourselves from being hurt again. Being overweight also can be an attempt to become unattractive. Anorexia and bulimia also can be coping mechanisms for those who were abused. Controlling food intake and weight loss can offer a sense of control over our bodies and lives.
- 10. Anger/violence**— Sometimes we express the pain of abuse through intense, or even violent, anger often directed at people who we see as unsafe.
- 11. Feelings about women**— Some women who were abused have a poor view of women in general. They see all women as weak and as victims. Likewise some men who were abused by women are afraid of women.
- 12. Feelings about men**— Some abused women are afraid of or even hate men. Likewise a man who was abused by a man may have a fear of, or hatred of, men.



Jesus understands what it is

to be abused. He was all alone. Jesus didn't deserve this kind of treatment,

God loves you. He is with you and wants to bring healing. He can restore your soul and heal the effects of abuse.

Steps to healing⁶

1. Inviting Jesus in to cleanse and heal
2. Facing our walls and inner vows
3. Rebuilding good boundaries

1. Inviting Jesus in

Jesus loves to heal our memories of abuse. He can take away the terror, loneliness and pain by bringing His love, comfort and protection. As we come to know Him in the deepest places of pain, we will come to know a deeper intimacy with Him than we ever thought possible.

Jesus understands what it is to be abused. He was beaten and humiliated, accused of all sorts of things—from being the devil to being crazy. One of his best friends took sides with his enemies. His friends and family were powerless to help. They could not relate to his pain. They could not begin to imagine it. He was all alone. Jesus didn't deserve this kind of treatment.

Andy Comiskey writes, "Jesus entered into the suffering we have experienced in our powerless state as children. He was 'betrayed into the hands of sinners' (Mt 26:45) who 'spit in His face and struck Him with their fists' and slapped Him (Mt 26:67-68). At His death, a 'soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water'" (Jn 19:34).⁷

He can handle all of the pain that may come up as we face the abuse. We can offer our pain to Him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:17).

Just as He takes our sin, we can press our pain into His wounded body on the cross. As we bring our wounds to Him, He takes the weight of the sin that was done against us.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, the cross is the place where our pain gets turned around. He takes pain and sadness and brings new life and joy. He cleanses and heals. He frees us to LIVE. Having shared with Him in our suffering, we can share in His resurrection life.

What happened?

You may remember being abused clearly and may see its effects. You may remember it but don't think that it affected you.

Abuse always affects us. You may only remember bits and pieces or have fragments of memories. It is important to work with what you remember and to ask and trust God to reveal what is necessary for healing. He will.

It is helpful to have a counselor work along side you in this process.

QUESTION

Why did it happen?

Abuse happens because abusers disobey God. And people disobey God because of their sin.

Even though many abusers were abused themselves, it never justifies abusing another.

Abuse is never the fault of the victim. If a kid did something wrong, physical abuse is never fair punishment. If a kid went to his neighbor's house when he wasn't supposed to, it was not his fault if his neighbor molested him.

God hates it when His children are abused. It grieves His heart. Jesus has a lot to say about people who cause God's children to stumble. He said that "it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin" (Lk 17:2). "For He has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes" (Ps 54:7) In the end, justice will be served for those who abuse.

*God hates
it when
His children
are abused.
It grieves
His heart.*

**Abuse is NEVER
the fault of the victim.**

2. Facing our walls and inner vows

When we experience abuse, we naturally want to protect ourselves. And so we build walls to cover our wounded hearts. It is important that we confess the walls we have built in response to the abuse. These walls keep us from experiencing the love of God and other people. They can be walls of bitterness, isolation, or any variety of masks.

Sometimes we make vows, such as, "I never will be hurt like that again," or "I will never let anyone get close to me again." These vows need to be broken so that we can take good risks and have healthy intimacy.

Forgiveness is key to our healing. It enables His healing to flow into the depths of our hearts. Forgiveness enables many of the walls in our hearts to come down. As we forgive, we are set free from the prison of pain that our abusers inflicted on us.

3. Rebuilding good boundaries

God created us with boundaries around our hearts to protect us. They serve like skin, letting the good in and keeping the bad out. Some wounds bruise the skin. Abuse, though, tears the skin and damages the insides. When our hearts are torn, our boundaries are broken and someone else invades our space. Depending on the type of abuse, many different boundaries can be confused.

Some boundaries we might need to rebuild:

- learning to say "no"
- making thoughtful and wise choices
- learning to assign responsibility for the abuse to the abuser
- taking healthy risks

Wisdom...

Sexual, physical and verbal violence are real problems in high schools, on college campuses and all sorts of other places. If you feel uncomfortable or vaguely unsafe in a certain place or with a certain person, leave. If you feel uncomfortable around someone (adult or peer), don't hang out one on one. Date rape and other violence often happen when people are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Not getting drunk or using drugs may help you to avoid unwanted situations. These are a few practical things you can do to guard against future violence.

You are not alone

If you have been abused and especially if you are currently being abused, there are people who can help you. We recommend sharing your abuse with a trustworthy adult.

"MY MOTHER HAD MANY BOYFRIENDS

when I was a teenager. One of them paid a lot of attention to me and even took me out for dinner once. He was pretty flirtatious and it made me a little uncomfortable. But he was also very funny

and cool. He said he needed to stop by his house before he could take me home, and he asked me to come inside. I said I just wanted to go home, but he insisted. We went inside and he said he didn't feel well enough to drive me home yet. Then he raped me. When I finally got home, my mother didn't believe me. She said that I had betrayed her for sleeping with him. I felt alone and so dirty inside. My distrust for men was growing. I soon began to sleep with any guy I dated.

Several guys treated me badly. I was raped again. I had made a commitment to Christ before, but I had walked away. Jesus seemed so far away. But I knew that He was the way to real life. His gentle love started to call me back to Himself. He washed me and comforted me.

He picked me up. I had grown up too fast in the world, so He sheltered me, so that I could grow spiritually. He is the shelter I need. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty . . . under his wings you will find refuge" (Ps. 91:1,4).

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty . . . under his wings you will find refuge" (Ps. 91:1,4).



**God created
us with
boundaries
around our
hearts to
protect us.**

The trusted person with whom you share may suggest reporting the abuse to an authority or hotline. This person may in fact be legally required to do so (different states have different laws). This system is in place to ensure that abuse victims are safe and that the abuse will not reoccur. If this process is suggested and you are afraid, share your fears. Ask your friend to support you through the process. There may also be other resources you want to pursue such as counseling or a support group with other people who have dealt with abuse. It is important for you to know that you're not alone.

Response:


If you identify some sort of abuse in your life, you can pray something like this...

God, I really need You in these places where I am wounded from abuse. I am fragile in these places, and I am afraid that nothing will heal me. Sometimes I am even afraid of You. But I need You, and I know that You are close to the wounded and broken-hearted. I need Your love and reassuring presence. I want to tell you how I was hurt and how it made me feel. And here are the ways it affects me.

(You may want to stop and do this now.)

Thank You for dying for me on the cross to take away the sin of abuse. Thank You for cleansing me from shame and self-hatred. Father, in the places where my heart feels dead and numb, breathe life into me. In the sadness and fear, I need Your life. Come and reveal Your love for me in this place.

**FORGIVENESS is key to
our healing. It enables His
healing to flow into the depths
of our hearts. Forgiveness
enables many of the walls in our
hearts to come down. As we
forgive, we are set free from the
prison of pain that our abusers
inflicted on us.**



QUESTIONS



#1

Have you experienced any kind of Abuse? _____

What kind(s)? _____

At what age(s)? _____

What was the nature of the relationship of the abuser(s) to you? _____



#2

What has the effect of abuse been in your life? Do you build walls around your heart?



#3

Do you feel resentful toward God for allowing it to happen?



#4

How do you think Jesus wants to minister to you in this area?

Forgiveness is anything but wimpy. It is a sign of love and radical discipleship.

Forgiveness heals

It removes bitterness and sin from our hearts, and gives

Jesus more room. It calls out and strengthens our true selves. And it brings freedom from the sins done against us.

Forgiveness frees us from the prison of pain we are in as a result of being wounded. Lewis Smedes writes, "When you forgive someone for hurting you, you perform spiritual surgery inside your soul; you cut away the wrong that was done to you so that you can see your 'enemy' through [new] eyes that can heal your soul."¹

Forgiveness reveals love. It reveals Jesus' mercy to us and others, including the ones who hurt us.

Our experiences of forgiveness influence our thoughts about it. Here are some questions to think about...

- Have you had good or bad experiences with forgiveness?
- Are you in the habit of forgiving people for ways in which they have hurt you?
- Have others forgiven you for the ways you have hurt them?
- Do you recall any particular experience of receiving God's forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a gift that we first receive. No one can earn it. We don't deserve it. But God forgives us anyway. Our relationship with God is based on His forgiveness of our sin.

We can forgive others because we have received forgiveness. The more deeply we grasp how much we are loved and forgiven, the more deeply we will be able to love and forgive others. Jesus pointed this out to the Pharisees when they asked about his association with the sinful woman who anointed him with expensive perfume and honored Him with her tears.

Jesus explained her extravagant love for Him. "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little" (Lk. 7:44b–47). She knew Jesus' extravagant mercy and forgiveness. In turn, she loved extravagantly.

What we receive, we can give

- "Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32 THE MESSAGE).
- "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son..." (Ro 5:10a NASB).
- "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36).

God tells us to forgive

- "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:44b–45).
- "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12).
- "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt 6:14–15).

Be MERCIFUL, just as

- "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Mt 18:21b-22).

People almost always have faulty ideas about what forgiveness really is.

Effects of unforgiveness

Imagine that every time we held resentment, anger or any kind of unforgiveness, a stone was placed in our hands. Soon it would be pretty hard to receive the good gifts that God wants to give us.

Not forgiving clogs our hearts. We suffer when we do not forgive. The following are some of the effects of unforgiveness.

ONE OF THE MOST FRIGHTENING

effects of unforgiveness is that "we tend to become just like the ones we resent. What we will not forgive,

we are doomed one day to live.



Myths

- If I forgive, I will be a doormat and open the door to be hurt again.
- Forgiveness makes the sin okay; it excuses the wrong done.
- Forgiveness will leave me emotionally naked and unprotected.
- Forgiveness means no justice.
- Forgiveness means pretending that everything is fine, even if I still hurt.
- Forgiveness is just a word.
- Forgiveness means I forget it happened.
- Other: _____

- bitterness
- wanting revenge
- demonic oppression
- judging and condemning
- envy
- jealousy
- experiencing or inflicting rejection
- experiencing or inflicting abandonment
- gossip
- pride
- self-righteousness
- hardness of heart
- physical illnesses

Reality

- Forgiveness always deals with the depth and reality of the wound.
- Forgiveness puts justice in God's hands. He promises to bring it about.
- Forgiveness leaves behind our own methods of justice.
- Forgiveness doesn't excuse what happened. It names the sin and may lead to confronting the sinner in love.
- Forgiveness doesn't mean we forget what happened.
- As we forgive, God repairs the broken boundaries in our hearts so that our hearts are protected by His strength.
- Forgiveness cannot be forced. It is a gift we freely give.
- Forgiveness is a process.

According to Steve Finn, a Christian therapist, one of the most frightening effects of unforgiveness is that "we tend to become just like the ones we resent. What we will not forgive, we are doomed one day to live."² Isn't that a compelling reason to forgive?!

Why forgive? I like being bitter!!

"Of the seven deadly sins, anger is probably the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back; in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."³
Frederick Buechner³

YOUR Father is merciful (Lk 6:36).



Forgiving people who hurt

us on a day-to-day basis enables us to forgive those who have deeply wounded us,

When we forgive,

we can see the person, not just in light of how he or she wronged us, but **with God's eyes**. We can see him or her as the wounded and weak one he or she really is.

Some steps of forgiveness

Forgiveness has some basic steps. Whether a person unintentionally or intentionally hurt us, the process is basically the same. It is a process and a lifestyle marked by significant commitments.

Forgiving people who hurt us on a day-to-day basis enables us to forgive those who have deeply wounded us. Forgiving an evil person or a particularly hurtful sin usually isn't a one time event.

1. Invite Jesus into this process and into your heart and mind.
2. Name the ways you were hurt and the sin done against you.
3. Tell God how you felt. Be real with Him! Speak to Him from your heart.
4. Ask Him to show you what He does with the sin that was done against you. Ask Him to cleanse and heal you.

5. Choose to forgive the person. If you feel unable, tell God that you *want* to forgive, or that you *want* to want to. You might find it helpful to picture Jesus forgiving him or her. You can then follow Jesus' example and forgive. In this process your vision of the person will be healed and their power to hurt you diminished.
6. It is important to confess to the Lord the sin of holding onto unforgiveness and its' effects.
7. Coming together. Forgiveness is completed as you are able to bless the one who offended you. This may or may not involve restoring relationship. Reconciliation is not always possible because it depends upon the readiness and willingness of both people.

Jesus died for all of humanity's sin including even the worst crimes and atrocities that would ever be committed.

How do you forgive monsters?

How can you forgive an abusive parent? What about someone who shows no remorse? What about an abuser who has wrecked many lives, and deeply hurt you?

This kind of forgiveness flows out of a heart that is softened by the love and mercy of Jesus. And forgiveness, as part of the healing process, is a step that cannot be rushed.

Jesus died for all of humanity's sin including even the worst crimes and atrocities that would ever be committed. So, with Jesus living in us and empowering us to forgive, we too can forgive those who have hurt us.

TESTIMONY

A word from a parent...

"Our teenage daughter was raped and then murdered by a teenager. In the midst of our intense grief, we extended forgiveness to the boy. We could not afford to hold onto the pain. We needed the Lord. Had we not forgiven him, the bitterness and hatred would have killed us. We particularly pray that our forgiveness will help the boy to make a fresh start in life."

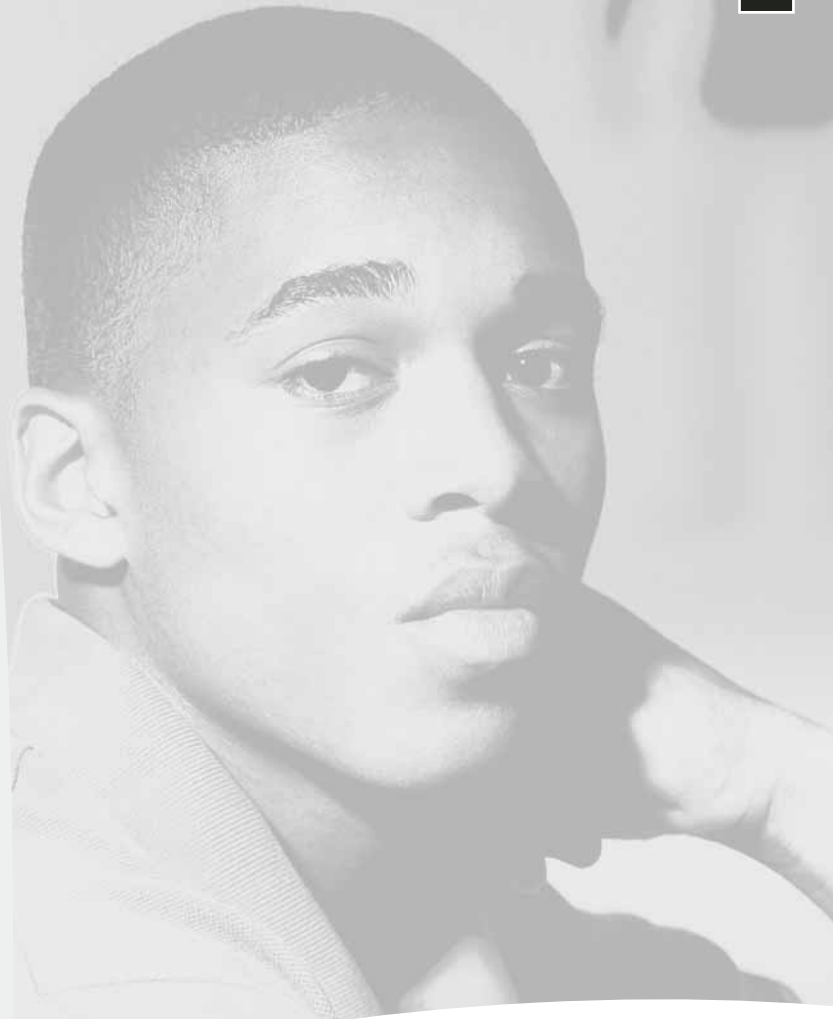
Forgive us our debts, as we ALSO have forgiven our DEBTORS (Mt 6:12).

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Heavenly Father, I want to be free from the ways that unforgiveness clogs my heart and gets in the way of my relationship with You. Often, Lord, I am oblivious to my need to forgive others, or I fear forgiving. Holy Spirit, I ask that You would reveal those people whom I need to forgive. God, soften my heart and give me a desire to forgive.

I bring _____ to You. (Name them.) These are the ways that he or she hurt me. (Name them.) And this is how the sins have affected me. (Name them.) Come and take the pain of this hurt from me. I come to the cross and ask for Your blood to come and cover me in this hurt. And with Jesus, at the cross, I choose to forgive _____. (Name them.) I place the cross between _____ and me. (You may want to visualize the cross being placed between you and the other person. The cross can symbolize the boundary of God's love and forgiveness which replaces anger and protects.) Soften my heart. Take away the walls that I have built. Fill me afresh with Your Spirit.



“BY THE TIME I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, I HATED MY FATHER BECAUSE OF HIS *critical and mean words. The words were like chains that bound me, and I struggled hard (with very little success) to be free from them.*

I started initially just forgiving him with words. And sometimes it was just, ‘God I know I need to forgive him. Please help me to forgive him.’ It was an important start that prepared the way for a deeper work.

One day I got in touch with my anger for the ways he hurt me. I really wanted his approval. I wanted him to be proud of me as his son. As I felt this anger and hurt, I cried and cried. I received comfort and felt Jesus’ compassion. I was able to forgive him from my heart! He softened my heart. I felt such joy. I began to see my dad for the broken man he is.

The words which were like chains around my heart loosened and, in some cases, were broken. It’s an ongoing process. My obedience in forgiving goes hand in hand with my becoming free.”



QUESTIONS



#1

Who are the people in your life that you need to forgive?



#2

How do you see the effects of unforgiveness in your life?



#3

What are your fears about forgiving?
(Be specific if you have fears about forgiving certain people.)



#4

The following boxes will help you walk through the steps of forgiveness.

I want to forgive: _____.

1. Stop and invite Jesus into this time. Let the Holy Spirit guide this time.
2. These are the ways that she or he sinned against me (intentionally or unintentionally).

3. God, this is how I felt about it.

4. Jesus, come heal and cleanse my wounded heart. Take the sin that was done against me. (Wait on the Lord for anything He might speak to you.)
5. I choose to forgive _____ for the sins she or he committed against me.
6. These are the ways that I sinned against _____ or others as a result of my hurt. I ask for your forgiveness.
7. Ask the Lord for a heart of reconciliation and for opportunities to bless the other person.

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RESTORING



We — ♂ and ♀ — are different. We learn differently. We communicate

differently. We feel loved in different ways.

Even if we dress the same way, studies show that guys and girls are fundamentally different.¹

*These differences are **good**. God made us different, and He made us to need and to serve each other.*

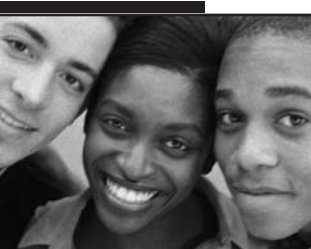
At “the fall,” we damaged what God inspired — our

identities as men and women and our masculinity and femininity.

Daytime talk shows thrive on exposing the dirt in the battle between men and women. “Men who abuse their wives.” “Women who hate men.” The roots of this battle are in the fall.

The battle is real. Satan targets our gender identities because our security as men and women is at the core of our identity. When our identities as men or women are underdeveloped or damaged, many areas of our lives are impacted. These areas include our self-perceptions as well as our relationships with God and others.

Jesus can restore us. He said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). This process of restoring and building our gender identities takes place in our personal relationship with the Father and in the context of real friendships in Christian community. It is in these real relationships that Christ in us is developed and we love others more fully. As these things happen, we become the men and women God intends.



Becoming men...

Our masculinity and femininity develops through relationships. It starts in our families. Mary and Joseph provided a strong family where Jesus “grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him” (Lk 2:40).

Mary gave Jesus a solid foundation of love. Andy Comiskey writes, “For Christ, as for all men, the true masculine depends upon making peace with woman, beginning with mother. There are no shortcuts here.”³ Jesus’ ministry was marked by a great respect for women and the ability to bless them.

Joseph modeled an incredible commitment to loving Mary, God and the truth. He stood by Mary, honoring her and believing the truth of what God was doing through her. He listened to God and protected his family, guiding them safely through Egypt.

Becoming men means transitioning from our parent’s house to our Father’s house. At age 12, when Jesus’ parents anxiously sought him, he responded, “Why were you searching for me?... Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49).

We become men through relationships, first with the Father, and then with each other. We need God’s affirmation and empowering. Before Jesus began His public ministry, His Father said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased” (Lk 3:22). Our Father calls out our masculine strength and truth. He makes us able to initiate relationships and persevere when things are hard.

And we need our brothers!! Through fellowship with other men, we are strengthened and refined. “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Pr 27:17).⁴

Guys following God...

So, what does masculine strength look like? In the following four areas we see the outworking of masculine strength in Christian character.²

I HAVE COME

Do what our Father does

Jesus modeled this balance of listening and obeying His heavenly Father. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what He sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (Jn 5:19).

Call others into their true identities

Jesus saw who Peter could be ("the rock") and called Peter into his purpose and identity through their relationship. Men have a wonderful capacity to initiate relationships and to call men and women into their real selves.

Stand in strength

Jesus gives us the courage to stand in His strength. In the midst of difficulty, God exhorted Joshua to fight in battle. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Jos 1:9).

Committed to the cross

Jesus' strength was demonstrated by His commitment to surrendering to the cross. Masculinity is not found in self-assertion but in surrender to God. Andy Comiskey writes, "Only in losing our lives to the Father's greater purpose will our masculinity be restored."⁵

Our ♂ brokenness

Our greater masculine strength — that of bringing order, strength, form and protection — was distorted at the Fall. The curse was that men would seek significance and power through work; and would avoid building nourishing relationships (Ge 3:17–19).

We see the outworking of this in our lives. In our relationship with God, our ability to BE with God is weakened because of our tendency toward **restless activism**. So often, we only feel valued when we are accomplishing something.

In our relationships with men, if we don't feel like "one of the guys," we can experience competition and **isolation** instead of brotherhood.⁶ Unaffirmed, we get stuck in feeling alone and inadequate, and are unable to embrace our true identities as men.

In our relationships with girls, we are prone to fall in two directions. Either we will be afraid of them and withdraw, perhaps feeling inferior or intimidated; or, out of touch with our hearts, we can overpower women, disregarding their opinions or feelings.

Women of God...

What does it mean to be a Christian *woman*? What is it that we, as women, uniquely contribute?

Respond to God

Mary, the mother of Jesus, pondered and treasured in her heart the news that she would bear the Son of God. Throughout Jesus' life, she remained faithful to God.

BECOMING MEN (OR WOMEN)

means transitioning from our parent's house to our Father's house. At age 12, when Jesus' parents anxiously sought him, he responded, "Why were you searching for me?..."

Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49).

It was a group of women who were present at the crucifixion and it was the same women who went to His tomb and testified to His resurrection.

Source of wisdom

Wisdom in the Bible is often portrayed as a feminine characteristic. Women have intuitive capacities which often lend great insight to situations.

Nurturer

Women have a great capacity to nurture new life. This is true as we raise our children, but also as it relates to visions God gives us for other people's spiritual lives.

Relational

Women often have more sensitivity to people's needs to connect and communicate. In friendships, dating, Bible study, or group projects at school or work, women generally are more sensitive to people's feelings. It is this feminine tendency toward cooperation and relationship that can build teams and enhance the process of accomplishing a task.

The Bible gives many examples of strong women. Deborah, a prophetess, led Israel for twenty years and led them to victory. The woman in Proverbs 31 exemplifies a wise and prosperous business woman, capable of creatively caring for her family. Her primary relationship with the Lord is honored, as is her right relationship with her family.

**that THEY may have LIFE, AND
have it to the full (Jn 10:10).**



If we think "Being"

is a waste of time, or at least less important than "DOING," we suffer from faulty, misogynistic thinking,

be responsive, nurturing and relational—becomes a liability. Guys, because they are not as responsive by nature, do not hold onto and process pain in the same way women do. Women internalize it and carry it more deeply.⁷

Jesus radically

honored women. He valued them and gave them new status. He broke many societal norms as He engaged with women.

Our ♀ brokenness

Eve offered the apple to Adam. She invited him to sin. As a result, a woman's desire will be for her husband, and he will rule over her (Ge 3:16). Our partnership was lost. There would be power struggles. Woman would find herself dominated by man and **she would seek her identity in him.**

Our lesser physical strength and need for protection (seen especially during pregnancy and breast-feeding) leave us vulnerable to being overpowered by guys.

We respond in several broken ways. We sometimes say, "I hate men!" Often we devalue men and see them as less than women but want them in our lives nonetheless. We usually feel justified in holding these views because it is our sinful response to having been hurt at some point by guys.

Another expression of our brokenness is finding our identity in someone. We stop looking primarily to God and create **idols**. How many girls do you know who have lost their identities in guys? When a guy (or girl) becomes more important than God, it is idolatry, and is destructive for all involved.

Because we are by nature responsive and tend to ponder things deeply, when we are hurt, wounds go in very deep. In this way, our feminine strength—to

Disrespecting each other

Daytime talk shows show how much we disrespect each other. We tend to feel simultaneously superior and inferior to the opposite sex.

As a result we feel dishonored as guys or girls and often participate in dishonoring one another.

Misogyny (me-sä-jä-nē)

definition: the dishonor (or hatred) of women and femininity

What does it look like?⁸

- not valuing girl's opinions or input
- thinking guys are superior
- not listening to girls and receiving their advice or input
- treating girls and women as sex objects
- constant criticizing of one's girlfriend or wife in private or public (or both)
- breaking commitments to women, such as divorce (divorce can be a mutual decision, but usually the woman is left with a great financial loss and care of the children, children are more vulnerable to abuse if they grow up without their father present)
- abusing, especially sexually, exploits a woman's vulnerability and beauty

Our culture has traditionally valued masculine ways of knowing over feminine (ie: rational over intuitive).

Our culture has traditionally valued masculine ways of knowing over feminine (ie: rational over intuitive).

Sometimes we encounter these attitudes in school, at church, with our friends or at home. These attitudes may be passed on from grandparents, to parents, and then to children.

If a girl grows up with a father or brothers who looked at pornography, she might believe that women are primarily sex objects. Another girl in that situation might hide her own femininity in fear of male sexuality.

Guys can be wounded by misogyny too. It is the dishonor of the feminine, not just women. Sometimes guys are labeled sissies or other names because they have a strongly developed feminine side. These characteristics might include being sensitive to others, understanding emotions, or having creative abilities.

When we experience misogyny, the pain of feeling unprotected, abused, or unvalued is often very deep. The power of God, however, is able to heal us.

While it is more common for guys to dishonor the feminine, girls, too, may identify with some of these attitudes.

If we think "BEING" is a waste of time, or at least less important than "DOING," we suffer from faulty, misogynistic thinking. Likewise we (both guys and girls) may reject the feminine within ourselves and shut down our own hearts. Guys struggling with homosexuality often suffer from a deep fear of the true feminine.

Misandry (mis-an-drē)

definition: the dishonor (or hatred) of men and masculinity

What does it look like?

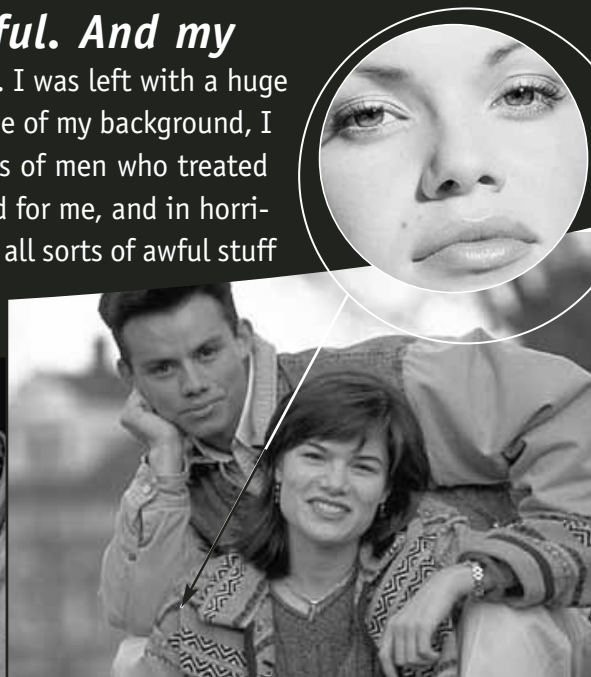
- thinking that men are just hormones
- stereotyping guys as clueless and out of touch
- believing that rational, masculine ways of thinking are less valuable than the intuitive or creative
- hating guys
- thinking guys are less than women
- distrusting all men in authority
- seeing or using guys as sex objects
- using guys to gain power (manipulation)
- thinking masculine strength is bad

These attitudes can be very subtle. Perhaps it is a "dumb men joke" about how men can't do anything right, or a greeting card comparing them to animals. These attitudes often do not even bother our consciences.

"I ALWAYS WANTED TO MEET MR. RIGHT AND GET MARRIED,

but on the other hand I was deeply afraid of men. I was sexually abused when I was 6. The abuse caused me to distrust men in general. I thought they were all lustful. And my

mother had instilled in me a fear that guys only wanted one thing. I was left with a huge self-protected, angry heart, vulnerable to being hurt again. Because of my background, I was very sensitive to broken men, and seemed to run into all sorts of men who treated women badly. For example, I was at a restaurant and a man phoned for me, and in horribly intimate detail told me that he had my roommate and would do all sorts of awful stuff to her. I called the police. It turned out to be just some nut who had way too much personal info on us. My roommate walked into the cafe right behind the police, completely oblivious. I was really freaked out. I felt unsafe again. I felt like I had a mark on me that said to men, TARGET."



TESTIMONIES

TESTIMONY

“I grew up hearing all sorts of bitter comments from my mother about men. Since she and my dad had separated, she complained bitterly about him and men in general. While I understand that she was hurt, it hurt me to hear her comments. I ended up feeling guilty and like I needed to apologize for being a guy. Now I understand that her comments are sinful and that Christ takes the effects away from me. I got free from the chains of shame about being a man.”

In a wounded and fatherless generation, it is easy to reject and to despise the good of masculinity.

This leaves guys in a dilemma. At the same time that many women continue to be victimized by men, many guys feel disempowered and isolated. Guys, too, often feel inadequate when compared to some magazine standard. And they feel hurt and defenseless in light of “man-hating” jokes or comments.

The hope

Jesus reverses these downward relational spirals. He restores our identities and relationships. Restoration between men and women is part of the victory secured by Jesus when He died and rose again.

We are invited to build bridges of friendship and love in these areas. As we become bridge-builders, we will experience both the pain related to our wounds as men and women as well as the joy of reconciliation. Jesus loves to heal broken lives to show the world that whole relationships are possible. We are His agents of reconciliation!!

Response:

Girls, you can pray something like this...

Father, I give to You the ways that I have experienced being dishonored by guys. (Name these ways.) It hurts, Lord, to be treated as “a thing,” to be lusted after and ridiculed for being a girl. It hurts to be discounted or brushed aside just because I am a girl.

Father take these sins that have been done against me. Take my pain into the cross. Thank You that no sin is too big for You. I surrender to You my bitterness, anger, hurt, betrayal, and all of the ways being hurt has affected me. I choose to forgive those who hurt me.

Father I confess the sinful ways I have responded. I too devalued my own or others’ femininity and I have believed that men are better. (Name them.)

Father, I confess I have tried to find my identity in men rather than in You. I have sometimes wanted more than another human being can give. Forgive me, Lord.

And Father, I confess I have dishonored guys and masculinity. (Name them.) In my wounding, I have lashed out at guys and blamed them for more than their fair share of the problem. Instead of building up guys, I’ve broken them with my anger and dishonor. I ask that You would cleanse me of my sin.

I want to see with Your eyes. Help me to reach out in friendship. Bless my femininity and enable me to walk in all of who You have made me to be, full of Your Spirit and with a heart full of love. Teach me to bless and build up the good in guys and men.

Guys, you can pray something like this...

Father I give You the ways that I have felt dishonored or been sinned against as a guy. (Name these ways.) It hurts to be the brunt of jokes, to be stereotyped, or to be treated as if I am abusive simply because I am male.

I confess how I’ve been wounded by the anger of girls and women. Their needs and emotions overpower me and make me feel inadequate. Sometimes, I feel like I can never be or do enough to please them. I choose to forgive those who hurt me.

Father, I confess I have put up false fronts, trying to be strong. I give You all of the false ways I have tried to be cool or tough. (Name them.) I know I need authentic relationships.

Father I bring to You my weaknesses and how I often don’t know what it means to be a man. I often feel alone, isolated and empty. Father, please forgive me for the times I am unable to hear You because of my restlessness.

And Father, I confess the ways that I have dishonored girls and women and feminine ways. (Name them.) In my brokenness, I’ve lusted too much and loved them too little. I’ve also seen myself as superior even though I acted like a jerk. Please forgive me, and restore our relationships. Strengthen me and empower me as a man to be a blessing to others.

I want to see with Your eyes. Help me to step out to initiate in relationships. Bless my masculinity and enable me to walk in all of who You have made me to be, full of Your Spirit and with a heart full of love. Teach me to bless and build up the good of girls and women.



#1

How do you want God to strengthen or heal you as a guy or girl?

#2

Do you think it's a good thing that you are a guy or girl? If so, how? Or if not, why not?

#3

In what ways have you encountered misogyny? Misandry? Does your family hold attitudes that dishonor guys or girls? What are they?

#4

Do you have attitudes that dishonor guys or girls? If so, what are they? What are their roots?

#5

How do these attitudes affect your relationships?



QUESTIONS

17

Friendship

It is hazardous to our health to not have friends.

With friends, we live longer and are more successful. Many of the major movers and shakers in the Bible had particularly important friendships. Moses had Aaron and Joshua; Ruth had Naomi; David had Jonathan. Daniel had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Jesus' life was intertwined with his disciples and specifically with the three who were closest to him.

Paul had Timothy. The list goes on and on.

Having healthy, strong and loving

Christian friendship is at the heart of Christianity and is essential for our lives. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34).

If we all need friends, why are true friends so hard to find? Why are so many of us lonely? **Loneliness. Ugggh!!** This is the cry of our hearts in response to our God-given hunger for connection. We ache for intimacy.

Loneliness prompts us to build relationships. We need friends, whether at school, at work or at church, with whom we feel that we belong and with whom we have fun. And we need closer friends with whom we share our lives in the good times and the bad. These few friendships are true **gifts** that can deepen as we become more mature and whole.

God wants to heal our wounded hearts and broken ways of relating in order that we can enter into healthy and life-giving Christian friendships and community.

Good friendships take time to develop. It is natural to experience greater loneliness when we don't have long-standing, developed, stable friendships. We need to press into our friendship with Jesus during these times.

Facing the effects of our own brokenness on friendships

Our own brokenness can distort our friendships. We may become jealous or feel overwhelmed and drained. Our friendships may become romantic and sexual relationships, seemingly out of nowhere. We may look for someone to take care of us, to be the mom or dad we never had. We may isolate and not know how to have meaningful friendships at all. Or we may relate well with one sex but may be at a complete loss with the other sex.

TESTIMONY

"I am so lonely and the people in my high school are such snobs. I am tired of the back-biting. I like my youth group, but so far I haven't gotten really close to anyone. I know that I want close Christian friends. I am praying that God will bring a few close friends into my life."

Feelings of loneliness and disconnection can run **deep** in our lives. Some of us did not have many friends as children. Or, because of family situations, we were particularly lonely and isolated. Inevitably, these wounds affect our current friendships.

Our responses to loneliness range from cutting ourselves off from our peers to making our peers our "new family." In the latter case, we often attach ourselves to them with a sense of desperation, hoping that they will meet all of our needs.

A NEW command I give



Friendship with Jesus

In light of our wounded hearts, we need to be well grounded in our **friendship with Jesus**.

In the whole of the Old Testament, Abraham and Moses were the only men who were called “friends of God.”¹ But Jesus offers each of us a friendship relationship with Him. This is radical! Jesus calls us His friends.² As we seek Him first, He will provide for our needs, including our relational needs.

listen to someone, we need to concentrate *on them* and what they are saying. People communicate not only with their words but also with their tone of voice and body language. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (Jas 1:19b).

“**LOVE EACH OTHER AS I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). His model of friendship, which is extravagant, is to be our model.**

In our friendships, God asks us to **GIVE away what we’ve gotten from Him**. Jesus said, “My command is this: Love

each other as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). His model of friendship, which is extravagant, is to be our model.

Friendships grow when we choose to **give** to others. The person is not just convenient. He is no longer just a classmate, a co-worker or a roommate. She is no longer just someone in youth group.

For some of us the idea of receiving love is challenging and makes us squirm. Perhaps we prefer to be the strong one, the tough one, or the helper. We usually take pride in our self-sufficiency.

Friends vs. lovers

It is hard for some of us to distinguish friendships from romantic relationships. And we are surprised if a friendship suddenly becomes romantic. Friendships are based on some sort of mutual interest, whether that is a sport, music, a particular style, faith, a hobby, or a class. Romantic interest, while probably including some aspects of a friendship, also includes much specific attention to the relationship with the other person. Much of the focus is on the other person. C.S. Lewis writes about what distinguishes friends from lovers: “Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever talk about their friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends side by side, absorbed in some common interest.”³

Elements of real friendships

Listening—One of the ways we can give to others is to really listen to them. Often when we “listen” to other people we are more concerned about how we are going to respond. Or we are thinking about our own lives. When we

Friendships grow when we choose to give to others.

Sacrifice—This means going the extra mile.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). Perhaps this means sticking up for a friend who is being put down. Perhaps it is caring for a sick friend. Perhaps it is speaking the truth to a friend when we would rather not offer our opinion.

Loving others means sometimes doing what we would not do naturally. When we are most likely to be self-absorbed, we are commanded to love. When we want to isolate, we need to step out. When we would rather hide behind surface chat, God’s love calls us to pursue real sharing.

Self-disclosure—This is what makes us friends with Jesus: He shares with us about His Father. “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15).

Sometimes we are afraid to share how we really are. We want to be “fine” or just want to blend in. It is risky to be vulnerable. Often we fear getting hurt, especially if anything we say or think leads to a conflict.

Or we can tell all too quickly. Out of loneliness or hurt, we may unwisely share with people who are untrustworthy. Our sharing might be premature. We need to let others into our lives as trust mutually develops, not in a headlong rush.

you: LOVE one ANOTHER. (JN 13:34)





Friendships

bear fruit. Jesus “appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16b). All good friendships produce good fruit,

Initiative — Jesus took the initiative in our friendship with Him. “You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .” (Jn 15:16a). Initiative is important in friendships. It is part of reaching out in love rather than waiting for the other person to approach us. Ultimately in a healthy friendship, both people take initiative.

So how do we take initiative? We can suggest meeting together to pray for one another. We can be the first to say that we are sorry. We can be the first to reconcile.

Same-sex friendships are foundational. There is a unique brotherhood or sisterhood that comes through them.

These actions are risky. Any feelings of insecurity or fears of rejection will come to the surface. But if we want to invest in a friendship, we need to step out and take risks.

Bear fruit — Friendships bear fruit. Jesus “appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16b). All good friendships produce good fruit. Our goal is to build the other person up and help him or her become the person that she or he was created to be. Maybe we encourage our friend to pursue a dream. Or we regularly share and pray together, helping each other to become more Jesus-centered. Perhaps we explore a new hobby together.

Friendships can produce bad fruit. Sometimes the bad fruit is quite obvious. “Bad company corrupts good character” (1Co 15:33b). Friendships can produce bad fruit, such as gossip, jealousy, lying to your parents, getting drunk, doing drugs, or emotionally dependent relationships. These are signs of unhealthy friendships.

Good friendships will not regularly bear bad fruit. Something is wrong with a friendship that produces bad

fruit. Bad fruit reveals deeper sins or needs in our hearts. Often our core issues of rejection, abuse, other wounds and our need for love and empowerment, fuel unhealthy patterns in friendships.

Communicating about a conflict

Communication in friendship is essential for the resolution of problems and further growth. Often we don’t know how to communicate and speak the truth in love. We need to address problems as quickly as they arise. These simple steps should guide our approach to communicating:

- Take the problem to God, express your feelings and ask for His forgiveness as needed.
- Talk to the other person. Use “I feel” statements. Be specific about what troubles you.
- Listen to the other person.

Same-sex friendships

Same-sex friendships are foundational. There is a unique brotherhood or sisterhood that comes through them. They contribute to our own understanding and perspectives as women and men.

For any number of reasons, we may not have good same-sex friendships. Same-sex friendships can bring up our feelings of insecurity or inferiority as guys or girls. We might not have fit in with them at school. Or we may judge them as competitive, manipulative, arrogant, or uncaring. The opposite sex might feel more comfortable. Perhaps because of a high need for affirmation from the opposite sex, our attention was fixed on the opposite sex, and we never established same-sex friendships.

Many guys who struggle with homosexuality are comfortable with women as friends but only with men as lovers. In the case of homosexuality, the need for same-sex friendship is sexualized.

You did not choose ME, but I chose YOU . . . (Jn 15:16a).

Many girls who struggle with homosexuality *are* comfortable with women as friends but not with men as lovers. In this case, the need for same-sex friendship is sexualized partly out of fear of the opposite sex.

It is healing for anyone struggling with homosexuality to establish healthy, non-erotic, same-sex friendships.⁴

Whatever our struggle, we need solid friendships with the same sex. As we make peace with the same sex, we then have the freedom to relate to the opposite sex as the "other."⁵

Opposite-sex friendships

Opposite-sex friendships are also important. Through them we better understand each other as men and women and we learn from our different perspectives.

Sometimes we fear guy-girl friendships because we have been hurt in the past. Sometimes we fear them because we were never encouraged in how to relate to the opposite sex. As a result we are highly guarded and feel particularly insecure.

For other people, guy-girl friendships are easy and comfortable, but lack good boundaries. Too often they may "automatically" become romantic relationships. As a result, we may string along a number of guys or girls.

In opposite-sex friendships (or same-sex, if we struggle homosexually), it is important to know what sort of boundaries we need around our hearts so that we can have a friendship without confusing it with a romantic relationship.

Unhealthy friendships

What keeps us from making friends? What causes our friendships to go sour? And what characterizes an unhealthy friendship?

A poor self-image, jealousy, depression, anger, isolation, fear and dependency are among the things that can cause friendships to end or can keep us from forming them.

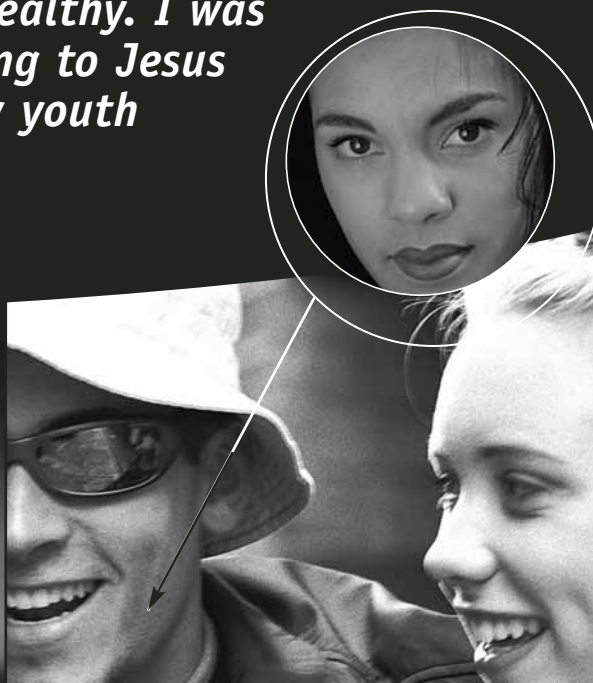
Often friendships become unhealthy because we try to control or fix other people or the circumstances in our lives. Perhaps our friendship becomes dominated by trying to help someone become less depressed, or stop drinking, or some other problem. We can stop genuinely caring and can become resentful when the person doesn't respond to our control. We may try hard to control what other people think of us. And sometimes we try to control our own feelings, not allowing ourselves to feel our own anger or sadness.

We may control our relationships and/or our emotions (consciously or sub-consciously) to cover up insecurity, fear, anger or other unresolved issues. This is the classic definition of codependency.⁶

The truth is that each person is responsible for his or her own feelings, thoughts and actions. No one can make someone else do, think or feel something. We can't make another person not be angry with us. We can't make someone like us. We can't guarantee that someone will succeed if we help him or her.

"WHETHER MY FRIENDSHIP WAS

with a guy or girl, it often became unhealthy. I was so needy for attention. Now I am looking to Jesus and I am accountable to a leader in my youth group. When I see a friendship starting to become a romantic thing, I tell my leader and she prays for me. I am learning to make good and healthy friendships with boundaries."



Friendships are a **gift** from God. We can build them and care for them, but we cannot control them. We cannot *make* another person do or feel anything. Someone may not be willing to talk about a past hurt; we cannot force the issue. We can choose only how *we* respond.

One of the keys to healthy friendships is setting healthy boundaries. In order to do this, we must learn where our boundaries are weak.

Setting boundaries

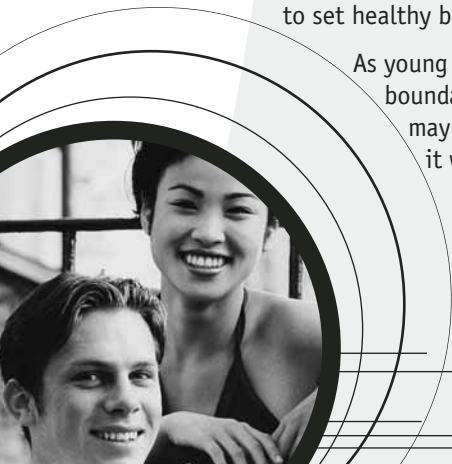
Boundaries are key to all friendships. We have physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries. They protect our hearts, minds, bodies and time. An important and simple boundary is learning to **say NO**. By learning when to say YES and when to say NO, we can organize our lives so that they are not out of our control.⁷

Boundaries...

- signal where I stop and where you start. People are different. I cannot assume that everyone thinks like I do.
- help me know what is my responsibility and what is yours. I am responsible for expressing my feelings and opinions. I cannot assume others will read my mind.
- help me to own my feelings. No one makes me do or feel anything. I choose my own responses to my feelings.
- help me know what my limits are. Without this boundary, I may never say no when someone asks for something. I may spend more money than I have, or I may spend four days with a person when I can only handle one day.

Our families were where we learned the most about boundaries. If our families did not model healthy boundaries, inevitably we will struggle with having poor boundaries and ultimately will need to learn to set healthy ones. Abuse, too, breaks our boundaries and scrambles our ability to set healthy boundaries.

As young adults we can re-establish our boundaries. Setting healthy boundaries may feel silly or selfish, but in the end it will pay off.



Are boundaries selfish? No. Healthy boundaries enable us to listen to God and be faithful to what Jesus asks us to do. They protect our hearts and our relationships.

The solution

God's mercy is new each morning, and as we follow Him, He will teach us how to be good friends. Although there may be seasons of loneliness, He wants us to have good friendships.

We need to be well grounded in our friendship with Jesus. He longs to be our best friend. Within that nurturing relationship, we can seek to build solid friendships with others. We can identify our weaknesses, establish better boundaries and take steps to develop our friendships.

While boundaries are important, they will also reveal our separateness and loneliness. Relationships will not take away all of our loneliness. Good friendships and community do meet real needs. But until we get to heaven, even with good relationships with God and others, we will all feel lonely from time to time. This ache is common; even happily married people at times feel lonely. We need to offer Jesus this ache as we seek to build healthy relationships.

Response:

You can pray something like this ...

Father, I need good friendships. I want to know You, Jesus, as my best friend. I am lonely. I offer You my disappointment and hurt from past friendships, and I offer You the unhealthy patterns in my friendships. I submit my friendships to You. Where I have sinned in jealousy, pride, gossip, etc., please forgive me. I pray that You would teach me to have good boundaries and how to truly listen and give to my friends. I pray for good models of Christian friendship and for Christians in my life who will be lifelong friends.

#1

Do you have same-sex friendships? If yes, what is important to you about the friendships? What good fruit comes from the friendships? Are there unhealthy elements?

#2

Do you have opposite-sex friendships? If yes, what is important to you about the friendships? What good fruit comes from them? Are there unhealthy elements?

#3

In what ways do you want to grow in your friendships?

#4

What are the ways that your fears, past friendships or family dynamics affect your friendships?

#5

Do you have good boundaries? Are there places you lack boundaries?

QUESTIONS



18

Dating and

beyond

“And they lived happily ever after.” Most of us

are wise enough to know

that this is not how life goes. But many of us

are also cynical enough to think that healthy

dating, and particularly marriage, are out of

reach. We think about our own experiences and the

lives of our families, friends and the culture at

large.

We bring baggage into our relationships with the other

sex. For example, for many of us, television has been our most powerful picture of dating and sex. More personally, our relationship with the opposite-sex parent and the model of our parents’ relationship will impact our dating relationships. Other early formative experiences with the other sex also impact us. And our own dating histories contribute to our hopes and fears of the future.

As a result, we often **compromise** ourselves and the plan that God has for us. Jesus wants to give us a new model. He wants to give us new standards and hope for the future based on Jesus and what He does in us, not based on our pasts or the people around us.

If God could raise Jesus from the dead, He can change us! He can teach us to have good relationships with both guys and girls. In good relationships with the opposite sex, we grow both in our uniqueness and in our appreciation of the strengths of the other.

In light of our pasts or brokenness, we need to trust Jesus. He can give us eyes of faith to believe what we do not see, to be “sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1).

Road blocks to relationships

Fear and shame—Fear and shame can result from past sexual involvement, self-hatred or abuse. Sometimes we fear that we will be marked forever by the past. But no brokenness is beyond Jesus’ cleansing power or ability to redeem.¹

Insecurity—When we feel inadequate, we probably will feel insecure around the other sex. Sometimes we try to find our security by having a boyfriend or girlfriend. Or we flee. Either way, we need to find our identities in whom God says we are. We need to listen for His voice and affirmation and accept ourselves.²

Unrealistic romanticism—Girls: a prince will not come and rescue you in a castle. Guys: the perfect and flawless girl will not magically appear before you. These are fantasies. Real relationships will keep us in reality, and not in our fantasy worlds. We are imperfect people who will sharpen one another. This is good. Fantasies need to be confessed as sin, whether they are from a television show or pornography.³

Friendship

The foundation of any substantial dating relationship or marriage is friendship. Friendship should be pursued first above all else. Everything in this chapter about dating should be built on the foundation of friendship.

Communication and honesty are important. Don’t try to pretend you are someone you are not.

Dating

The Bible says nothing specifically about dating. It wasn’t an issue back then. Mostly girls and guys were married when they were teenagers, and marriages were arranged mostly by their families. The marriage was practical and love grew (hopefully).



SURE of what we HOPE

Today, the age of puberty is younger and younger, but the age of marriage is rising, averaging around twenty-five. Our bodies are ready for sex long before we are ready for the emotional commitment of sex and marriage. That's a problem. As a result, our culture uses relationships and sex outside of marriage to try to get the best of both worlds. We often call it experimenting. But as a result, girls get pregnant, guys and girls get STD's, and sex outside of marriage really damages us emotionally.

There are two ways to look at this prolonged period of **singleness** (puberty until whenever). We can act as if our life is on hold or we can use the time to pursue Jesus, friendships, specific goals, and healing with our whole hearts. In reality our singleness is a gift.

TESTIMONY

“When I was in high school, I felt like a loser because I didn't date anyone. That alone caused me to feel insecure. In fact, my fiancé was my first serious relationship. I am so glad (now) that I don't have a lot of wounds from past relationships or memories of sexual partners to sort through as I approach our marriage. God gave me the ability to wait. It is possible and it is so worth it!!”

GOD WANTS US TO

*honor and love one another.
Dating either can help us learn
to do that, ←
or it can be destructive.*

Risks and/or results of pre-marital sex

- sexually transmitted diseases (including but not limited to AIDS)
- pregnancy
- broken promises, broken relationships
- a wounded heart
- distance in your relationship with God

A few words about marriage. Marriage is not for everyone. Jesus and Paul were single. But most people are not called to celibacy. Marriage is a unique gift God gives to us to meet our needs—emotionally and physically. It is designed to ease our aloneness and provide a place where we can be naked and unashamed (Ge 2:25).⁴

Faithfulness in marriage, emotionally and physically, is important. “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Heb 13:4 RSV).

Marriage doesn't cover over sexual sin or help us to escape from other problems. Sometimes we think that our past relationships will not impact our marriages. Sometimes people marry young to escape bad home situations. Sometimes we enter marriage hoping it will curb our homosexual desires or sexual addictions. But these problems will surface again.

From different planets?

We tend to assume that “the other” is like us. And in many ways she or he is. But in significant ways, we are different. It has been said that men and women are from different planets.

One general difference is the way we feel cared for in a relationship. John Gray noticed in his counseling practice that women want primarily to be cared for, understood and respected. Men primarily want to be trusted, accepted and appreciated.⁵ Our differences can be a great source of misunderstanding or a great source of blessing. Because we are different, learning to communicate with one another is essential.

To date or not to date?

God wants us to honor and love one another. Dating either can help us learn to do that, or it can be destructive.

Some Christians are opposed to the concept of dating. However, short of the unrealistic possibility of arranged marriages, we need a venue in which to relate to the opposite sex as we journey toward mature relationships and the eventual goal of marriage. We need a Christian understanding of dating and of relating to the opposite sex. When dating is done right, we grow as men and women in character and commitment.

for and **CERTAIN** of what we
do **NOT** see (Heb. 11:1).



Okay, so are you ready to date?

Dating is not just an automatic right because we have hit puberty. We need to be mature enough to handle it,

Taking initiative (especially for guys)

Part of the healing of the masculine soul is the desire and ability to take initiative. It is a desire to reach out and connect with others, and give form to relationships. In dating, this means taking initiative and asking girls out. Many girls really want guys to be the ones to take initiative in dating relationships.

And guys, this means being clear about your intentions. Don't keep the girl guessing about what your initiative means. If you are only seeking friendship, be clear about it. If you want more, make that known to her.

Taking responsibility for feelings (especially for girls)

Sometimes girls are quicker than guys to develop emotional and romantic attachments to opposite-sex friends. They may "read" a romance that is not there.

Girls, you need to know what's in your hearts. If a friendship has become for you a romance, then you need to talk that out with someone (i.e. an accountability partner, a female leader). At some point, you need to let your friend know what's happening to you. The friendship will need to be adjusted to not "feed" a romance that isn't there.

These are good reasons to date:

- To learn to relate to and communicate with the opposite sex
- To find out what kind of person you like and what you want in a future mate
- To meet your mate
- To have fun (yes, dating can be fun, and that's okay!)

These are good reasons not to date:

- To allow God to heal past wounds
- To take time to (re)set boundaries, and (re)establish good values
- To obey God if He tells you not to date
- To establish good friendships first
- To honor your parents if they are opposed to your dating
- Other _____

Okay, so **are you ready to date?** Dating is not just an automatic right because we have hit puberty. We need to be mature enough to handle it.

The following standards for dating are taken from *What Hollywood Won't Tell You About Sex, Love and Dating*.⁶

Guys, here are some minimum standards for dating:

- I'm not dating to increase my popularity
- I'm not dating to prove I'm not afraid of girls
- I don't want to date in order to be physically involved with a certain girl
- I realize I may not marry the girl I'm dating, so I'd better treat her the way I would want a guy to treat the woman I WILL marry
- I am dating to get to know a certain girl I am attracted to
- I realize this girl is a unique creation of God who deserves to be treated with respect
- I want to learn how to communicate better with girls

Girls, these are some minimum standards for dating:

- I won't wear something suggestive in order to keep a guy's attention
- I won't give in to the temptation to do something physical in order to keep a guy interested
- I'm not dating to boost my shaky feelings of self-worth; I don't need to date to realize that I am someone of value
- I won't date any guy I can't trust
- It's easy for me to speak my mind and I can say, "No, I'm not into that" if the guy gets physically pushy
- I'm just as content not dating (enjoying my friends) as I would be if I were involved in a relationship
- I want to learn how to communicate better with guys

Our differences can be a great source of misunderstanding or a great source of blessing.

A dating relationship is built on...

a friendship sharing:

- Jesus -

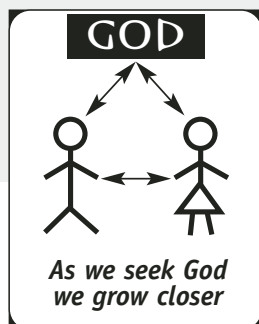
- values - interests - attraction - personality -

Necessary dating prep work

- **Pray** about your dating relationships and for your future mate.
- **Set limits ahead of time.** What time will you stay out until? How far will you go physically? How much time will you spend together?
- **Don't make promises you'll break.** It is easy to promise to "always be there" or "never leave." Be careful what you say. Respect the reality that you may break up with the person.

Seek Him first...

We need to seek Jesus first in every part of our lives, including our dating relationships. As you both have your eyes fixed on Jesus, you will be drawn closer to one another. If you are not drawn closer to God, then this is a pretty good sign that the relationship should end.



Let's talk about **physical intimacy**. The first obvious ground rule for physical intimacy in dating is to save sexual intimacy for marriage. But what does that mean? Is everything except intercourse, okay? What's okay? What's not? Our goal is honoring God and each other.

Physical intimacy ranges from holding hands, to kissing, to giving back rubs, to cuddling together. Each of us needs to consider what our limits are.

Telling the truth with touch?

Physical intimacy bonds us with others. Something that may seem harmless can convey a kind of love and commitment that both parties do not share. Consider how your expressions of physical intimacy might be saying things to another that you do not mean.

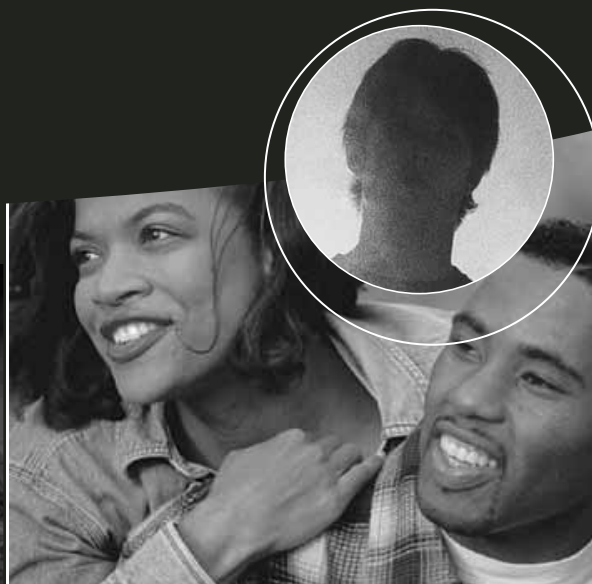
Consider these questions:

Several of the following questions are taken from *What Hollywood Won't Tell You About Sex, Love and Dating*:⁷

- Am I seeing this person through God's eyes?
- Am I caring for and respecting him/her as God wants me to?
- Am I growing as a Christian because of this relationship?
- When I'm with my wife or husband someday will I regret this?
- Does my conscience bother me?
- Am I seeking to be aroused?

"AS GOD HEALED MY HOMOSEXUALITY,

I started to feel an emptiness inside for a deep intimacy with a girl. This was really scary for me. But at the same time it felt really whole."



Warning: The following are always sinful in any relationship before marriage:

- Petting over or under clothes
- Petting with clothes removed (you're sharing intimate parts of the body with someone other than your spouse)
- External genital contact and/or orgasm (you are stealing from your future mate)
- Sexual intercourse (this is a gift only meant for your spouse)⁸

Healing

Dating relationships can be really scary, especially in the places where we are weak and unhealed. But as we seek Jesus first, God can use relationships to show us His transforming power. Relationships, especially serious dating or marriage relationships, serve as a mirror in which we see our growth as well as our weaknesses.

However, no person is going to be able to make up for the wounds of the past. Only Jesus can restore us. And so we need to learn to lean heavily on Him for what we need.

We especially need to forgive those of the other sex who have injured us, whether from long ago or from last week. This is a key to freedom.

The risks

Dating implies that at any point, we have the freedom to say, "This is not working, we need to end this relationship." There is little commitment and a lot of risk. Because of this, a romantic relationship is not the place we should seek to fill the wounded places from the past.⁹ When we do this, the relationship becomes all about us trying to get our healing, and we lose sight of our primary goal to care for the other person.

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Lord, I want to follow You with all of who I am. You made me a sexual creature, created with attraction and desire. I invite You to be in charge of this area of my life. I commit myself to following Your ways. I give You my relationships with the opposite sex (or lack thereof). I surrender all of my fears and hopes to You. I give to You my past wounds and mistakes.

It is so hard to live in Your reality when our culture is so confused about love and relationships. Fill me anew with Your Spirit. Empower me to know the truth and to live in it.

Prayer for restoring sexual purity:

(If you have not confessed areas of sexual sin, confess them to God and an accountability partner.)

I confess the ways that I have compromised my sexual purity. (Name them). I am sorry for giving myself away to others sexually, and for using others in ways that violate Your standards. Forgive me. Remove the stain of my sin and cleanse me with Your Holy Spirit. Renew my mind and heart. I pray that You would sever any soul ties formed with past lovers. I ask You to rebuild the boundaries in my heart and mind.

If sexual purity was stolen through abuse or rape, Jesus can restore you.

Jesus, restore my purity. Cleanse me from the sin done against my body and soul. I pray that You would restore my dignity and beauty as a man (or woman). Thank You that You promise to heal. In Isaiah, God says, "You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Is. 62:2-3). Restore my innocence that was wrongfully stolen.



#1

How did your family or other significant relationships influence how you relate to the other sex?

#2

What dating standards have you had in the past? Have you kept your standards?

#3

What are the positive and negative consequences of romantic involvement in your life?

#4

In what ways have you compromised the purity God intended for you?

#5

What are the character qualities that you want to look for in dating and in your future wife (or husband)?

#6

If you are single, will you commit to abstinence before marriage?

#7

If you are married, will you commit to faithfulness and honoring God in your sexual life? What does that mean to you?

QUESTIONS

Mom, Dad and me

Your parents. On a scale of one to ten, how are your relationships with

them? Can you imagine improvement? When you hear the topic "honoring your parents," do you feel a vague sense of uneasiness? Do you want to run? What difference does Jesus make in your relationships with them?

Assessing our relationships...

Our heavenly Father really cares. He has not left us to work out our relationships on our own. Family is His idea and He has the power to bring change.

It is helpful to know where to start from in assessing our relationships with our parents. Evaluating our current situation can help us to see realistic steps toward improvement. We will probably also see more places that we need God.

The following boxes are lists of statements about our relationships with our parents. The M stands for "mom" and the D for "dad." Check those that apply to your relationships with your mom and dad.

Strengths to build on

M D

- I feel close to my parents.
- I try to communicate honestly with my parents.
- My parents are Christians and their faith is spiritually nurturing.
- My parents live by Judeo-Christian values.
- My parents humbly acknowledge that they mess up.
- I expect God to answer my prayers about my family.
- I trust my parents.
- My parents trust me.
- I know my parents love me.
- I try to cooperate with them.
- I value their opinions.
- I respect them.
- My parents often work hard to be good parents.
- I listen to them.

Tough situations

M D

- I feel emotionally distant from my parents.
- I do not communicate with them about important topics.
- My parents' faith is legalistic and hypocritical.
- My parents are very critical.
- My parents are abusive.
- My parents are too controlling.
- My parents are too permissive.
- My parents are inconsistent.
- My parents blame everyone but themselves.
- My parents abuse alcohol or drugs.
- I go into emotional survival mode when I am around my parents.
- I have lost their trust.
- I talk back and am rude to my parents.
- Other _____



Weaknesses and wounds in our relationships with our parents . . .

- can be places of deep pain
- can contribute to unhealthy relational patterns in the future
- can distort our views of God

Jesus wants to meet us in these places and to heal us. He will always change us when we allow Him to do so.

Sometimes God changes entire families. Other times there is no change in the family situation. This can be very painful and disappointing. Jesus wants to meet us in this disappointment. He does not blame us for the state of our families. Instead He comes alongside as our Father, friend and savior.

Thank God for the strengths of your relationships with each parent. Are there ways that you can build on these strengths? For example, if you value their opinions, thank God for this and tell them that you value their opinions.

We tend to see our parents as all good or all bad. But parents aren't one or the other. They're a mix of both.

God's promises

"My father and mother walked out and left me, but Yahweh took me in" (Ps 27:10, THE MESSAGE).

"God sets the lonely in families" (Ps 68:6a).

For all of us, there are **2 universal truths**.

#1 We all have parents.

Perhaps we live with only one parent. Some people have step-parents or significant others that come and go. And sometimes parents are sick or highly dysfunctional and abdicate their role as parents. Nevertheless, we still have parents and are affected by our relationships with them or lack thereof.

God created families to teach us to love others and to work out relationships. His plan was for us to have a good model. We looked in previous chapters at what parents are supposed to model and give to us. We need to work out our relationships with them.

#2 We are commanded to honor our parents.

Honoring? Are you serious? For many of us, this is hard. How can we honor an alcoholic? Or the better question may be, why should we?

Even if we have pretty good relationships with our parents, no relationship is perfect. Even in the best scenario, relating to mom and dad in the teen and young adult years can be stressful.

WE TEND TO SEE OUR parents as all good or all bad. But parents aren't one or the other. They're a mix of both.

But in fact, this is the only commandment with a conditional blessing: "Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, *so that* you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Dt 5:16, emphasis added).

God understands that our lives are better and that our parents are easier to deal with if we honor them!

However, there is no five-easy-steps formula for honoring our parents. More than a list of do's and don'ts, honoring them will come out of an attitude of respect. What it means to love and honor them, and to grow in healthy relationships with them will differ for each of us.

Do they deserve it?

Usually we think that people earn honor. If they behave in a way that is worthy of honor, then we respond with honor. However, God's commandment to us is not based on good behavior. We can honor anyone when they earn it. But we are commanded to honor our parents (among others) regardless of whether they have earned it or not. For this we need Jesus' love in us.

Can we both acknowledge how they have hurt us and honor them at the same time? Yes, in fact, true honor is only possible in light of the truth. Hiding abuse or unhealthy relational patterns is not real honor.





We are called to love others

others — including our parents — as Jesus has loved us,

Honor is different from love. Love implies closeness and intimacy. Honor implies a respect of differences and recognition of different roles. Both need to exist together.²

Jesus' opinion of honor

Jesus does not overthrow the command to honor our parents, but He puts a new spin on it.

When Jesus was twelve, his parents were worried about him because He had stayed behind at the temple. They didn't know where He was. He told them, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49b). Was He dishonoring his parents? No, He was responding to the authority of His heavenly Father. But Mary and Joseph were confused.

When Jesus commissioned the twelve disciples, He said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn, 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:34–37).

These are radical words, especially in the Hebrew culture, where family loyalty is highly valued. Our primary allegiance is to Jesus. And if our parents ask us to do things that go against what Jesus would tell us, we need to prayerfully consider our response.

Jesus redefines family. He said that because our primary identity is as Christians, our spiritual family is our brothers and sisters in Christ. (Mk 3:31–34).

However, if Jesus hasn't revealed Himself to our parents in the same way He has revealed Himself to us, this does not mean that we can blow them off as people.

Honor

What honoring parents doesn't mean:

It doesn't mean that we have to agree with their opinions, advice or lifestyle.

It doesn't mean that we ignore or gloss over serious problems. If a parent has an alcohol problem, it doesn't mean that we lie to cover it up.

It doesn't mean that we must stay in an abusive situation.

It doesn't mean we become doormats.

Honor is

different from

love. Love im-

plies closeness

and intimacy.

Honor implies

a respect of

differences

and recognition

of different

roles.

What does it mean?

Children are told to obey their parents, adults are commanded to honor their parents. This is different. Obedience implies that we live under their absolute authority. Honor implies that we respect and value their role but are no longer under their absolute authority.

The Hebrew word for honor is *kadab*. This word is roughly translated as weightiness.¹ So honor implies that we respect people in our lives who carry weight. Parents fit in this category.

Honor also implies that we understand that a person has authority. Authority is an unpopular word today. But it's important. We always will be under some sort of authority. So, if we can learn to honor imperfect authority in our families, we will be equipped to work and to live with others throughout our lives when we find ourselves under their authority.

Children are TOLD to **OBEY** their parents, ADULTS are commanded to honor their parents.

We are called to love others—including our parents—as Jesus has loved us. The call to love is always difficult with those who know us the best. But it is our challenge nonetheless.

Factors for healthy relationships with our parents

#1 Boundaries

Parents set many boundaries for their children as they grow up. “Don’t play in the street.” “It’s time for you to go to bed.” Children learn to set healthy boundaries from watching their parents. If our parents don’t have good boundaries, we will struggle to set boundaries.

As we become adults we must learn to set boundaries for ourselves. We honor our parents and God as we learn to set good and healthy boundaries. We can determine wisely those things our parents used to oversee.

Some of us also need to create boundaries in our relationships with our parents. For example, if your father yells at you in a phone conversation when he has been drinking, you might decide that if you suspect he is drunk, you should end the call. These are other questions concerning boundaries you may wrestle with:

- If a parent puts you in the middle of a disagreement between them and another person, how will you respond?

- How can you be closer to them without feeling suffocated?

These kinds of boundaries are important. In fact, boundaries honor our parents because they establish order where there may be disorder.

#2 Forgiveness

Forgiving our parents is one of the most helpful things we can do to improve our relationships. It honors them and enables us to relate with a clear conscience.

Rebellion—is it necessary?

Some think that teenagers need to rebel against their parents while they figure out who they are. Every teenager faces the task of becoming independent. But it’s a myth that the best way to do this is by shutting out our parents. We need our parents, just in a different way.

Rebellion goes hand in hand with hardening of our hearts. And we can’t selectively harden portions of our hearts. It will spill into other areas of our lives and particularly into our relationship with God.

“OVER THE YEARS I HAVE HAD TO

come to terms with how to honor my parents in light of their abuse. Four basic things.

1. I seek Jesus first in my life.
2. I am honest about my hurts.
3. I forgive my parents.
4. I thank God for them because they gave me my life.”



#3 Communication

Talking with our parents is critical. Often both we and our parents want to talk about matters of substance, but we don't know how to communicate.

Honesty is foundational for real talks. Most parents would rather know the truth than be told a lie. Have you ever talked about this with them?

As we seek healing, often new questions pop up. We ask...

- Should I tell them what hurt me so much?
- Should I tell them that I forgive them?

Talking to our parents about important stuff can feel scary and risky. Our parents will not always respond as we hope. But honest talks can also build bridges to a much better relationship.

A few **practical tips**:

- If you want to initiate more meaningful dialogue with your parents, pray and ask someone else to be praying for you.
- Start conversations when neither you nor your parent is stressed.
- Think about what topic(s) you want to talk about and how you might approach them.
- Communicate using phrases such as "I feel," and "I would like." Avoid, "you always" or "you never." These are bound to put the other person on the defensive.

And, of course, telling your parents that you love them and doing small things to express it goes a long way.

TESTIMONY

"I could feel the anger gushing through my veins. Once again, when I asked for money, my father laughed and said, "What, don't you have money for that?" I felt as if I had to feel guilty before he would give me money, even for food. And I felt like he was scoffing at me—making fun of me because I didn't have any money.

My small group prayed for me. The Lord gave me immense courage and I confronted my dad. I feared nothing more than confronting my father. I told him how I felt when he reacted to my requests for money. He told me that he did not mean to react that way. I had been assuming his motives (that he was trying to manipulate me), and I was wrong. The Holy Spirit broke through years of my fearing my father! My dad apologized and gave me a hug. I felt loved. Later, when I went to the Lord to celebrate the victory, He smiled on me."

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Lord, I bring to you my relationships with my parents. You know all about them. I invite You into the painful aspects of the relationships. You know where I get frustrated and hurt. I confess the ways that I have dishonored my parents. (Name them.) Thank You for my parents, Lord. I acknowledge that they are important people in my life. Teach me what it means to honor them.

Honesty is foundational
for real talks. Most parents
would rather know the truth
than be told a lie.



#1

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your communication with your parents?

(Is it open? Honest? Frequent? Meaningful?)

Dad: _____

Mom: _____

Other(s) (step-parents, etc): _____

One way to improve communication: _____

#2

Is one or both parents completely out of your life (through divorce, death, etc.)?

If so, how do (or did) you experience this as a loss?

#3

What are the strengths of your relationships with your parents?

Mom

Dad

#4

What hurts me the most in our relationships? How have I most dishonored them?

Mom

Dad

#5

What is one area would you like God to strengthen in each of your relationships?

What action do you need to take? What will you pray for?

Mom

Dad

#6

What one specific thing do you or can you do in your relationships with your parents to honor them? (For example, tell the truth, listen to their opinions, not talk back, do my chores when I'm asked, forgive them for _____, etc.)

Mom

Dad

Radical Living

If you won the lottery, you could change things in your life, such as your

clothes, house, etc. But if someone gave you

\$50 and told you to buy a new house or to

throw away all your clothes and buy new ones,

you might laugh in his face.

God's love is very real and more life-changing than the

lottery. As we experience His love and grow to trust it, we will be free to make substantial changes in how we live. We are freed to offer God and others everything we have. And by holding nothing back, totally surrendering to Jesus Christ, we find real freedom.

Freedom does not come from being able to do whatever we want. It is a state of heart and mind.

Purity → freedom

Purity in our hearts and minds leads to freedom. What is purity? Purity is a by-product of being Jesus-centered. Only Jesus and His work on the cross make us pure. No one is pure apart from Him. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1Jn 1:7).

Purity requires honesty. It is not about putting on an act.

If we are looking for purity we need to ask God to form His truth in our inmost parts. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:10).

God's loving-kindness and mercy

Our growth in Christ depends on our ability to receive God's love in the deepest places of our hearts.

As we receive His love, we can more fully participate in His work here on earth: seeing people healed, the poor fed, the lost saved, prisoners set free and helping our friends to know Him. This is His mercy.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship" (Ro 12:1).

QUESTION

- What do you think -

Is it possible to have a pure heart and mind and body?

- A. Only if you join a convent
- B. No
- C. Maybe if you go and sin all you want first
- D. Yes, I have never had a sinful thought
- E. I think _____

Purity and worship

Worship is an essential element of healing as well as a foundation of our lives. When we worship, we respond in gratitude for what God has done. We actively place Him first and obey His voice. God desires for us to worship Him with all of who we are: our minds, hearts, emotions, and bodies.

Purity and our bodies

God wants us to honor our bodies and use them to worship Him. We present our bodies to God as an offering, holy and pleasing to Him.

We choose what we do with our bodies and how we view them. For example, we can use them to worship God, or we can use them to make other people adore us. We can hate our bodies, or we can accept them as created by God.



OFFER your bodies HOLY and

Ways to honor God with our bodies

- Stop abusing our bodies (with sex, drugs, etc.)
- Accept our bodies
- Dress decently, modestly (using good judgment, not dressing in ways that will cause others to stumble)
- Establish healthy living patterns (eating, sleeping, etc.)
- Be active: play sports, work out, dance
- Help those around who need it (such as an elderly person who needs help raking leaves, carrying groceries, etc.)

Those of us who struggle with issues of hating our bodies may be afraid to accept our bodies. Our fear may be of accepting what we hope to change. Instead, we can accept who we are now, knowing that in all ways God will be transforming us.

No matter what has been done to our bodies, no matter how we have altered them, no matter how we have injured or defaced them with sexual sin or other addictions, the blood of Jesus makes our bodies holy and pleasing to Him. Our response is to offer our whole selves back to God, and worship Him with our bodies, minds and hearts.

Purity and our minds

God wants our minds to think His thoughts and to be filled with His dreams and His vision for our lives.

“Do not conform any longer 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” (Ro 12:2).

• *Thinking it through*

God wants us to learn to think objectively so that we can know His voice and follow Him in our lives. Thinking that is inspired by God is important as we consider His healing and transformation of our lives.

Jesus often answered direct questions by telling stories. Why did He do that? He was and is more concerned with sharing how He thinks and what He values than with giving us rules. He is more concerned that we learn to think with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we will just go around setting up rules about what is Christian and what is not.

If we get caught up in rules and regulations, we lose the first command: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind” (Mt. 22:37 LB).

In earlier chapters we considered the implications of the creation story, the fall and God’s work in Jesus at the cross. This story is the foundation of Christian thinking.

Christian thinking is also always consistent with biblical commandments. That is why we need to know God’s truth. Some Christians think that we should discard biblical commands. This is distorted thinking based on feelings and not on the truth of God’s reality revealed in the Bible.

DO NOT CONFORM

any longer 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

(Ro 12:2).

The more we focus on God’s love for us and practice thinking carefully about what God teaches us, the more freedom and purity we will find.

QUESTION

Who influences you to THINK about what Jesus would do in everyday situations?

- parents
- friends at school
- friends at youth group/church
- pastor or youth leader
- other: _____

• *Making good choices*

Sometimes we grew up not knowing how to make good choices or how to think for ourselves. Perhaps a parent was too controlling or we were punished for having a different opinion. Perhaps we had many older siblings and they made most of our choices for us.

Our Father wants to teach us to make good choices and will empower us to do so. In chapter 3 we saw how, early on, the job of our fathers was to empower our wills. Our wills help us to make good choices. Good intentions are useless if we don’t act on them. We need God to empower our wills. We can pray for God to do this as often as we need.

as living sacrifices,
pleasing to **GOD**



“What draws me close to Him?”

Why? What separates me from Him?
Why? How do those thoughts, events or actions effect me?”

What helps and what hurts

In order to make good choices, we need to ask and answer these questions about our own lives:

“What draws me close to Him? Why? What separates me from Him? Why? How do those thoughts, events or actions effect me?”

Here are some possible responses to these questions:

“Not speaking up is as much a sin in my life as lying or cheating could be. I don't speak up because I feel like what I say will sound stupid. And then I start to think I AM stupid. And when I don't speak up, I start to get really critical of what everyone else says. But when I do speak my mind, I take the risk, and believe that God has given me things to say. And that if I make a mistake it's okay. That draws me closer to Him.”

“Romantic fantasies that Mr. Right will come and rescue me NOW separates me from God because I am not living in reality. It is a fantasyland and keeps me from pursuing real friendships now. I end up scoping constantly.”

“Masturbating to deal with stress separates me from God because it leads to more lust and fantasy, and becomes very isolating. I know that it is my way of dealing with anxiety. Working out or going to the batting cages helps me to deal better with anxiety and draws me closer to Him.”

“Watching inspiring, good movies draws me close to God because it encourages me to look for God in the world.”

“Hanging out with my girlfriend in my empty house makes it hard to stay pure in our relationship. Not hanging out alone with her has helped me to be right in our relationship.”

“I need to jog and listen to worship music to maintain my passion for the Lord. They are outlets to process what's going on in my life.”

• **Garbage in, garbage out**

We all are tempted to feed our minds and hearts with junk food. Junk food is easy to find and satisfies for the moment but does not nourish. We feed our minds with all sorts of junk food, such as soap operas, pornography, romance novels, fears, doubts, fantasies, bad movies, etc.

Just as junk food is not good for the body, these things are not good for the soul. What are the effects of the junk food with which we feed our souls? Eventually, like with junk food, our souls can get sick or fat. Among other things, we lose that peace of abiding with Jesus and hearing His voice.

When we feed ourselves on violence, pornography or other unedifying images, we need to ask God to cleanse our imaginations. If we're tempted to lust or evaluate someone's body, we can ask God to bless that person as His child. He can give us His eyes for others and for ourselves.

Junk food is a quick substitute for real food. In John 6, Jesus says, “my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” **We need to feed our minds and imaginations on Jesus Himself as our main course.**

Our hearts and minds have a great capacity to dream and envision. Our imaginations are hungry. We need to feed our souls with good and true things that inspire our imaginations and creativity. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Php 4:8).

Jesus wants us to see Him more and more so that we reflect His love in our relationships and as a result, to the world.

**Blessed ARE the PURE in HEART,
for they shall see GOD**

(Mt 5:8 NASB).

This might mean being in nature, looking at art, doing drama, listening to good music, reading good stories, or watching edifying TV or movies. We need to fill our imaginations with powerful images that help us to “imagine the possibilities” with God.

Jesus wants us to see Him more and more so that we reflect His love in our relationships and as a result, to the world. Purity enables us to see Him. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8 NASB).

The goal: integrity in relationships

Purity gives us integrity in our relationships and enables us to have real relationships. We are free to care for other people. “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1Jn 1:7). We can only love people from a heart that is being made pure. Later in 1 John we are encouraged to “not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1Jn 3:18).

As we seek to be people of purity and integrity, as Jesus is formed in us, our insides will more and more match our outsides. We will no longer need to hide if we choose to have such honesty.

Jesus challenges us to be ruthlessly honest. We need to stop pretending about who we are or how we’re doing. Jesus is transforming us, but we have not yet arrived!! We need to be real and transparent. Such honesty gives us a greater awareness of our need for more of Jesus, so we draw in closer, seeking greater purity.

Radical love

Radically loving others requires a foundation of purity, and a reservoir of God’s love.

Involvement in a fellowship group or youth group can be a life-changing experience. In an atmosphere of love, we are free to know others and to BE known. This requires trust.

When people have hurt us, we are hesitant to trust again. Jesus understands this but loves us too much to allow us to stay in that place.

For many of us, our trust has been broken. As we choose to risk again and open ourselves to God and other Christians, we open the wounds to God’s healing and cleansing. He will often use relationships in the present to heal our hurts from the past.

As we seek out Christian community, we have the opportunity to truly love as Jesus did. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1Jn 4:12).

Radical Service

When Jesus does a deep work in our lives, we are freed to serve others. Serving God and other people becomes a joy. We realize that we can meaningfully give to other people.

As young people, we have unique opportunities to serve that others who have significant family responsibilities and financial commitments no longer have.

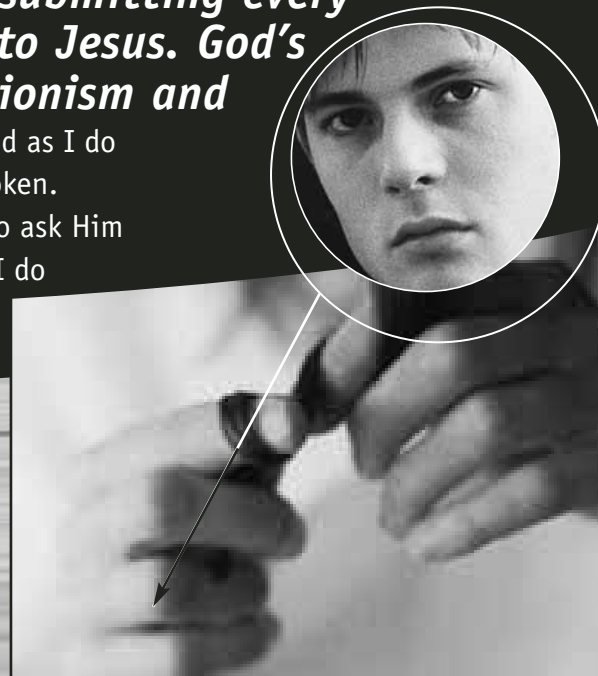
“I LONG FOR FREEDOM.

I’ve tried unsuccessfully to find any freedom that really lasts. Now I see that it comes in the form of submitting every aspect of my life and my relationships to Jesus. God’s been asking me to lay down my perfectionism and

my belief that I can do things well independently from Him. And as I do that He also wants me to let Him heal those places that are broken.

Rather than keeping God separate from my life, I am learning to ask Him about my relationships, my life at school and the other things I do with my time. It’s about inviting Him in. His way is so much better. I am learning that He wants to speak into all

areas of my life, that I may know Him in them, that I would be able to love others better and that Jesus would become known through my life.”



God has used teenagers and young adults throughout history to impact the world. Mary, mother of Jesus, was but a teenager when she was chosen to bear the Son of God. King Josiah was twenty when he began to clear Jerusalem and Judah of their idolatry.

Our youth does not disqualify us from being used powerfully by God. Paul instructed Timothy to not allow others' view of his youth disqualify him from what God had called him to do. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1Tim 1:12). Paul then exhorts Timothy to be faithful in using the gifts God gave him.

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1Tim 1:12).

Serving our Church Family

Serving in our churches is a primary way we can "love one another." Whether it is teaching Sunday school, working in the nursery, serving as a leader with the youth group, helping stuff envelopes or bringing a meal to someone who is sick, there are many opportunities to lend a hand and meaningfully serve our church.

Reaching the Lost

God's heart yearns for those who do not know His Son. Many are spiritually dying because no one has told them the good news that they can find life in Jesus. Our testimonies of His faithfulness can be like a cup of water to thirsty people, giving them a taste of the life of Jesus.

There may be specific people perhaps at school or at work with whom we could share our stories. God may also call us to share our testimony at a home group or on a retreat. Christians too need to hear the good news that God restores our wounded hearts. Many Christians don't know that He can transform them in the deep, broken and shameful places.

Serving the Poor

God's heart is also for the poor. He wants to see the poor and disenfranchised in our society cared for. We too can share the love of Jesus by caring for them, whether they are elderly people who need assistance, those with terminal illnesses or AIDS, prisoners and their families, or those who are homeless among others.

Serving the Nations

God wants all people to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. It is exciting to partner with Him in reaching into cultures where there is no Christian church, whether by going or by supporting those who go. As our use of technology advances, we have

new and incredible opportunities to learn about these groups and how we can take the good news of Jesus to them.

Bringing Justice

God hates injustice. God loves people who bring justice. It is far more pleasing to Him than empty forms of worship. "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Am 5:24). We can become involved in our schools or communities to defend the dignity of human life, protect the environment and other issues with which God might call us to become involved.

Becoming Wounded Healers

Another way we can serve is to choose to become involved with a ministry that offers healing. It is an incredible privilege to see others set free, and to give away what we have received.

It is important to establish a habit of serving in our lives. This will keep our focus clearly on Jesus. Sometimes we can become too focused on our healing process and we forget the true words of Jesus, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac 20:35).

Jesus sets the radical standard for how to live and love. And He invites us to follow in His footsteps. As we do, He will heal us and grow in us a deep and radical love. This may take you to places that surprise you. You may start a new ministry that leads many people into the Kingdom. God may use you as you share what He has done in your life. He wants to use you to make a radical difference in the world. Expect it.

Response:

You can pray something like this...

Thank You, Father, for all that You have been teaching me and working into my life. I want every good thing that You have for me, that I could know You more intimately and powerfully. Help me to be ruthlessly honest and to seek You with everything in me. I want a greater passion for Your Son. Teach me, Lord, how to think with You about my life. I am hungry for good Christian community. Lord, help me to be someone who loves others with integrity. Use me, Lord, to reach others who are in need of Your love and life. Give me a vision of how I can serve You. God, in my weaknesses, come and establish Your presence and power.



QUESTIONS



#1

Where in your life do you need more purity, honesty and Jesus-centeredness?
What or who (in addition to God) will help you seek it?



#2

What in your life separates you from God? How does it separate you?



#3

What draws you close to God? How so?



#4

What were the three most important things you learned reading SOULutions?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



#5

How do you think God might want to use you to help others?



#6

What is your next step in your healing?

Epilogue

Where have we been?

In the first chapters of SOULutions we discussed the foundational issues for our lives and healing: knowing God the Father, receiving His love, and understanding His plan. We acknowledged our needs and came to Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

Then we took an honest look at ourselves, allowing God's truth to shape us and expose our masks, idols and addictions. We learned to listen for His voice to tell us who we are. We said "yes" to the reality He showed us and "no" to temptation.

In the third section, we looked at some of the ways our trust has been broken in family and peer relationships, and through abuse. We saw how these wounds contributed to our brokenness and we discovered how Jesus heals through prayer and frees us to forgive.

In the final chapters, we explored our attitudes toward men and women and how we love others in our current relationships — in our friendships, our dating relationships, and our relationships with our parents and other authority figures. The last chapter encourages us to take what we've learned and live our lives with the goal of loving one another from a more firm foundation and with more whole hearts.

So where do you go from here?

At some point along the way, you may have realized that getting to wholeness isn't going to be quick and easy. And relational wholeness isn't something we achieve in isolation, but rather in community. Reading SOULutions and thinking about the issues and roots in our lives is a good start. However, you will likely need help on your journey toward wholeness. Along the journey you'll need the encouragement and support of other Christians. This may come from a healthy Christian friend, an accountability partner, a good fellowship group, a mature Christian who can mentor you, a pastor, or a professional counselor.

You may want to get involved in a group setting so what God has started in SOULutions continues as you worship, share and receive prayer from others. Worshiping and learning together, and then being real with one another in a small group context helps to break the power of shame and old patterns. In a small group, we know that we are not alone in our struggles and we can receive prayer from others in the body of Christ.

Your church may have small groups or programs that you can join. Consider talking to your pastor or youth leader to see what's available in your church. You may want to show them this book so that they are familiar with what you have been reading. If there is nothing available in your church, both Desert Stream and Rock the World offer conferences and programs which may be available in your area. You can reach each ministry at the addresses below:

Desert Stream

Ministries

P.O. Box 17635

Anaheim, CA

92817-7635

(714) 779-6899 Tel.

(714) 701-1880 Fax

www.desertstream.org

Rock the World

YouthMission Alliance

P.O. Box 43

Ambridge, PA

15003-0043

(724) 266-8876 Tel.

(724) 266-5916 Fax

www.rocktheworld.org

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Appendix 1

The Father Heart of God

BY JOHN DAWSON

Have you ever wondered what God thinks of you? Is it hard for you to believe He loves you as much as the Bible says He does? God is so big and He sometimes seems so distant—but what is He really like? Do you really know Him?

You've heard His instructions, but do you know anything about His emotions or His character?

One of the most wonderful revelations of the Bible is that God is our Father. What do you think of when you hear the word "father"? Do you automatically think of protection, provision, warmth and tenderness? Or does the word "father" paint different kinds of pictures for you? God reveals Himself in the Bible as a gentle, forgiving Father, intimately involved with each and every detail of our lives. It is not only a beautiful picture, but a true one. However, every person seems to have a different idea of what God is like, because they unconsciously tend to attach the feelings and impressions that they have of their own earthly father to their concept of their heavenly Father. Each person's own experience with human authority is usually transferred over to how they relate to God. Good experiences bring us closer to knowing and understanding God, just as bad experiences create distorted pictures of our Father's love for us.

What did God have in mind when He created the family? The Bible says, "God makes a home for the lonely" (Ps 68:6, NASB). A family involves a circle of relationships including an adult male and female, into which tiny, dependent human beings are born and raised. Why do we enter the world as such helpless, inadequate persons, and then slowly grow up physically, mentally and emotionally into self-sufficient adults? Have you ever wondered why God didn't come up with some sort of reproduction system that would produce a physically completed person such as His original creation of Adam and Eve?

I believe God wanted us to come into this world totally dependent and helpless, because He intends the family unit to be a place where His love is demonstrated to both parent and child. As parents we begin to really understand God's heart toward us as His children. And as children, it is God's will for us to see His

love revealed through parental tenderness, mercy and discipline.

But what if the ideal did not happen? What if parental authority has failed you in some way? So many have suffered hurt and rejection by their families that it is hard for them to see God as He really is. Understanding the character of God is essential if we are to love Him, serve Him and be like Him.

I want to talk about six different areas of misconception concerning God and His love for us. For ease of communication I will be referring almost exclusively to God's qualities of fatherhood. However, a full revelation of God's parental love is incomplete without the presence of the male and female attributes of parental affection. "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Ge 1:27, NASB). I want you to look back into your personal past and see if your relationship with God has been hindered in any way because of a failure or absence of tender loving care from one or both of your parents.

Parental Authority

Have you ever turned into the driveway of a friend's house to be greeted by the family dog? The foolish mutt will either cower from you, trembling with fear, or leap upon you with an unwanted display of affection, demonstrated with tongue, tail and dirty paws. The browbeaten puppy that cannot be induced to trust you has obviously been mistreated. The exuberant mongrel attempting to give you a facial with his tongue has obviously come from a loving home.

So it is when God approaches man. Our past experiences dictate our response when God reaches out to us. A weeping prophet named Hosea heard the voice of God saying, "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hos 11:1-4, NIV). God's authority is not harsh and vindictive, but to the contrary, He is unspeakably gentle and longsuffering.

The other day I rushed into my den urgently needing some information from my files. As I sorted frantically through my papers, my five-year-old son repeatedly blew his shrill tin whistle. I told him again and again to stop. There was a peri-

Appendix 1: The Father Heart of God (continued)

od of silence followed by a deafening blast right next to my ear, including a spray of saliva. I reached around, swatted him with the back of my hand and bellowed at him in anger. Immediately I felt that the Spirit of God had been grieved. I remembered the biblical statement that God is slow to anger and delights to be merciful. I took my son in my arms and asked him to forgive me. It was only right that I should correct his disobedience, but our children should always know that we discipline them because we love them, and not because we are venting our momentary frustration.

Our heavenly Father is at this very moment being slandered and misrepresented all over the world by man's cruelty and selfishness. Not only in the home, but in all forms of human government. His laws of love have been ignored and our mangled hearts continue on in carrying out injustice to all those smaller and weaker than ourselves.

What horror is God seeing at this moment? A bedroom door bursts open. A small boy is slapped awake by a drunken and angry man in the middle of the night. "The sprinklers are still on. It's a flood. I'll teach you, boy!" The terrified child is beaten mercilessly by the dark, hulking shape of a man he calls "Daddy."

A fifteen-year-old prostitute with blank, empty eyes, mechanically performs through a night of degradation on Hollywood Boulevard. She doesn't care what happens to her. She hasn't felt clean since the night she was molested by her own father.

A wounded generation stumbles through their youthful years, only to visit the same hurts on their own children. Generation after generation it goes on. Is there no one to comfort us? Who will father the children of men? Whose arms are big enough for all the lonely children of the world? Who weeps over our pains? Who will comfort us in our loneliness? *Only* God. A brokenhearted Father who is rejected by the little ones He yearns to heal. Our problem is that we, like the browbeaten puppy, shrink away from the One who we assume will be like the other authorities in our lives. But He is not. He is perfect love. It was God who gave this command to parents in Ephesians 6:4: "Parents don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord Himself approves"(LB).

Parental Faithfulness

Every promise of God will be fulfilled. He is consistently loving. His one heart motive remains the same through time and eternity. He never changes. He only desires to show love and forgiveness.

Do you distrust God? Our distrust hurts Him deeply. What if I came home to my wife and children after a long journey and they ran away from me when I opened the door and called their names? I would be terribly hurt.

You are God's child and even now He calls your name, but maybe deep in your heart you doubt His faithfulness. As a child you may have experienced the complete absence of a

father because of death or divorce. Maybe you were orphaned by the demands of your parents' career? Or is it just the childhood memory of broken promises or neglect that haunts you? Some of you screamed for hours as babies but nobody came to relieve you of your discomfort and hunger. Some of you whimpered behind locked doors, a small child, forgotten and alone.

Do you have an inability to sense His presence with you? Is your heart soft toward God or hardened with cynicism and distrust? Look up into His eyes and see His love for you. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you... I am with you always even until the end of the age" (Heb 13:5, Mt 28:20, NASB).

You may say to me, "But if He has loved me so much, then why haven't I felt Him or seen Him?" It isn't God who has failed you, my friend, but I and those who know His love personally. Too many times we have failed to become His voice and His hands to those who do not know Him. Far too few allow themselves to be driven by the broken heart of Jesus into the dark corners of this world where the poor and needy wait. Jesus is not attracted to pleasant places, but to hurting people. He pursues us with His love from our first breathing moment until the day we die.

Your heavenly Father was there when you first walked as a child. He was there through hurts and disappointments. He is present now at this moment. You were briefly loaned to human parents who, for a few years, were supposed to have showered you with love like His love. But you are and always will be a child of God, made in His image. Your loving Father awaits even now with outstretched arms. What would keep you from Him?

Few people know God in all His loveliness while living this brief life. Many of us are like the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus. Outwardly he saw a bloody, disfigured body, but soon he began to perceive the true nature of Jesus, and at the last minute, entered by faith into the family of God. We too must see past the religious and commercial mutations of Jesus, and behold the God of love who still stands with open arms saying, "I came that you might have life and that more abundantly" (Jn 10:10, NASB).

"Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, He remains faithful to us who are part of Himself, and He will always carry out His promises to us" (2Ti 2:13, LB).

Parental Generosity

A few years ago I stood in a native village in the South Pacific, watching the children play. It occurred to me that these children would very seldom hear the words, "Don't touch that! Leave it alone! Be careful!" Their homes were simple, consisting of earth floors, thatched roofs and mats that rolled down to serve as walls at night.

In contrast, our modern homes are stuffed with expensive and fragile furnishings and appliances that represent a minefield of potential rejection and rebuke for inquisitive toddlers. How many mothers have exploded in anger at a child who has damaged a treasured object of great expense or sentimental value.

Appendix 1: The Father Heart of God (continued)

Children are constantly reminded of the importance of things — *their* value, and how to care for them. Very few times do they hear the simple words, “I love you.”

A repetitious and destructive chant is working its way into the subconscious minds of our children: “*Things* are more important than *me*. *Things* are more important than *me!*” What are we to do? Abandon our modern homes? Obviously not. But we do need to realize that our concept of God’s generosity may have been crippled by our childhood experiences.

The truth is that God is innately generous. Creation shows an extravagance of color, complexity and design that goes far beyond simple functional value. At this moment, high in the Italian Alps, a tiny white flower glistens in the sunlight. It has never been seen by the human eye in all of its seasons of bloom. It is not an essential part of the food chain. It was created by God in the hope that one day a son of Adam or a daughter of Eve might glance at it and be blessed by its beauty.

The greatest demonstration of God’s father heart seems to come with His attention to the details of our life. He surprises us with those extra things, those little pleasures and treasures that only a father would know we yearn for. God is not stingy, possessive or materialistic. *We* use people to get things; *He* uses things to bless people.

My family and I have worked as missionaries since 1972, trusting God for our daily needs. Our testimony is that in providing for us, God goes far beyond our basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. We serve a truly generous God! The psalmist said, “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it” (Ps 37:3–5, NASB).

Parental Affection

Do you have any idea how attractive you are to God? One of the biggest hindrances to our walk with Him is a sense that our flesh is repulsive to Him because of sin. When my small son is covered with mud from the back yard, I pick him up and clean him off with the garden hose. I reject the mud, *not the boy*. Yes, you have sinned. Yes, you have broken God’s heart. But you are still the center of God’s affections — the apple of His eye. It is *He* who pursues us with a forgiving heart. We say, “I found the Lord,” but the truth is, He found us.

Many children, particularly boys, have had no physical display of affection from their fathers, or no real compassion when they are hurt. Because of our false concept of masculinity, we are told, “Don’t cry, son, boys don’t cry.” Jesus is not like that. His compassion and understanding are measureless. He feels our hurts more deeply than we do because His sensitivity to suffering is so much greater.

I once had to hold my screaming two-year-old while a doctor stitched a large gash in his forehead. He quickly forgot his painful experience and fell asleep in my arms. But I was tormented by the experience and grieved for hours. You have for-

gotten most of your pains, but God has not. He has perfect recall of every moment of your life. Your tears are still mingled with His at this very moment.

God was there when you experienced cruel teasing in the school yard and you walked alone avoiding the eyes of others. When you sat in a math class confused and dejected, He was with you. At the age of four when you got lost at the county fair and wandered terrified through the huge crowd, it was God who turned the heart of that kind lady who helped you find your mother. “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love” (Hos 11:4, NIV).

Sometimes we don’t understand what a fussy, doting father God is. Your parents may proudly display bronzed baby booties on the mantle, or trophies on the wall - but how does that compare with God’s infinite capacity to be overjoyed with your every success? It was actually God who heard you speak your first real word. The hours you spent alone exploring new textures with baby hands were a delight to your heavenly Father. Some of His greatest treasures are the memories of your childhood laughter. There has never been another child like you, and there never will be.

Moses once invoked a blessing on each of the tribes of Israel. To one tribe he said, “You shall dwell between the shoulders of God.” What a fantastic blessing! But that is where *you* dwell also. Whatever you become in the eyes of men, even a person of great authority, fame or title, you will never cease to be more or less than a babe in the arms of God.

Parental Attentiveness

There is one attribute of God that not even the best parent can hope to imitate — that is God’s ability to be with you all the time. As parents we just cannot give constant attention twenty-four hours a day. We are finite beings who can only focus on one thing at a time. Not only is God with you all the time, but He gives you His whole attention. “Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is *always* thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you” (1Pe 5:7, LB, italics mine).

God is constantly thinking an uninterrupted stream of loving thoughts toward you as though nobody else in the world exists. You say, “How does He do that? How can He be personally involved with billions of individuals at the same time?” I don’t know, but I know it’s no problem for the Creator of the world. Perhaps the explanation is the speed of His thought. There are five billion people on this planet. God has created things in nature that pulsate at incredible speed. I have heard that the quartz crystal’s molecular structure vibrates at the speed of nine billion movements per second. If God could only think that fast, He could think a loving thought toward you about twice every second without straining His ability to relate to the rest of His children. Who knows how He does it? Just enjoy it! As far as you are concerned, it’s just you and God. You don’t have to get His attention; He’s already listening. Don’t worry about taking His time - it’s all yours.

Appendix 1: The Father Heart of God (continued)

Your parents were often preoccupied with their activities, and sometimes showed no vital interest in the small events of your life, but God is not that way. He cares. He is a God of detail. Why does the Bible say that God has numbered the hairs of your head? Not because God is concerned with abstract mathematics. He's not a computer wanting data; it's just that He's trying to tell us in what detail He knows us and cares about our lives.

A little boy has worked all afternoon pounding nails into pieces of scrap wood. He finally emerges from the garage and shows a three-level battleship to Mom. He can't wait until Dad gets home. Dad is late. At 6:30 a tired, preoccupied man finally arrives. A cold dinner is waiting, and so are the income tax forms. The excited boy proudly displays his handiwork to a daddy who barely looks up from the calculator. Daddy never looked, never appreciated, but God did. Father God *always* looked, *always* took delight in the work of your hands. He's your real Father, always will be. Don't ever resent the failings of your human parents. They are just kids that grew up and had kids. Rather rejoice in the wonderful love of your Father God.

We live in a performance-oriented society. Acceptance is always conditional—*if you make the football team, if you bring home a good report card, if you look pretty, if you have money, if you win.* The kingdom of this world is a kingdom of rejection. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of unconditional love. God's promises are conditional; we must obey Him to see blessing, but His love is unconditional. You don't have to wait to experience the love of God. Come as you are. Just be honest with Him about your sin—He delights to forgive you. Even in the depths of your past rebellion He still loved you. Even God's judgments are motivated by love.

Many of you have an inability to receive God's love and approval. You are trapped in a slave-like relationship with the harsh god of your imagination. A true love relationship involves the giving and receiving of love responses. There's one night I will always remember—the night I proposed to my wife, Julie. I kissed her and asked her to marry me. What if she had responded like this, "I'll wash your socks, I'll clean your car and I'll type your letters." I didn't want to hear that! I wanted a response that matched my feelings of love for her. I wanted to know that she felt the same way about me.

What is your response to God when He simply says He loves you? Can you "be still and know that He is God" without rushing into frantic activity to earn His approval (Ps 46:10, KJV)? One of the greatest pictures of human peace and contentment is that of a baby asleep in the arms of a mother after having been fed at the breast. The child no longer squirms and demands, but rests in the embrace of loving arms. A deep mellow contentment wells up into the sound of a lullaby sung by mothers like this. The prophet Zephaniah described a similar emotion in the heart of God. "He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zep 3:17, KJV).

Don't be so restless in the presence of God. Corrie ten Boom had some simple advice to offer this generation. She who experi-

enced so much suffering at the hands of the Nazis, yet went on to great spiritual victory, once said to my friends and me, "Don't wrestle. . . *nestle.*" What a profound but simple truth.

God *already* loves you. All through life you have had to perform and compete. Even as a tiny baby you were compared with other babies. People said you were "too fat," or "too thin," or had "his legs" or "her nose," but God delighted in your uniqueness and still does. It's when you bask in the love of the Father that you cause God to "rest in His love and joy over you with singing."

Yes, there is much to be done in your life and through your life. There will be days when God comes bringing deep conviction of sin, showing you areas of your life that need to be changed, committed and submitted to Him. But God is not always demanding changes. He knows our limits, and He gives us the grace and power to do the things He asks of us. He is tender and compassionate. Most of the time He just says, "I love you," and softly speaks your name.

Conclusion

If you see that you have been hindered in your relationship with God due to some kind of failure of parental love, then take these things to the Lord. You must find forgiveness in your heart toward anyone who has hurt you. If you don't, your bitterness will consume you and you will find no peace with God. Realize, too, that you are not alone. I haven't met a perfect person yet, or a parent who hasn't made mistakes. Everyone has suffered some kind of hurts in their life. One of the keys for release is found in forgiveness. The important thing is that you go forward and get to know God for who He really is—not who you *think* He is. He is the Perfect Parent. He always disciplines in love. He is faithful, generous, kind and just. He loves you, and He longs to spend time with you. He wants you to receive His love and know that you are a special and unique person to Him. Will you receive God's love and affection? Won't you open up and enter into an intimate relationship with your true Father? He is patiently waiting for you to come. It is my prayer that you will realize His love for you and respond to the father heart of God.

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Appendix 2

Who I Am in Christ

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27)

The Word of God says:

I am:

God’s child for I am born again of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. (1Pe 1:23)

Forgiven of all my sins and washed in the blood. (Eph 1:7; Heb 9:14; Col 1:14; 1Jn 2:12; 1Jn 1:9)

A new creature. (2Co 5:17)

The temple of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19)

Delivered from the power of darkness and translated into God’s kingdom (Col 1:13)

Redeemed from the curse of the law (1Pe 1:18, 19; Gal 3:13)

Blessed (Dt 28:1-14; Gal 3:9)

A saint (Rom 1:7; 1Co 1:2, Php 1:1)

The head and not the tail (Dt 20:13)

Above only and not beneath (Dt 28:13)

Holy and without blame before Him in love (1Pe 1:16; Eph 1:4)

Elect (Col 3:12; Rom 8:33)

Established to the end (1Co 1:8)

Made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13)

Victorious (Rev 21:7)

Set free (Jn 8:31-33)

Strong in the Lord (Eph 6:10)

Dead to sin (Rom 6:2, 11; 1Pe 2:24)

More than a conqueror (Rom 8:37)

Joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17)

Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 1:13)

In Christ by His doing (1Co 1:30)

Accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6)

Complete in Him (Col 2:10)

Crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20)

Alive with Christ (Eph 2:5)

Free from condemnation (Rom 8:1)

Reconciled to God (2Co 5:18)

Qualified to share in His inheritance (Col 1:12)

Firmly rooted, built up, established in my faith and overflowing with gratitude (Col 2:7)

Circumcised with the circumcision made without hands (Col 2:11)

A fellow citizen with the saints and of the household of God (Eph 2:19)

Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone (Eph 2:20)

In the world as He is in heaven (1Jn 4:17)

Born of God and the evil one does not touch me (1Jn 5:18)

His faithful follower (Rev 17:14b; Eph 5:1)

Overtaken with blessings (Dt 28:2; Eph 1:3)

His disciple because I have love for others (Jn 13:34, 35)

The light of the world (Mt 5:14)

The salt of the earth (Mt 5:13)

The righteousness of God (2Co 5:21; 1Pe 2:24)

A partaker of His divine nature (2Pe 1:4)

Called of God (2Ti 1:9)

The first fruits among His creation (Jas 1:18)

Chosen (1Th 1:4; Eph 1:4; 1Pe 2:9)

An ambassador for Christ (2Co 5:20)

God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10)

The apple of my Father’s eye (Dt 32:10; Ps 17:8)

Healed by the stripes of Jesus (1Pe 2:24; Is 53:6)

Being changed into His image (2Co 3:18; Php 1:6)

Appendix 2: Who I Am in Christ (continued)

I am: (continued)

Raised up with Christ and seated in heavenly places (Col 2:12; Eph 2:6)

Beloved of God (Col 3:12; Rom 1:7; 1Th 1:4)

One in Christ! Hallelujah! (Jn 17:21-23)

I have:

The mind of Christ (Php 2:5; 1Co 2:16)

Obtained an inheritance (Eph 1:11)

Access by one Spirit unto the Father (Heb 4:18; Eph 2:18)

Overcome the world (1Jn 5:4)

Everlasting life and will not be condemned (Jn 5:24, NIV; Jn 6:47)

The peace of God which passes understanding (Php 4:7)

Received power, the power of the Holy Spirit; power to lay hands on the sick and see them recover; power to cast out demons; power over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt me. (Mk 16:17-18; 10:17,19)

I live:

By and in the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:2)

I walk:

In Christ Jesus (Col 2:6)

I can:

Do all things in Christ Jesus (Php 4:13)

I shall:

Do even greater works than Christ Jesus (Jn 14:12)

I possess:

The Greater One in me because greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world (1Jn 4:4)

I press:

Toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God (Php 3:14)

I:

Always triumph in Christ (2Co 2:14)

My life:

Shows forth His praise (1Pe 2:9)

Is hid with Christ in God (Col 3:3)

Appendix 3

Demons, Idols, and Sex

BY MARK PERTUIT

Adam and Eve, before the Fall, lived with all their attention fixed on God. With their attention centered on Him, they lived in a condition of freedom (no shame, no inhibitions on their talents, no depression or anxiety) and of

satisfaction (no craving, no loneliness, no real want). From the Lord flowed a constant stream of love, truth, and strength. By looking towards Him and listening to Him, they were able to receive from this stream, and to enjoy all things.

The Fall came in the act of Adam and Eve's disobedience to what the Lord had told them. The problems began, however, not when they ate the forbidden fruit, but when Eve began to *listen to Satan* and, worse yet, *to dialogue with him*. With little effort he succeeded in taking her focus off of God, which was his main task. He did this first by pretending to be her helper, her friend. Then he deceived her by eliciting in her a desire to be a god, a desire to receive admiration and power, and to be over others. Eve's mind and judgement were suddenly filled with a dark fog, and she immediately began making mistaken choices which led to evil and much destruction. Adam too came under Satan's convincing and appealing lie and, with Eve, became the source of his own undoing.

As with the parents of humankind, our problems come about when we seek our satisfaction and delight in things which are less than God. God, in calling us through Jesus, invites us to a return to the freedom and satisfaction Adam and Eve first knew. For this to happen, we must look to Him, listen, and obey. We worship Him, and we practice His presence, and we more and more become who He means us to be, people who are intimate with the Eternal Father and who are thus full of freedom and satisfaction. The Bible gives us many hints on how to look to Him without having to needlessly make the same errors that Adam and Eve made, and we are foolish to ignore its warnings.

The Jewish people of ancient Israel, God's chosen people, often made the very mistakes that our original parents did. They often failed to listen to what God had told them and, instead, imitated others, one group being the Canaanites. The Canaanite people were in the custom of worshipping the gods Baal (meaning "lord possessor"), Ashteroth (his "wife," whom

the Lord calls the "Queen of Heaven" in the book of Jeremiah), and Molech, the darker, deadly ally of Baal and Ashtoreth. These Canaanite gods were a fertility cult. These gods were invoked by the Canaanites, who lived by farming, in order to bless their crops. One author describes their worship:

"[They] followed a lengthy fertility ritual. First, the ruler of a tribe celebrated the rites of spring by having sexual intercourse with the earth, symbolizing his people's hopes for the fertility of the earth, and thus, abundant crops. Then young virgins were chosen to symbolize the earth by receiving the seed of the carnal priests in temple ceremonies. Every other man and woman was enjoined to imitate the ritual with the male and female prostitutes of the temple. When children were born from these couplings they were offered as 'holy' sacrifices to the god Molech...and were thrown into fires or off cliffs or into a river. Modern excavations have uncovered ayeards filled with pottery vessels containing bones of millions of tiny infants sacrificed to the gods. These are always located adjacent to the temple ruins. The golden calf, therefore, was a well-known pagan symbol of the fertility cult, fashioned with a distended phallus. The golden calf implied an invitation to participate in the sexual orgies that constituted the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth."

*The Journey to Wholeness in Christ,
Signa Bodishbaugh, p. 238*

The Jews, unlike the Canaanites, had received commands from God about their sexuality. The Lord put boundaries around their sexuality, saving intercourse for marriage, because it was so sacred to Him. The Lord didn't want His people to take so precious a gift and squander it as though it were not important to Him. He therefore forbade sexual activity outside of marriage. Jesus further clarified these boundaries, forbidding his followers from entertaining lustful imagery, thoughts, and those things that would cause such imagining. God also promised to protect and guide His people, so that they wouldn't worry over their futures, or about how their lives would turn out. They were instructed, instead, to focus on the Promised Land, which He wanted to give them, and to remember His loving deeds, so that they would keep remembering His character, and how He wanted to treat them again and again.

The Israelites' sins in almost (if not) every case issued out of one particular sin: a sinful forgetfulness. Forsaking God, they allowed their attention to wander, to slip off of the sure-footed

Appendix 3: Demons, Idols, and Sex (continued)

Rock which was Him. Instead of calling to mind the many good things He had done for them, and the promises He had made, they instead worried, often, about their well-being, about their crops, about what they'd eat. Then, already full of anxiety, they would remember how the Canaanites had sought Baal and Ashtoreth and Molech for fertility, and they imitated their sexual practices, a form of illicit worship. Time and again they did this, and time and again God grew angry with them, as in the book of Judges:

“And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God, and serving the Baals and the Ashteroth. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel” (Judges 3:7).

The Israelites 1) forgot God and His goodness and His desire to help them, 2) therefore distrusted Him, and then 3) invoked other gods, hoping that they might help. One huge problem with all of this was (and is) that the “other gods” were not gods at all. Here, as in Eden, Satan was once again pretending to be a friendly companion. But, as we have seen, innocent-seeming prayers to Baal for fertility turned into prostitution, into unwanted births, and into infanticide, the murder of babies. Posing as helper-gods, Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech were really demons which gained access to the lives of the Israelites and then wrought destruction.

The mistakes that the Israelites made have everything to do with our lives. Like them, we have received from God the boundaries that He asks us to put around our sexuality. When we don't live by those boundaries, the same demons that afflicted the Israelites gain a foothold in our lives. They have the right to attack and oppress us when we begin allowing pornographic imagery into our imaginations; they gain a greater right to attack us when we are deliberate about acting out our fantasies. And, as we throw off God's restraints altogether, they are allowed access to body and soul, and can even demonize a Christian, living inside the body somehow. (This remains true whether our fantasies are heterosexual or homosexual.)

Like with the Israelites, once Baal gains access to our lives, he draws us deeper into sexual perversion, seeking (often successfully) to get us *addicted* to sexuality, either in imagery (through fantasy or pornography or both), and/or in act, through masturbation and illicit sex. What begins as a curiosity for pornography, under demonic influence, can thereby become a steady habit, and then an addiction which can't be stopped. This can then turn into acting-out behavior, and promiscuity. And, believe it or not, it can become deadly as in ancient times, through abortion, through sadomasochistic sex, through harm to one's partner. Baal-worship leads ultimately to Molech worship, to pain and harm being introduced into sexuality. The more we listen to Satan, the more successfully he twists and warps us and deforms us.

This whole awful cycle can be avoided. We can take up our great privilege and responsibility as Christians, to continually remember the Lord, to practice His presence. Even if we were just saved five minutes ago, we can recall how we are no longer des-

tinued for Hell. And, the more we walk with Jesus, the more there is to remember of what He's done in, with, and for us. As we recall His goodness with gratitude (actively giving thanks, even if we'd rather not) we suddenly find ourselves enveloped and penetrated by the joy and healing which attends His Presence. Peace comes where there had only been anxiety.

For myself, I was oppressed and demonized for many years, by various dark spirits. One day, in prayer, the Lord suddenly told me, **“You have hated your parents. Repent.”** I realized that I hadn't dealt with my hatred and bitterness well. Instead of facing my hatred and bitterness and bringing them to the Lord (Who would have taken them, bit by bit) I harbored these things. I repented. Then He said, **“Now cast out demons of hatred.”** I commanded demons of hatred to leave me immediately. I began coughing violently, for a few moments, as the demons left, and then became full of peace, in body and soul. To my surprise, I was instantly healed of asthma. Lifelong asthma ended that day, as demons of hatred which had lived in my lungs were made to leave by the strong Name of Jesus. I called on Him, and He evicted them.

I had long been oppressed (and perhaps demonized—I'm not sure) by Baal and his gang. I had long entertained sexual imagery as a teen, and needed to repent of these practices. I needed to then renounce Baal and Ashtoreth and, because my imaginings had sometimes been sadistic, Molech had to be renounced as well. Just as with the demons of hatred, these spirits had to go. I received powerful deliverances as I, with others praying for me, commanded these spirits to leave me. At times, if by my actions I had allowed them to come back, I simply told them to leave again. Many times they left silently, and sometimes with some drama, but always without harming me, and quickly. Jesus, infinitely more powerful than the demons, is in complete control of such deliverances when we sincerely repent of our old ways. We then ask Him to come and reign where evil once was, and He does.

If you have habitually acted (in mind and/or body) in an impure and ungodly way, you will need to renounce these dark foes. Just as in Eden, they are clever, and don't often announce themselves as demons. But sometimes their presence is obvious by their effects. You may be demonically oppressed if you...

- find that you're not able to stop engaging in lustful fantasy
- find that you're not able to stop engaging in masturbation, or sex, or pornography (all of these are sexually addictive behavior)
- have a stream of perverse thoughts constantly (or usually) running through your mind
- have habitually used your eyes for impure purposes
- have gotten into cross-dressing or transvestitism
- have acted-out homosexually
- have a heightened hatred or fear of sexuality
- have had a sexual partner who has absurd demands for sex (too much, for too long, or too often)

Appendix 3: Demons, Idols, and Sex (continued)

- have had parents or grandparents involved in sexual sin
- have used pornography
- have had relatives involved in neo-nazi, satanic, or Masonic activity

Taking hold of our freedom in this involves prayer. Before we command the enemy to leave in Jesus' name it is important to ask God to cleanse your imagination. The pornographic and violent pictures you have seen or entertained have a definite impact on the soul; besides the negative emotions that are associated with such things, the images are often footholds that allow the enemy to continue to oppress a person. The cleansing of the imagination is often a key healing.

The prayer that follows can be prayed over a group. If you are alone, you can adapt it and pray it by yourself. We will ask the Father to bring up and out those dark pictures that He wants to remove right now. Pray along in your heart as the leader prays aloud:

Father of Lights, in Jesus' name I ask You to send Your Spirit upon the mind and heart of each one here. Fill Your child's mind with the light of Your face, with the peace that can come only from You.

I ask that You would lift up and out of each one's heart the broken, fallen images that have long lodged in their hearts. Bring to mind each perverse, hateful, and hellish image that You would remove now, Lord, and receive it as Your son/daughter gives it to you.

As you become aware of pictures pull them out of your mind; bringing your hand to your forehead and give it to Jesus. By doing this physically you are saying, "yes, Lord, I give you this image; I don't want it anymore.

I thank You, Father, that the darkness cannot remain in the presence of light. As You look into the heart of Your child, the radiance of Your face is sweeping his/her heart clean.

Thank You for this deep cleaning, Lord, so simple and yet so powerful. I thank You that You are freeing the mind and heart of your son/daughter.

I thank You, Father, that the heart of each one is being radically changed as You renew the ways in which we see the same sex and the other sex. Take the wrong images now, Lord, and replace them with new and true images of men and women.

Fill my soul with Your tender love and compassion. Let true images of Your creation descend from Your heart to replace the false ones. I thank You that this one's soul is now being anchored in the truth.

Lord Jesus, You have told us that You are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Take Your place as Truth and Life in this heart. Pave a path right to Your throne where once there was foul imagery.

Together we praise You for this simple and yet powerful work, and for the new life we will experience because of it. Let this good work be set deeply in place. Amen.

You will renounce Baal, Ashtoreth and Molech as a group; if you are reading this on your own, then you can of course pray through this yourself.

Wherever the Kingdom of God is, Jesus has bound the enemy. In Luke 11:14–22, in particular verses 21–22, Jesus tells how He (the Stronger Man) binds Satan (the strong man). So, as far as we're concerned, Jesus has done the work. Our part is merely 1) to repent of any sin by which we've allowed Satan access into our lives, 2) to renounce the enemy and collaboration with him, and 3) to rebuke him, sending him away. We do not need to bind Satan, or chat with him, or listen to him. Rather, if we have taken care of our sins through confession, we can send him away quite quickly. If he talks back, as he sometimes does, we tell him to be silent and to leave. In all of this fear is unnecessary, for Jesus' blood is supreme and keeps us safe. (For more on this, see chapter 14 of *The Healing Presence*, by Leanne Payne.)

The leader, if this is done in a group, can begin praying:

Come, Lord Jesus Christ. You were anointed with the Holy Spirit to destroy the works of the devil. Send Your Spirit now and fill us with new power, authority and resolve in our fight against sin.

Leader asks participants to now repeat after him or her the following two paragraphs:

I repent of all of my past sexual sin, which I turn from. Forgive me. Thank You that You are faithful and quick to forgive, and that You have never refused a contrite heart.

I take authority over Baal, Ashteroth and Molech, in Jesus' name. May the Lord rebuke you. And, in His name, I command you to leave me now, harming no one. Amen!

Eternal Father, send holy fire now to consume any foul or unclean thing. Incinerate and utterly destroy any images of these idols that are now surfacing. Burn them up, Lord! Surround each one here with a wall of fire, Your very presence.

Lord, cleanse each person here of personal filth. Lord, where some of these ones were placed on Baal's altar by sexual abuse, I remove them now. By faith, we smash the altars of Baal, Ashtoreth and Molech in our lives and the past four generations. We establish the Cross, where You were sacrificed once for all, at the center of our lives, as the only altar allowed.

Christ indwells you and is your hope of glory. Therefore, I proclaim your whole being to be holy, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The participants now repeat after the leader:

Praise You for Your great cleansing, Lord. I receive it fully and into the depths of my being. Fill me now with Your majesty, holiness, and a glorious fear of the Lord. I accept and receive these gifts. Create my heart anew, to be a heart of love, faithfulness and gratitude. Amen.

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Appendix 4

Homosexuality: Myths and Reality

BY CATHY MORRILL

HOMOSEXUALITY—THE MYTHS

Myth: there is nothing wrong with homosexuality

Myth: if we believe or say homosexuality is wrong, we are being unloving

Myth: experimenting with homosexuality is helpful in figuring out who we are

Myth: people are born “gay”

Myth: God hates “fags”

Myth: “homosexuals” can’t change

—AND THE REAL DEAL

REALITY: Homosexual behavior is sinful, as is any sex outside of a marriage—a life-long commitment between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24, Ro. 1:26–28, 1 Cor. 6). God gives us this boundary for sex, not to torture us, but because He loves us and knows what is good for us. Homosexuality and other sexual sin damages us emotionally, spiritually and sometimes physically.

REALITY: It is loving to live in the truth, which sets us free. Jesus: “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and truth will set you free.” (Jn. 8:31)

REALITY: Experimenting won’t help us figure out who we are. God has told us who we are, we are created in the image of God—to be in sexual relationships only with the opposite sex. Experimenting is playing with fire and it deepens our confusion and brokenness.

REALITY: Homosexuality is not primarily biological. It is rooted in needs for love and affirmation. Our emotional needs become sexual and these sexual feelings are so powerful, it feels like we were born with them. There are many factors, including personality, family relationships, and peer relationships. If biology is a factor, it could be compared to alcoholism; if there is a biological predisposition, that does not make it right.

REALITY: God loves the person who struggles homosexually, just as He loves everyone else. He loves the sinner—and we’re all sinners, but He hates our sin. Jesus has a lot of compassion for sexual sinners and for the broken. (John 4, woman at the well) And He loves us too much to leave us in our sin.

REALITY: People who struggle with homosexuality can change. Jesus loves to transform people from the inside out, and it is no different for the homosexual struggler. As we walk with Him, He transforms us and frees us from our sin!

Appendix 4: Homosexuality: Myths and Reality (continued)

MORE MYTHS

Myth: most homosexuals are very hip, happy, emotionally healthy and come from perfect families

Myth: homosexuality is just a demon we need to cast out

Myth: if a struggler dates the right person, and/or gets married, homosexual feelings will go away. He or she will be healed

Myth: Christians have a good reputation for ministering Jesus to the homosexual struggler

Myth: Christians don't struggle with sexual brokenness

Myth: I should be afraid of homosexuals

Myth: I can avoid this issue

MORE REALITY

REALITY: Statistics show that people who identify themselves as homosexual have a higher alcoholism, depression, abuse of drugs and sexual promiscuity. Homosexual struggles are usually rooted in not getting needs met as a child from within their families. A high percentage of homosexual strugglers experienced abuse (especially sexual abuse) as children.

REALITY: While demons do attach themselves to areas of unconfessed sexual sin and ongoing sexual struggles, homosexuality is rooted in deep emotional needs.

REALITY: Dating or marriage do not take away a homosexual struggle. It needs to be dealt with before the Lord and in the context of prayer, counseling and strong Christian support.

REALITY: Christians are notoriously bad at addressing this issue. We either give truth with no compassion or compassion with no truth. Jesus gives both, resulting in healing. We can give both too.

REALITY: Our whole lives are spent becoming more whole in Jesus. Accepting Jesus is a start. But our baggage follows us into our relationship with Jesus, and we need Him and others to work through it.

REALITY: They are real people who need real friends, and they need Jesus' love, just like everyone else. Maybe God will use you to reach someone.

REALITY: It's a HOT TOPIC. Inevitably you will face this issue (again).

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