



# Overcoming Codependency

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# “Overcoming Codependency”

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## What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here due to personal need, the needs of others, or for a general interest in the topic, we hope this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that should help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

**1. Someone in your life had a problem this week.** That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

**2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3).** God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and promised they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and ability to skillfully apply these resources to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of "good advice," and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this "good advice." We do not aim to present new material, but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel found in Scripture.

**3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals.** Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls "one-anothering" and something we are all called to do.

**4. That person either got no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help.** Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within for the answers to our problems or told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough in ourselves to overcome. Hopefully you will see today how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

**5. If they did not get meaningful help, they will go elsewhere.** When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God's grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope you will be more prepared because of our time together today.

**6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others!** We become evangelists for the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called "Good News"). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented effective for your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of "normal" daily conversations.

## “Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, Freedom Groups have developed a progression of five levels of starting points.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories, but unless the upper level concerns are addressed first (i.e., substance abuse should be addressed before conflict resolution skills), efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The degree of self-awareness usually increases as you go down the page. The level of denial usually increases as you move up the page.

1. **Safety** – When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

2. **Substance Abuse / Addiction** – After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes the life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse. **The mentoring and Freedom Group materials for the sexual sin seminar can be applied to an addiction level struggle.**

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

3. **Trauma** – Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst.

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

4. **Character** – This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character. **The mentoring and Freedom Group materials for the sexual sin seminar can be applied to a character level struggle.**

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

5. **Skill** – With skill level changes there will be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

## WHAT IS G4?

***G4 groups provide a small group atmosphere where individuals invest a season of their life in overcoming a particular life-dominating struggle of sin or intense suffering. They provide a safe environment where members learn insights and skills that will allow them to more fully engage in biblical community.***

G4 has 7 core values which guide each group:

**Bible-Based & Gospel-Centered:** Programs and information do not change people. God changes people through the power of the Gospel and the wisdom of His Word. The relational structure of G4 Groups is the vehicle God has ordained to transport the Gospel and Scripture into the lives of His beloved, enslaved, and hurting children.

**Recognize the Difference Between Sin & Suffering:** G4 Groups recognize that struggles of sin are different from struggles of suffering in terms of cause, dynamics, emotional impact, relational influence, and other ways. While every believer is simultaneously a saint, sinner, and sufferer, there are fundamental differences (practically and theologically) between a struggle an individual does (sin) and those that happen to the individual (suffering).

**Built On Honesty & Transparency:** The courage to be honest about our suffering or sin is often the essential expression of faith God calls for in overcoming a life-dominating struggle. G4 Groups create an environment that fosters honesty and transparency by incarnating the love of God and protecting confidentiality within the group.

**Uphold Confidentiality:** We all have a story to tell. G4 Groups are a safe place where group members can be open, honest, and transparent without fear that their issues will be shared outside of the group. G4 group members commit to hold in confidence things shared within the context of the group environment.

**Avoid Struggle-Based Identity:** We recognize that when an individual has struggled with one issue for an extended period of time that struggle begins to define them. G4 Groups are structured in content, duration, and philosophy to alert the participants to this temptation and guide them away from it. G4 Groups strive to teach and model what it means to live out of an identity as a dearly loved child of God.

**Blend Discipleship, Accountability, & A Guided Process:** G4 Groups are more than a Bible study on a given subject. They develop a practical theology of their subject during the group study and guide members through an intentional process during the personal study while the members hold each other accountable.

**Transition Into Larger Small Group Ministry:** The goal is for each G4 Group member to be in a general small group within a year. Group members may choose to be a general small group the whole time. If desired, at "graduation" the G4 Group leader would direct the participant to a small group with a leader who has completed personal study and counseling exercises for that area of struggle. It would be the participant's choice whether to disclose that was the reason for choosing that leader's small group.

## The 9 Steps of G4

We do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

In G4 Groups we attempt to walk through the Gospel in slow motion with a concentrated focus upon a particular life-dominating struggle. We do this in a setting of transparent community because we believe God changes people in the midst of relationships.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption. We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer. However, we believe the Gospel is best understood and applied when we consider how the Gospel relates to the nature of our struggle. The nine steps below are those used by G4 Groups to address struggles of sin and suffering.

Sin-Based Groups	Suffering-Based Groups
<p>STEP 1. ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p>	<p>STEP 1. PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p>
<p>STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p>	<p>STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p>
<p>STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p>	<p>STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p>STEP 4. REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p>	<p>STEP 4. LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p>
<p>STEP 5. CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p>	<p>STEP 5. MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p>
<p>STEP 6. RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p>	<p>STEP 6. LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p>
<p>STEP 7. IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p>	<p>STEP 7. IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p>STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>	<p>STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>
<p>STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>	<p>STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>

To learn more about G4 Groups visit [www.summitrdu.com/g4](http://www.summitrdu.com/g4)

## Chapter I

### “I’m Tired of All the Drama... Exhausted!”

PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.

**“Living in denial about my unhealthy relational patterns would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the restoration process.**

**God is good for bringing me to the point of knowing what has happened.**

**Therefore, I will put myself in the best physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual position possible to face my suffering.”**

**Memorize:** John 2:23-25 (ESV), “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part *did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people* and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “In Jerusalem at Passover” – Like you, Jesus made difficult relational decisions in real places and at specific times.
- “Many believed” – Not every good thing that happened around Jesus was a sign for him to let his guard down.
- “Did not entrust himself” – Jesus, who was perfect, did not trust everyone; he trusted wisely, not absolutely.
- “Knew all people” – Part of Jesus’ hesitancy to trust was based upon his personal knowledge of who he was with.
- “What was in man” – Part of Jesus’ hesitancy to trust was based upon the general human condition – sin.

#### Teaching Notes

“Isn’t that what we’ve been taught? If we do the right thing, then our marriage will get better (p. 8)... I find that Christians are often confused on what ‘dying to self’ really involves. Sometimes we act like martyrs within our marriages, suffering under all kinds of inappropriate and sometimes abusive behavior, thinking that this means dying to self. It is never wise or godly to sacrifice our self in order to give our spouse more license to sin (gamble, abuse drugs, abuse us or our children, etc.)... Dying to self means that we let go (or die to) our old, immature, and sinful ways and grow to become what God has made us to be – like him. Therefore, like him, we are called to sacrifice our lives for the *good* of another (p. 155).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“People who are destructive should lose the privilege of your fellowship. That does not mean that you have to turn your back on the person in question. Step back while facing forward, inviting that person to change so that reconciliation may be possible (p. 167).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“I always warn my clients that even if their marriage fails and they no longer live with their spouse, they will always have to live with themselves. Therefore, it is crucial to their long-term well-being that they conduct themselves in such a way that they will have no regrets (p. 185).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“Taking care of yourself is a skill you can’t afford to ignore (p. 10)... Your emotional resilience, physical health, social supports, and perspective on change can contribute to this. First, you will be setting an example. Second, you need internal resources to do what is most helpful for your loved one (p. 11)... Typically people experience a shrinking social support network as the problem takes over... We cannot overstate the importance of social support and enjoyment independent of the status of the substance problem you’re dealing with (p. 275).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“Ultimately, whether or not your drinker achieves lasting sobriety, your journey with us will give you the skills and tools to enhance your own quality of life. Hence, in a best-case-scenario, the two of you will achieve peace together and worst-case-scenario is that you will have done everything possible and be able to move on and take care of your own life. In either case, your future looks brighter (p. 5).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

“Codependency is about normal behaviors taken too far. It’s about crossing lines (p. 5)... Blaming ourselves is a survival skill. It helps us feel in control when life doesn’t make sense and being abused doesn’t make any sense at all... Controlling and taking care of others – the entire package of codependent behaviors – become survival tools, living skills that we think will keep us safe (p. 2).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

### Embedded Study

This may be the most confusing seminar topic ever. *Is codependency really a thing? After all, no one can agree on a definition (this is true). Besides, the problem isn't me; it's the people who are hurting me or are destroying their life with addiction. You're not going to tell me this is my fault, are you? Wait a minute, no one in my life is an addict and I'm not married, can I be codependent?*

These are just a few of challenges we will have to navigate on our journey. We will define the concept of codependency in greater detail as we go along, but here are a few foundational premises for how we'll use the term.

- Codependency is a style of relating; meaning it is an activity rather than a condition.
- Codependency is more about *why* and *how* you do things than *what* you do. There are not codependent *behaviors* (what you do) as much as there are codependent *motives, tones, and patterns* (why and how you do things).
- Those who relate codependently struggle to rightly assign responsibility for problematic actions by others and self.
- The struggle to rightly assign responsibility makes it hard to determine "reasonable expectations" for others.
- The struggle to appropriately assign responsibility results in a difficulty regulating personal emotions.
- The struggle to assign responsibility and regulate emotions produces unhealthy relational patterns.
- Codependency is often (not always) associated with abusive, addictive, or controlling home environments.
- Those who related codependently are usually physically-emotionally exhausted and feel used by others.
- Unless we intentionally learn to think about responsibility, relationships, and emotions differently, we will continue to relate in a codependent manner.

You may not like using the term "codependency." That is fine. There is no magic in the term.

"We don't have to label ourselves at all. Deal with the behaviors that hurt and call yourself whatever you want (p. 77)."  
Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

You may not feel like you have the emotional energy left for what change will require. But realize the number of crises and amount of drama around you is going to take a large emotional investment. You might as well invest that energy in learning to relate in a healthier manner.

"Given how long you have already lived with your drinker under the present circumstances, you can tolerate it a little longer as you make small, controllable changes (p. 6)." Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

You may have reached out for help before and been burned. Unfortunately, this is too frequent, even in Christian contexts. Those affected by abuse, addiction, or adultery do not always get good counsel when they reach out for help. Hopefully this seminar provides a resource to help you vet the competence of helpers you invite into your life.

"In fact, many victims believe clergy have the most potential to help them, when in reality they are too often the least helpful and sometimes even hurtful (p. 16)." Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

If you look at the studies referenced by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, what you will find is that *direct invention helpers* (pastors, police, lawyers) are initially less helpful to those in harm's way than *less direct intervention helpers* (hot lines, social workers, counselors). When attempts are made to introduce change, even healthy changes, into your social systems before you are ready to consistently cooperate with those changes, the results are often a more difficult living situation.

That is why this seminar is focused on you; more than your living conditions (i.e., abuse, addiction, manipulation, etc...). You will need to be ready to consistently live out the implications of any changes that are made in order for those changes to benefit you. You will also need to be ready to live out the implications to maximize the potential influence you have on your loved one(s) who are living destructively around you.

With that said, one of the goals for this seminar is for you to understand the entire process. We will be taking a 9 step journey together that unfolds in three phases. A summary of the primary objective for each phase is listed below.

- Phase One: Steps 1-3 // Gain an accurate and unhurried view of your relational patterns
- Phase Two: Steps 4-6 // Remove destructive, dysfunctional messages from how you understand these patterns
- Phase Three: Steps 7-9 // Identify healthy ways you can have influence in unhealthy relationships and things you believe God has called you to pursue regardless of how much cooperation there is in key relationships becoming healthier



### 3 Types of Codependency

We mentioned earlier that there is no agreed upon definition for codependency. That is because codependency is a pop-psychology term rather than a clinical-psychology term. This does not mean codependency is a myth. It just lacks a clear definition which comparable terms such as addiction, bipolar, or anorexia have.

For the purposes of this seminar, we will examine three types of relational patterns that can be codependent.

1. *Relationships Involving Addiction* – When addiction is present, it creates the dynamics of infidelity. Something is primary in your loved one’s affections. For a period of time you may not know who-what it is. When you find out, you feel betrayed. There is lying, promising, threatening, pleading, silence, and other dysfunctional communication patterns. Your life and habits begin to accommodate the presence of this “other” for the purpose of maintaining some sense of order. With time, these accommodations become an increasingly unhealthy pattern of relating.
2. *Relationships Involving Abuse* – When abuse is involved, it creates a power imbalance in the relationship. The abuse is usually intermittent, so you think “It’s not always that bad.” Relational patterns are developed to appease the things that would upset the abusive person and the number of secrets being kept increases. This creates increasingly superficial relationships with those who are unaware of the abuse and higher degrees of shame.
3. *Relationships Marked by a Fear of Man* – “Fear of man” is the biblical term for valuing the approval of other people more than the approval of God. If the first two forms of codependency are the result of suffering, this expression is rooted more in our values and choices. This expression of codependency often goes by the names of peer pressure or insecurity. We live to please people more than to please God. This study will focus primarily on the suffering side of codependency, however, in the latter stages of your journey you will likely also have to wrestle with fear of man issues.

Knowing these types of codependency can help you navigate when parts of this study do not match your situation well. We will be speaking to all three. These distinctions may also help you understand when friends use the term codependency to describe a struggle different from yours. It doesn’t mean either of you are wrong. It is like when two people talk about owning a dog and one has a Chihuahua while the other has a Golden Retriever.

### Where Do I Begin?

At the beginning of this journey, God invites you to care for yourself. God does not view you as an employee from whom he wants the maximum return on his investment. Instead, God views you as his child who is hurting and for whom he wants wholeness and hope. Recognize change will be a process, rather than a moment of change. Therefore, at this stage in the journey, God would have you make the necessary preparations for what is ahead.

**Read I Kings 19:1-8.** Elijah was facing the suffering of being persecuted and he was facing it alone (at least to his knowledge). Notice the first thing God does for His discouraged child – God lets him sleep and feeds him (v. 5), then God acknowledged the “journey is too great for you (v. 7)” as a way of encouraging Elijah. No longer did Elijah need to feel like he should be able to do this on his own. No longer did Elijah have to pray as if God did not understand (as in v. 3-4). By allowing Elijah to prepare physically, God demonstrated He understood Elijah’s limits.

**Read Psalm 3:3-5.** In this Psalm David is on the run for his life (v. 1-2). Notice what God does first for His child – God lifts his chin out of shame (v. 3), listens to his cries (v. 4), and gives David sleep (v. 5). David knows he would not sleep at a time like this apart from God’s giving him rest. God’s involvement was not restricted to the approaching army. God began by preparing His child for what was ahead by giving David sleep.

**Question:** How do you respond when you hear that God wants you to prepare for this journey out of codependence more than He wants you to be productive? Are you able to receive this as a sign of God’s love for you?

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### Areas of Preparation

We want to offer five areas of self-care for you to consider. We have already discussed their spiritual significance – these are things God wants for you, not from you. As you read them, remember this is not a to-do list for winning God’s favor. These are gifts God wants to provide to assist you on your journey.

## I. Assess Safety Concerns

Safety is never a luxury that can wait until later. The expectation of safety is not an exorbitant request that reveals you are being unrealistic. When you or your children are in danger, this is the most important consideration. There are many things we will say can (and should) wait until you have a better understanding of the situation. Safety is not one of them.

Any of the following would be safety-level concerns.

- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
  - ❖ This item represents you being a threat to yourself. The other items are about others threatening you.
- Violence or threats of violence (against people or pets)
- Impediment from moving freely in your home
- Destruction of property or other physical intimidation tactics
- Attempts to isolate you from friends and family
- Withholding the financial means for basic provisions (i.e., food, electricity, water, etc...)
- Threats that “no one would believe you” if you disclosed what was occurring

“If your loved one is addicted to illicit drugs, you must be especially vigilant about safety issues... Thus, if your loved one is involved in this lifestyle, you and your dependents may be at serious risk for violence. The risks, moreover, do not stop there. Drug paraphernalia left in the home or anywhere that children may find it spells potential disaster for the children’s well-being (p. xxii).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

If these type actions are occurring, then please skip directly to **Appendix A “Making a Safety Plan.”** The rest of this material will be beneficial for you, but the danger of your immediate context indicates that you either need to take immediate action for safety or need to be prepared to do so in case your situation escalates.

**Read Romans 12:14-13:7.** Often we fail to see the connection between chapters in Scripture (which did not exist in the original text). Paul wrote a letter, not a book. The second half of Romans 12 talks about *how to interpersonally deal* with destructive relationships. We want to do everything possible to prevent escalating the situation and leave as much room as possible for God to bring the abusive person to repentance. The first part of Romans 13 talks about *how to legally deal* with destructive relationships – involve the appropriate legal authorities. A crime between friends or family members is still a crime and we thwart God’s consequential grace when we do not take the legal steps our situation would warrant. For more on this, read [bradhambrick.com/romans13](http://bradhambrick.com/romans13).

“At other times, separation may be implemented as a severe consequence for certain sinful behavior. As a Christian counselor, I do not say this lightly. Yet at times this is the only gift of love that convinces a spouse to consider his or her destructive behaviors seriously... The kinds of situations that warrant this type of drastic action, in my professional opinion, are domestic violence, chronic adultery, and drug, alcohol or other dangerous addictions that severely impact home life (p. 178).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“Children are better off when their parents stay together, except in cases where there are serious problems of addiction or abuse (p. 191).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

## 2. Begin Self-Care

Often Christians (or people who are just culturally concerned with being “nice”) are concerned that self-care is selfish and is a form of self-love akin to pride. We want to affirm your desire to have a character that is above reproach. However, it is important for you to be able to differentiate healthy self-care from selfish self-love. If this differentiation is a significant obstacle for your progress, you can reference the resource at [bradhambrick.com/identity](http://bradhambrick.com/identity).

Recall the presentation at the beginning of every airplane flight. What do you do if you’re traveling with a child and the oxygen masks are needed? You put it on yourself first and then the child. Why? If you are debilitated, the child is alone. Oxygen is a matter of self-preservation. Neglecting your self-care would be detrimental to the child.

Later we will begin to differentiate needs and wants; negotiable and non-negotiables. The things we will discuss in this Step One are clearly “needs,” meaning if you neglect them, the deterioration in your personal life will become a major detriment to the entire relational environment in which you live.

“We all have a hard time squeezing in optimal amounts of sleep, exercise, nutritious food, quiet time, and doing-things-we-like-to-do time. Prolonged worry about someone you love makes it seem even harder to attend to your own needs (p. 102).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

The journey ahead towards healthy relationships is likely a long one (or else you wouldn’t be picking up a resource like this), so you need to plan accordingly. Consider three key areas to help you persevere well, so you can maximize whatever redemptive influence (defined in the next section) you can have in your relational context.

- A. **Sleep** – When life gets hectic, sleep gets interrupted. This may be because emotional distress decreases the quality of your sleep or because schedule accommodations you make intrude on times when you should be sleeping.

It is not selfish to indicate that you are only available to care for others, especially those who regularly reach out to you, within the rhythms of care that God intended for you – of which, sleep is a primary one.

If you are having trouble regularly getting 6 to 8 hours of continuous sleep most evenings (at least 5 per week), consider the following suggestions to help with sleep at this time.

- Believe that sleep is intended as a good gift from God and do not feel guilty for resting.
- Memorize a passage of Scripture related to God’s care for you and repeat it slowly as you lay down.
- Play soft music or nature sounds to help prevent your mind from drift-thinking while trying to sleep.
- Reduce the level of caffeine and sugar in your diet, especially after the noon hour.
- Avoid daytime naps so that your sleep is in concentrated blocks if you have trouble sleeping through the night.
- Establish a bed time routine to help habituate your body towards sleep.
- Try a warm bath or muscle relaxation exercises about an hour before going to bed.
- Establish a deep slow breathing pattern that simulates sleep breathing.
- Talk with a medical professional about the possibility of a sleep aid.

- B. **Diet** – Our diet contributes to more than our figure and physical health. It has a major influence on our cognitive health and emotional regulation. Where does our body get the component parts that comprise our brain chemistry? From our diet. If we recognize how much our diet influences our cholesterol, blood pressure, and energy levels, why don’t we equally appreciate its role in our brain chemistry and subsequent emotional health?

Beyond these physiological influences of a healthy diet, what we eat often reveals how much we believe our day-to-day choices matter. When we stop paying attention to what we put in our body or when we begin to just eat-to-survive, it can reveal an “it doesn’t matter what I do” attitude that throws fuel on the fire of our relational crisis living.

Consider the following suggestions to help with your diet at this time.

- If you’ve lost your appetite, eat several small meals throughout the day instead of three big ones.
- Take a multi-vitamin.
- Consider a Vitamin C booster for your immune system; stress causes the body to pull energy reserves from the immune system.
- Avoid excessive sweets or caffeine. These will impact blood sugar levels and impact your sleep cycle; both of which makes emotional regulation more difficult.

- C. **Exercise** – Crises and relational drama can leave us prone to both depression and anxiety. Exercise, particularly cardiovascular exercise, is good for countering both. Exercise cleanses the body of free radicals generated by stress, boosts energy levels, improves sleep quantity/quality, and facilitates a more pro-active attitude towards life

What are ways that you can introduce three to five occurrences of cardio vascular exercise into your week?

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### 3. Define Responsibility

Being accurate and comfortable attributing responsibility for various actions (before a decisions are made) and outcomes (after a decisions are made) is the most pragmatic skill of overcoming codependency. We will look at other emotional and narrative elements, but few things will be more practically important than accurate responsibility-attribution.

“The power to influence someone, no matter how great the influence, is not the same as responsibility for another person’s choices. Our loved one’s problems become our problems – that’s a price we pay for love – but our loved one’s problems are not our fault (p. 115).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

An introductory exercise in responsibility-attribution is to make a list of the top five relational hardships that you believe you are consistently not handling well. Then for each one complete the chart below.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. \_\_\_\_\_

*My Responsibility* – In this column, list those matters for which your choices have direct influence. If your choices cannot have direct influence over an outcome, then it is not a matter of your responsibility. When you try to control things (people or outcomes) outside of your jurisdiction, you are relating codependently.

*Other’s Responsibility* – In this column, list those matters for which the other person’s choices have direct influence. Whatever outcomes result from their unhealthy or immoral choices are God’s consequential graces (implications meant to awaken them to their folly) that you should not try to rescue them from.

*God’s Sovereignty* – This column is for important factors that influence the outcome of a situation that are outside your or your loved one’s control. There are factors in most decisions / conflicts over which neither person has control. “Having faith” is the willingness to accept with a good attitude the implications of these factors without excusing folly on the part of any decision maker who was careless or offensive in the process.

<b>My Responsibility</b> (Matters of My Jurisdiction)	<b>The Other’s Responsibility</b> (Matters of Their Jurisdiction)	<b>God’s Sovereignty</b> (Unpredictable Variables)

“Kathy decided that at least part of the reason she felt so responsible for Jim was because she loved him so much. Somehow, she figured, by taking responsibility for this terrifying turn in their lives, she must have been striving to fix it. When she finally accepted that the responsibility was not hers to take, two things happened. One was that she stopped beating herself up. She could take a breather. The second consequence was her head cleared, and she could think rationally about what she realistically could control (p. 94).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

These initial reflections will be an excellent tool to help you measure progress later. At this stage in your journey, simply write how you actually think / relate. This will be the baseline from which you measure growth. If there are parts you can already tell are unhealthy, go ahead and begin to revise them. But leave the baseline thoughts legible.

If you were more confident / accurate in responsibility-attribution, how much relief do you think you would experience?

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**4. Remove Isolation**

The previous section probably alerted you to the reality that this journey is going to be difficult to take alone. Trying to discern healthy responsibilities-attributions, balanced life style choices, and proportional emotional responses is hard for anyone to do in isolation. We would either second guess ourselves out of any firm stance or become too dogmatic.

That begs the question: *Who do I talk to? I don’t want to do this alone, but I don’t want to get so many cooks in the kitchen that the process becomes overwhelming.* It is normal to be nervous about inviting others into our struggle. Here are some helpful parameters about who to involve and how.

- Disclose to those you are willing to let be a part of your journey towards healthier relating.
- Disclose to those who you believe have your best interest (rather than their agenda or personal relief) at heart.
- Disclose to those you admire how they balance care-for-others with personal-well-being in relationships.
- If abuse or addiction is involved, disclose to someone who has experience in these areas.
- Be direct and clear in the type of assistance you are and are not requesting.
- Honor the limitations this person(s) may have when you request their help.

Who in your life (i.e., pastor, family, friends) or community (i.e., counselor, support group, etc...) fit these descriptions?

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“The toxic effect of the destructive person upon us can be lessened when we invite and allow others to encourage us, pray for us, support us, and love us (p. 54).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

With this in mind, script out what you would like to say as you reach out to someone about your challenges. Whether you send this as a letter or e-mail is up to you, but writing it out will help make sure you actually say what you want to say.

Name,

*I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about some challenges I've been facing. I believe I may not be relating well to others because there is significant strain in several of my close relationships.*

*I would like your help thinking through these challenges more objectively, so please do not just take my side because we are friends. In the end, I believe there will be places I need to be more firm and places I need to be more gracious. Initially, however, I am just asking you to listen well helping me to think through the situation as objectively as possible.*

*I am using a resource, which is available at [bradhambrick.com/codependency](http://bradhambrick.com/codependency), to provide structure and a clear process to my efforts. You are welcome to review it if you like.*

*As I go through this process, I will be looking for friends who can support me in this journey. I would appreciate if you would consider being one of those people. I understand that your time is limited and would appreciate you being honest about your availability. If this is something you are willing to do, I would also appreciate knowing the times that would work best for you. I want to honor your schedule on my journey.*

**Read Galatians 6:1-5.** This passage describes the kind of relationship for which you are asking. It is important to note that the word “transgression” in verse one can also be translated hardship. Often we tend to exclusively think of these kinds of relationships as accountability-for-sin and neglect to consider their value for support-in-suffering. As we’ve already said, rightly attributing responsibility will be a big part of the journey ahead. This devotion is meant to do two things: (a) give you a biblical portrait of the kind of relationships that facilitate this journey, and (b) to circumvent the “this is entirely my fault; I should be ashamed” fear from preventing you from reaching out to others.

## 5. Enjoy Life

Chances are you’ve put many of your interests on hold. As a short-term sacrifice, that would have been fine. But if it became a way of life and now contributes to the sense of dryness and (potentially) resentment that you feel, that is unhealthy. Life may still be too hectic for you to pursue all of your interests again. Few of us get to do that. But it is time to begin pursuing some of the things that are enjoyable to you again.

Make a list of some of the personal interests that have faded from your life.

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As you consider making one or two of these a regular part of your life again, consider the following questions to help you discern which would be the best to start with.

- Which interests fit best in your natural rhythms of life?
- Which interests put you in the context of healthy relationships?
- Which interests are least interruptible by the crises or drama around you?
- Which interests are most emotionally rewarding-replenishing for you?

We will spend more time considering and pursuing the life God designed for you in steps seven through nine. Between now and then we will be rooting out the weeds of dysfunction so we can enjoy the garden of God’s design. But, even before then, it is good for you to begin making time for things you enjoy.

This will do at least two things. First, you can begin the process of letting go of the guilt for taking time for things you enjoy when people around you are hurting (which is always). Second, it will generate more of the emotional energy that will be required to examine difficult areas of your life and relationships that need to change. Change is never easy. But it is easier when you’re not running on empty.

**Conclusion**

Be encouraged. What you are doing is wise and good, even if it is the hardest thing you ever do. If you are going to engage something that is difficult, then it’s important to know that the endeavor is worthwhile. Learning how God wants to care for you as you learn to relate in a healthier manner in unhealthy relationship is important.

At the end of each step, we provide a few questions we would like an accountability-encouragement partner to be asking you as you take this journey. This person could be a pastor, counselor, friend, or small group member. Use this as a way to educate your support network about what they can do to help.

**Encouragement Focus (PREPARE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- What type of codependency pattern are you facing (relationship involving addiction, abuse, or fear of man)?
- Which of the five areas of preparation are you strongest? Weakest?
- Are there safety concerns that need to be thought through?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 2

### “I’ve Been So Busy I Haven’t Been Paying Attention”

ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.

**“I will look at my life and acknowledge what has happened as my history.**

**I will not try to move forward out of a false history or with no history.**

**I trust that God can and will redeem what is and what has been.**

**Evidencing my faith in God I acknowledged my specific history to [name; counselor or group].**

**This brought great fear [describe] and then relief [describe].”**

**Memorize:** Luke 10:40-42 (ESV), “But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Distracted with much serving” –Distracted already implies she wasn’t focused on what was most important.
- “Lord, do you not care?” – Her over-involvement caused her to question and turn on everyone, even Jesus.
- “Left me to serve alone” – In this case Mary (the other) chose the better option. That may not be the case in your life.
- “Troubled about many things” – The implication is that Martha was troubled by things outside her control.
- “One thing is necessary” – You are to honor God with your life; not control everyone else’s life to honor God.

#### Teaching Notes

“If you want to learn to act right when your spouse acts wrong, you will need to make a commitment to yourself never to pretend that things are fine when they are not (p. 81).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“It’s not as much what we do as how and why we do it. Two people can engage in the same behavior in similar situations. One will be acting codependent; the other will be exhibiting healthy behavior (p. 50)... Sometimes one moment of awareness does more than months of hard work (p. 7).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“Pain is no proof of a bad relationship or even a harmful one. There is no perfect relationship or perfect person (p. 25)... What makes these sinful interactions destructive is their repetitive patterns, as well as lack of awareness, lack of remorse, and lack of significant change (p. 28).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“This type of behavior, called ‘splitting’... is the rigid separation of positive and negative thoughts and feelings about oneself and others; that is, the inability to synthesize these feelings (p. 14).” Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus in *I Hate You – Don’t Leave Me*

“Naming domestic abuse for what it is – and dealing with it as such – is important for this essential reason: the abuse usually gets worse. Infrequent episodes usually progress to more frequent ones. Less severe episodes usually progress to more severe ones (p. 23)... Abusive men often take the biblical text and distort it to support their right to abuse (p. 127).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

“Acceptance does not mean approving, giving up, or detaching; it means recognizing things for what they are, no better but no worse (p. 94)... When we accept what is hard, we don’t make it harder than it is (p. 96)... Often what we call ‘the problem’ is really a pileup of problems that overwhelms us with its size and complexity when we regard it as one big thing (p. 150).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“Sometimes people believe (incorrectly) that recovering from codependency means they have to get a divorce (p. 8)... My husband’s drinking didn’t create my codependency. I’d been doing the behaviors his drinking triggered – controlling, taking care of others and neglecting myself, repressing emotions, feeling victimized – most of my life (p. 20).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“Our problem is that we need them (for ourselves) more than we love them (for the glory of God) (p. 19).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

### Embedded Study

There is nothing “fun” or enjoyable about this step. However, it is a good and needed part of the process. But do not allow these first two statements to cause you to think, “Alright then, let’s get it over with as quickly as possible.” That would be a mistake that would likely result in you missing the key information that is most important to glean from this step.

Your goal in this step is to identify the unhealthy patterns of relationship that have developed in your life. Often we miss the patterns for the events; a form of missing the forest for the trees.

*The events* (i.e., controlling-abusive behaviors, repeated intoxication of a loved one, having your opinion taken for granted, etc...) are usually things that are happening to us. They are painful and we remember them. It is right to view them as suffering. But often we assume suffering means we have no choice but to be passive and that we contribute nothing to the interaction.

*The patterns* are the ways we relate that enable the events to continue occurring. They are confusing and thinking about them often creates the fear that this will be “all my fault,” so we avoid thinking about them.

You can begin to see that this is where it is vital to differentiate responsibility from influence.

- “Responsibility” refers to the direct volitional ability to change an outcome and moral culpability for that outcome. When a loved one is abusive or addicted, you do not have responsibility for their actions. You cannot change their actions, and you are not morally responsible for their actions.
- “Influence” refers to the ability to decrease the likelihood of an event occurring through indirect choices. Often the lack of responsibility makes us feel powerless, so we neglect influence. Other times we recognize influence is not 100% effective, so we don’t like uncertainty. The means of influence in an unhealthy relationship usually involve either conflict or allowing a loved one to experience unpleasant consequences, so we avoid using influence.

In this chapter we will not address the “methods of influence.” We will begin to see when these different “choices of influence” are possible. The first part of healthy action is clearly seeing when action is needed. Unhealthy relationships are notoriously murky. That is why accurately and consistently seeing the problem for what it is, is essential to living differently in unhealthy relationships. We will seek to accomplish this objective in three sections.

1. Codependency Assessment
2. Power-Control Relationships vs. Mutual Honor Relationships
3. Overall Life Satisfaction Scale (moderating)

### Codependency Assessment

**Instructions:** Read the following descriptive statements. Mark the answer that most accurately fits how you respond. Even if the situations described have not happened (for instance, your loved one does not have children to neglect), answer based upon what you realistically believe you would do if you were in a comparable situation.

**(N) almost never, (R) rarely, (S) sometimes, (F) frequently, or (A) almost always.**

For the most accurate results, ask one person from each major sphere of your life (i.e, home, work, social, church small group, etc...) to complete this survey on your behalf and compare results. If you are willing this is another effective way to begin to enlist those who know and love you to be part of your community of support.

Note: This assessment assumes the dominant dysfunctional relationship in your life is at home. If that is not the case, you will need to substitute work, school, church, or other social setting to make items match your circumstance.

Please remember this assessment looks at how you are interacting that allows the dysfunction to perpetuate. This is not meant to imply the dysfunction is your fault. The goal of this study is to help you learn to respond in as God-honoring and healthy way possible to an unhealthy relationship. That begins with seeing how your actions are allowing the dysfunction to fester.

A self-scoring on-line version of this evaluation can be found at: [bradhambrick.com/codependency](http://bradhambrick.com/codependency).

- |  |          |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. I make excuses for missed appointments, work, or classes.                       | <b>N</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>A</b> |
| 2. I let lies to other people slide even when I know they’re untrue.               | <b>N</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>A</b> |
| 3. I help with projects or assignments that are neglected.                         | <b>N</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>A</b> |
| 4. I lied to children or friends about why commitments were neglected.             | <b>N</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>A</b> |
| 5. I avoid activities or conversation with friends so I won’t expose my loved one. | <b>N</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>A</b> |



6. I clean up vomit or fix damage to house done while intoxicated.	N	R	S	F	A
7. I pay overdue bills or help catch up on debt accruing because of addiction.	N	R	S	F	A
8. I pay the bail needed to get them out of jail.	N	R	S	F	A
9. I buy the alcohol or drugs my loved one wants so he/she won't drive.	N	R	S	F	A
10. I mediate conflict created by my loved one's addictive behavior.	N	R	S	F	A
11. I repeatedly tell my loved one they are drinking too much and beg them to stop.	N	R	S	F	A
12. I frequently use tears or yelling to compel them to stop drinking or using.	N	R	S	F	A
13. I frequently make passive-aggressive digs about drinking in conversations or arguments.	N	R	S	F	A
14. I have made lists of the negative consequences of drinking to persuade my spouse to stop.	N	R	S	F	A
15. When nothing else works, I use extended periods of punishing silence.	N	R	S	F	A
16. I have threatened to separate and take the kids if the drinking doesn't stop.	N	R	S	F	A
17. I have threatened to expose my loved to their parents, family, boss, or friends.	N	R	S	F	A
18. I talk about "what I should do" if things don't change.	N	R	S	F	A
19. I talk about what my loved one would do if he/she were in my shoes.	N	R	S	F	A
20. I threatened to tell people at church or legal authorities if things don't change.	N	R	S	F	A
21. I create false stories to explain why I'm upset, late, or have bruises.	N	R	S	F	A
22. I coach my children on what they can and can't say about what goes on at home.	N	R	S	F	A
23. I avoid subjects that could lead to discussing arguments / abuse that occurs at home.	N	R	S	F	A
24. I pretend my home is safer than it is so I can emotionally cope with life.	N	R	S	F	A
25. Mental escaping (i.e., books, movies, games, etc.) is one of my primary coping mechanisms.	N	R	S	F	A
26. My loved one wants to limit my time with my family.	N	R	S	F	A
27. My loved one wants to limit my time with my friends.	N	R	S	F	A
28. When I spend time with others I have to answer many questions about what I said/did.	N	R	S	F	A
29. My loved one degrades my friends and family so I will value their perspectives less.	N	R	S	F	A
30. I often hide my social interaction with others so I "won't get in trouble."	N	R	S	F	A
31. Your loved one responds to you as if you are wonderful or terrible, rarely in between.	N	R	S	F	A
32. Your loved one often says "I never said/did that" to things they obviously said/did.	N	R	S	F	A
33. Abusive behaviors are minimized saying "You're too sensitive."	N	R	S	F	A
34. When your loved one is offensive, you are often blamed for thinking you're perfect.	N	R	S	F	A
35. Absence of conflict friends/co-workers becomes evidence for why conflict must be your fault.	N	R	S	F	A
36. In arguments, my words are becoming sharper and move cutting.	N	R	S	F	A
37. In my hurt, I have begun to initiate conflict as means of punishing my loved one.	N	R	S	F	A
38. I have begun to hide actions or money for reasons that do not have to do with safety.	N	R	S	F	A
39. I have begun to be physically abusive in my response to my loved one.	N	R	S	F	A
40. I have begun to slander (i.e., sharing false or exaggerated stories) my loved one to others.	N	R	S	F	A
41. I often say "I don't care" when I do have a preference.	N	R	S	F	A
42. I often share what I think people want to hear instead of my true thoughts or feelings.	N	R	S	F	A
43. My personality, vocabulary, and behaviors change based upon who I am around.	N	R	S	F	A
44. I frequently compromise my values to please those who are around me.	N	R	S	F	A
45. I have a significant fear of people disapproving of what I say, think, or do.	N	R	S	F	A
46. I replay social interactions in my mind trying to make sure I did it "right."	N	R	S	F	A
47. I spend a great deal of time trying to interpret what people think of me.	N	R	S	F	A
48. When I make a decision in front of or affecting others, I second guess it a lot.	N	R	S	F	A
49. I often remember a past, awkward social interaction and feel the shame intensely.	N	R	S	F	A
50. I help with projects or assignments that are neglected.	N	R	S	F	A
51. My fear of disappointing people is a primary motivator for me.	N	R	S	F	A
52. When a job is finished I feel more relief for non-failure than sense of accomplishment.	N	R	S	F	A
53. I remember words of criticism more vividly than words of encouragement.	N	R	S	F	A
54. I rely on my accomplishments more than the gospel to quell my negative self-thoughts.	N	R	S	F	A
55. I never seem to know when I've done "enough" and can rest.	N	R	S	F	A

**Key to Survey Scoring:** Give yourself one point for an "S" response, two points for an "F" response, and three points for an "A" response. If your total score matches the total number of questions in a given subset, that is an area of concern. If your total score comes close to doubling the total number of questions, it is a significant concern. If your total score more than doubles the total number of questions, it should be considered a life-dominating struggle.

A self-scoring on-line version of this evaluation can be found at: [bradhambrick.com/codependency](http://bradhambrick.com/codependency).

The material for this evaluation is arranged into three categories: (1) codependent relationships involving addiction, (2) codependent relationships involving abuse, and (3) codependent relationships marked by a fear of man. These three categories are not mutually exclusive.

**Category One: Codependent Relationships Involving Addiction** – In this codependent pattern you are responding unhealthily to your loved one's abuse of pleasure. As your loved one gives more of his or her life to addiction, the neglected responsibilities and added crises begin to fall on those around them. The responses below are the classic unhealthy way that family and friends often respond to these added pressures.

- Questions 1-5: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **covering up**. Often it is easier for us to take the little steps of keeping life moving "normal." In the moment, none of the actions described in these questions seem like that big of a deal. Over time, however, they remove a significant part of the social consequences that would be an alarm to the growing addiction.

- Questions 6-10: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **rescuing and fixing**. None of us want our loved ones to suffer. When we have the ability to reduce their hardship, we feel compelled to do so. We would often feel guilty if we didn't. But the net effect of our rescuing is taking the batteries out of the fire alarm in a burning house. It only aids our loved one's ability to sleep to their own demise. We love them by letting the alarm sound.

- Questions 11-15: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **nagging**. Once we get tired of removing consequences, social or situational, we become the voice of consequences. We feel like our over-service gives us the "right" to say whatever we want, especially because we're right. But, unfortunately, our nagging makes us a distraction from the needed change. It becomes easier to be upset with our verbal repetition than do the hard work of facing the addiction.

- Questions 16-20: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **threatening**. After nagging our sense of being the voice of consequence becomes more intense. But threats tend to be emotion-laden and lack follow through. We further reinforce to our loved one that consequences never really happen. The intensity of conflict usually becomes a reason for more substance abuse, either to punish you for being mean or to settle their nerves from the unpleasant interaction.

"When we yell, people don't hear us. They become defensive and flooded with emotion (p. 59)." Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

**Category Two: Codependent Relationships Involving Abuse** – In this codependent pattern you are responding unhealthily to your loved one's abuse of power. Your loved one thrives on control. In order for them to have more, you must have less. The responses below are the classic unhealthy ways family and friends respond to a relationship built upon an imbalance of power.

- Questions 21-25: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **lying and creating a false story**. When you don't want to admit that a relationship is abusive you have to lie: to yourself and to others. Whether you say you "fell down the stairs" to explain bruises or "had a bout of insomnia" to explain blood shot eyes from a sleepless night, the frequency of the abuse begins to mean that the people who know you know the real you less and less.

- Questions 26-30: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **constricting social sphere**. An abuser knows that in order to maintain a level of control over their loved one there have to be fewer healthy voices in their loved one's world. This can be accomplished through isolation or discrediting family and friends who would be healthy voices. When a loved one begins to forbid or degrade healthy friendships that is a red-flag sign the relationship is destructive.

- Questions 31-35: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **self-doubt**. An abuser also knows for them to have more voice, you must have less voice. A primary way of creating this dynamic is to instill self-doubt. The less you trust you and your judgement (in addition to being isolated from others), the more you must rely on them.

- Questions 36-40: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **retaliation**. As social restriction and self-doubt become more pronounced, it is common to become emotionally desperate. For some, this results in severe depression; others become aggressive, retaliating for the unjust treatment. However justified this may feel, it only adds to the volatility of the relationship and provides the abusive person with “evidence” (not real justification) their actions aren’t that different from yours.

**Category Three: Codependent Relationships Marked by a Fear of Man** – These qualities are often more dispositional than habituated reactions to an unhealthy relationship. In moderation, they often make for a very sweet and servant-hearted disposition. As they become more pronounced, they become qualities that have a magnetic quality for relationships with power imbalances (abusive) and with individuals who have unhealthy life styles (addictions). Bringing these qualities back into a healthy range is almost always a part of the later stages of codependency recovery.

- Questions 41-45: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **surrendering voice and opinions**. Often those who relate codependently confuse having opinions and preferences with being over-bearing; a sentence starting with “I want” or “I like” is equated with being selfish. Consequently, the preferences of family and friends gain a disproportional influence in your life. You should be able to vocalize your preferences without a sense of guilt. It doesn’t have to be 50-50, but it needs to be closer to 60-40 than 80-20.

- Questions 46-50: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **ruminating and second guessing**. We can tell what matters most to us by where our thoughts drift when we have a moment to think. When we are living in the fear of man, we will wrestle with whether our actions have pleased people more than whether they have pleased God. We will find that we are living to keep the peace more than to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

- Questions 51-55: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **driven over-achievement**. Sometimes the fear of man is very functional, at least for a while. We are so afraid of disappointing people that we force ourselves to be excellent at everything we do. We do this at the expense of our basic self-care (see Step One). Eventually we can’t bear up under the expectations we create by “needing to be needed” and “needing to be perfect.” We collapse. Initially we get mad at everyone who benefited from our driven-ness. Then we feel guilty and start achieving again. At no point in that process do we allow ourselves to enjoy relationship that is not predicated on performance.

“Perhaps the most dangerous form of the fear of man is the ‘successful’ fear of man. Such people think they have made it (p. 17).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

“Being overly independent can be just as codependent as being too needy. Both behaviors are based on fear (p. 109).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

### Power-Control Relationships vs. Mutual Honor Relationships

One of the big questions that has yet to be answered is, “What is the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship?” Doubtless, if you’re in an unhealthy relationship, when you’ve raised concerns, you have been told your expectations are too high. How do you know if this is true? Where is the line between healthy and unhealthy?

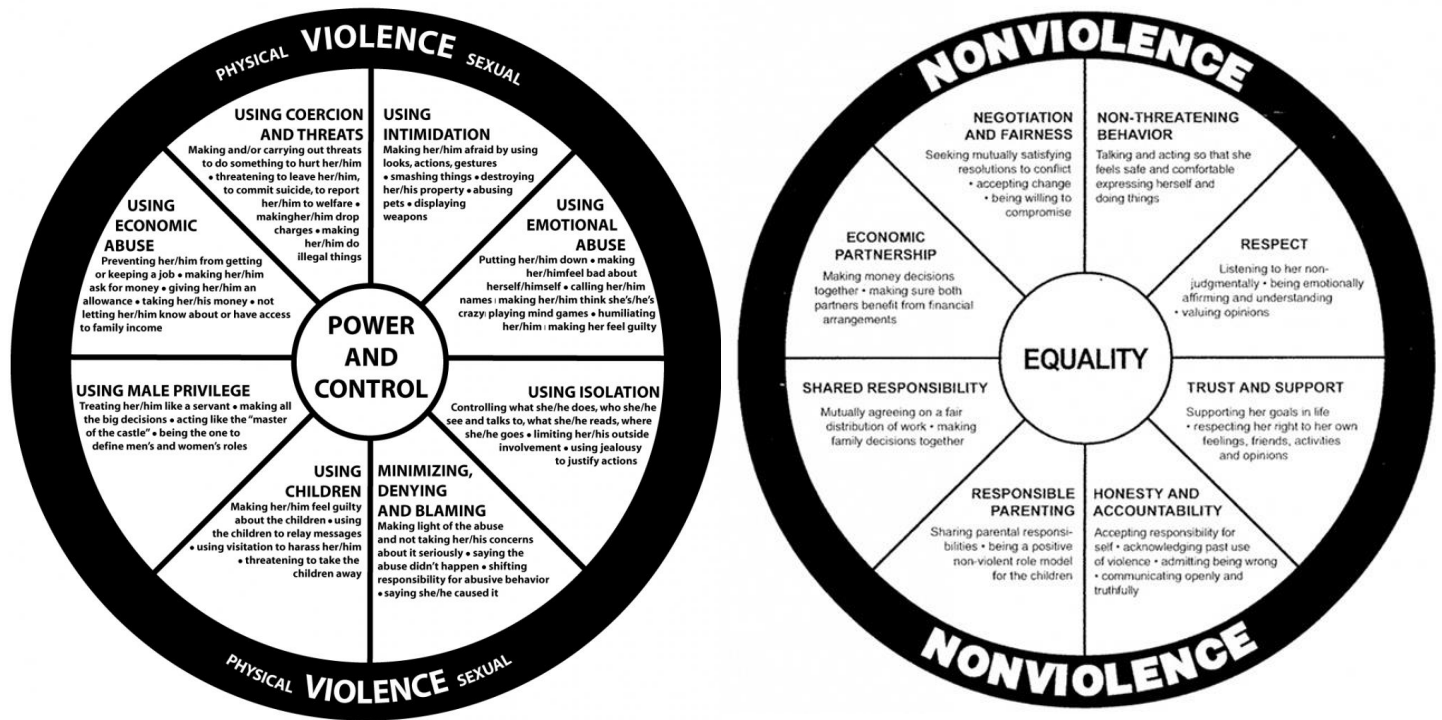
The answer cannot be “if you’ve been hurt.” Unfortunately, in all relationships – even healthy ones – we experience pain. This comes from the reality that every relationship is two sinners trying to do life together.

However, pain does reveal where we need to begin to look. The key question is, “How is pain responded to?” Is pain followed by listening, genuine repentance, effort towards change, and accountability with others? If so, the relationship is healthy. On the other hand, if pain is followed by minimization, blame-shifting, and secrecy, the relationship is unhealthy.

“Here is a good rule of thumb: If you’re in a relationship that lacks mutual caring, safety, honesty, or respect and you regularly feel anxiety, fear, shame, anger, or despair, then your emotions are warning you that you are in a destructive relationship (p. 51).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

The National Domestic Violence Hotline developed the diagram below to differentiate the key features of an abusive relationship. It is called the “Power and Control Wheel.” The more features on this wheel that are present in your relationship, the less safe the relationship is.

Similar resources available at [www.bradhambrick.com](http://www.bradhambrick.com)



Which segments of the “Power and Control Wheel” fit your destructive relationship(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

In the margins around the wheel make notes about the specific behaviors or events that fit each segment.

This second diagram is intended to illustrate the key features of “mutual relationships” as the alternative to “power and control relationships.” Take a moment to contrast each segment of the two wheels. There is a good chance you have had a hard time putting into words what you were asking for in a healthy relationship; or, at least, that you felt selfish for having expectations of a healthy relationship.

As you study the two wheels you should (a) begin to identify the key areas of your destructive relationship that needs to change and (b) release whatever guilt you feel for expecting a relationship marked by these qualities.

This discussion of violence begs an important set of questions, “How do choices about staying or separating change when children are involved? When is mandated reporting required? How is that different from pressing charges?” There is much confusion on these questions. Here are some guiding principles and key terminology differences.

- When there is reason to believe that a child is in an environment of harm, any adult aware of the situation is mandated to contact the local Child Protection Services (or functional equivalent for that jurisdiction). This requirement begins with reasonable suspicion and not known fact.
- A parent, even an abused parent, who allows their child to continue to live in an abusive environment can be considered negligent if active steps are not taken to ensure the child's safety. The adult being abused is not an exception clause for the responsibility of that adult to report abuse.
- When minors are being abused or exposed to abuse, the legal requirement is “mandated reporting” by whomever has reasonable suspicion of the abuse. When an adult is being abused that adult must “press charges” in order for legal action to be taken.
- For additional guidance on this subject visit [bradhambrick.com/abusereporting](http://bradhambrick.com/abusereporting).

“We would add that while an abused woman with no children has strong biblical warrant to flee an abusive husband, she has additional warrant to do so if she has children (p. 137).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

Another important question emerges as we consider abusive relationships, “Do relationships cross certain thresholds of destructiveness in which different sets of social rules or strategies become biblically warranted?” or stated differently, “Does Scripture teach us to relate differently in destructive relationships than in ones marked by honor?” The answer is “Yes.”

**Read Matthew 7:1-6.** This passage is a progressive set of relational protocols based upon the degree of destructiveness sin is introducing to a relationship. In verses 1 and 2, Jesus is addressing relationship where the impact of sin is minor – “judge not lest you be judged... with the measure you use, it will be measured against you.” In verses 3 through 5, Jesus is addressing closer relationships where the impact of sin should not be avoided – “take the log out of your own eye before you take the speck out of another’s... otherwise you’re being hypocritical.” In verse 6 Jesus is addressing destructive relationships where the other person is uncooperative with the restoration process – “do not feed wild dogs... do not throw your pearls before pigs.” For more on this passage see [bradhambrick.com/selfcenteredspouse](http://bradhambrick.com/selfcenteredspouse).

### Overall Life Satisfaction Scale

One of the skills we want to begin to learn is how to (a) not let one aspect of life or relationship define all of life without (b) living in denial about or accommodating the unhealthiness in the unhealthy area of life. Most of this step has been about “B,” not living in denial. This final section is about “A,” evaluating the enjoyment – or potential enjoyment – in the rest of life.

Living with a balance between “A” and “B” is a large part of what allows us to moderate our emotions and responses to the difficult or hurtful choices of others; and moderating our emotions in response to difficult circumstances – neither over nor under reacting – is a large part of overcoming codependency.

“Not knowing how to moderate is possibly the most visible symptom of codependence to other people (p. 36).” Pia Melody in *Facing Codependence*

When we live in denial, every disappointment hits us with the force of surprise that things are not as “better” as we thought. We feel the pain of the hardship and the pain of our “façade of peace” crashing.

“Letting go of denial makes life easier because we won’t have to control everything so our fantasy doesn’t become exposed (p. 104).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

Allowing one painful aspect of life to define all others prevents us from enjoying available relief outlets. Fully engaging parts of life you enjoy is not living in denial. Moderating emotions is about enjoying what is good while acknowledging what is bad. Part of being free is not getting caught up in the all-or-nothing, black-or-white style of thinking that is common to addicts and abusers.

The chart below is meant to help you be more balanced in your assessment of life. It can serve as a good marker of progress on your journey. It is recommended that you complete a new version of this chart each month as you work these steps.

**Instruction:** On the 1 to 10 scale provided, mark the current level of life satisfaction you are experiencing in each area of life. At the end, after reflecting on each component of your life, assess your overall level of life satisfaction. Your goal over the course of this study is to see the overall life satisfaction score increase as you learn what it is to love people without needing people; to be in relationship without being controlled or being controlling.

The concepts and skills you need to find this balance will be taught as you progress through the remaining steps. This tool is meant to serve as an early-warning-instrument to alert you to when one relationship or event is becoming too consuming and would impair your ability to utilize the concepts and skills in the remainder of this packet.

### Conclusion

Take a deep breath. If you feel overwhelmed, remember there is nothing true now that was not true before you read this chapter. You just know more about yourself and your struggle than you did before. This knowledge does not “add” anything to what is expected of you. You were going to battle with these challenges whether you knew them well or not. Now you can be better equipped for the struggle you were going to face anyway.

Often, the step of “acknowledging the history and realness of your suffering” can create a sense of unrest. Our denial provided a false sense of security. We were like children pulling the covers over our head to protect ourselves from the monster in the closet. If our sense of upset were true, then our attempt at self-protection was woefully inadequate.

Now you are being equipped to determine how to best address your codependent style of relating. We may not know how to sort our relational laundry yet – what we need to change, what we need to set as non-negotiables, what we don’t rescue others from, what it means to be “controlling,” etc...

But we are on our way towards finding out, so that we can make the best application of what God offers – directly through the gospel, His Word and His people; and indirectly through allowing wisdom to guide how we interact with loved ones who are abusive or addicted – in our journey towards hope and peace.



## Life Satisfaction Scale



Area of Life	Completely Unsatisfied					Completely Satisfied				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relationship with Christ	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Bible Study and Prayer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Small Group Involvement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Job or School	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Household Responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relationship with Children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relationship with Friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Relationship with Parents / Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Hobbies / Enjoyable Activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Financial Situation / Management	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social Activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sleep and Exercise Routine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sense of Independence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>General Sense of Satisfaction</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

\* This resource is modified and adapted from a comparable resource in *Beyond Addiction* by Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs (p. 144)

### Encouragement Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- What did you learn about your style of relating codependently?
- What did you learn from the “Power and Control Wheel” vs. the “Mutual Honor Wheel”?
- Where is your overall level of life satisfaction and what relationships or events are having an undue influence?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 3. “What Is the Impact of Living In Brokenness?”

UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.

**“I used to fear facing the reality of my relational unhealth and would not acknowledge it, so I expected myself to live as if the dysfunction wasn’t real or “that bad” [describe].**

**I can see how the dysfunction has affected me [describe].**

**I have been inaccurate in how I’ve interpreted brokenness in my relationships.**

**God’s interpretation is full of both grace and truth.**

**I will find peace and health when I agree with God’s interpretation and not my fears.**

**The impact of my suffering is starting to make sense and help me see life differently [describe].”**

**Memorize:** Psalm 55:12-14 (ESV), “For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together, within God’s house we walked in the throng.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Psalm” – God knew we would need words to express the pain of hardship and betrayal in close relationships.
- “Not an enemy” – This multiplies the pain. Hence David repeats it twice. Love leaves us more vulnerable to pain.
- “Then I could hide” – When dysfunction occurs at home it feels impossible to “get away.” Rest is hard to find.
- “My familiar friend” – Codependent relational styles usually require closeness and familiarity before they manifest.
- “Used to... together” – Time invested in the relationship, even if unhealthily, becomes something to be grieved.

### Teaching Notes

“Many women do not realize the different ways that an abuser has been harming them until they are out and away from his grip of power and control (p. 41)... The pattern starts at its center, which is the abuser himself. He puts his wants and whims first and foremost. And while the abuser’s life revolves around what he wants, the life of the abused revolves around the abuser (p. 42).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

“Sin-shame is something we bring on ourselves; victimization-shame is done to us. Everyone has the experience of sin-shame, but not everyone has this shame intensified by victimization shame (p. 26)... Victimization-shame usually intensifies pre-existing sin-shame (p. 27).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

“God did not intend for people to continuously depend on other people for their well-being. As we mature, he wants us to depend upon him. Certainly God uses individuals to meet many of our needs, but no person can meet all our needs all the time. When we believe that we always need a particular someone, we put that person in God’s position in our lives. Replacing God with a person will destroy us (p. 32).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“‘Enabling’ refers to anything you do that reinforces or increases the likelihood of your loved one’s substance using behavior, or any other behavior you don’t want to support (p. 183)... A screaming fight might also be enabling as it could give him all the reason he needs to justify smoking more pot (p. 184).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“All codependent behaviors make sense if traced to their origins. The behaviors associated with codependency – from controlling to caretaking – are behaviors that saved our lives when we didn’t know what else to do (p. 9-10).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“People-pleasers can mistake ‘niceness’ for love... People-pleasers can also mistake ‘yes’ for love (p. 214).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

“One problem with masks and walls is that, though their purpose is to protect you from hurt, they hurt you even more because they don’t allow relationships (p. 26).” Ed Welch in *What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?*

## Embedded Study

After acknowledging the history and realness of our relational unhealthiness, we need to understand the impact of these experiences on our life. Unless we understand the impact, we will be forced to “just try to do better;” which is often what leads us to the dilemma of taking responsibility for things that don’t belong to us and, hence, leads us to be controlling.

But the other rebuttal is, “Looking at the impact will only make me feel worse.” This is partially true, and why it is highly recommended you go through this study with a friend, pastor, or counselor. But it is also largely false. Consider the parallel example of debt. Many people in debt fail to itemize and total their debt for fear it will be overwhelming. But that leaves them powerless and with a “haunting ambiguous” sense of how big it must be.

In this chapter we will seek to understand the impact of relating codependently in four sections.

1. Qualities of Codependency
2. Effects of Living with Abuse
3. Effects of Living with Addiction
4. Thinking Well about Boundaries

While difficult, this examination will do several things. First, it will show you where and how you can begin to engage your codependent relational style. There are many occasions other than conflict or drama when we can learn to relate in a healthier manner. This information will be very important in step seven.

Second, it will de-mystify the experience of codependency. Often the question, “How did things get this bad?” paralyzes and shames us with bewilderment. No piece of the codependent experience seems to account for the whole. Looking at the pieces can give you the hope and strength to continue the journey.

Third, it will begin to reveal the unhealthy ways you have made sense of your codependent experience. This will be the primary focus of step four, but understanding impact is a great way to make the unhealthy “story” we build around our codependent experience more obvious and, therefore, possible to change.

## 5 Qualities of Codependency

We will begin this examination of the impact of living in abusive-addiction relationships with a summary of five qualities that begin to emerge in the life of someone who relates codependently. All of these may not be present in every case. In the sections that follow you will see how the prolonged accommodation of dysfunctional relationships produces these qualities.

- I. **Inability or Unwillingness to Rightly Allocate Responsibility:** As we’ve said, a primary skill of overcoming codependency is learning to accurately assess what you are and are not responsible for. A primary impact of dysfunctional relationships is transferring of responsibility.
  - The alcoholic relies on you to ensure they do not get fired or look bad to their children.
  - The drug addict blames you when they get in trouble with the law.
  - The physical abuser tries to teach you how not to upset them.
  - The manipulator redefines their over-reach as a form of love and concern.

When we play along with these assumptions, we begin to live as if we are responsible for things we cannot control. This is the centerpiece for the emotional and relational chaos that ensues.

Go back to the responsibility charts you began to keep in Step One. Reflect the patterns that have emerged as you tracked the situations where responsibility-allocation was confused or wrongly assigned.

- Who are the people from whom you expect too little? Too much?
- Who are the people who expect too much from you? Too little?
- What responsibilities (i.e., tasks or emotional weights) have you taken on which are not yours?
- What life systems or patterns have emerged around these wrongly allocated responsibilities?
- What responsibilities, that should be yours, get neglected to take care of the tasks that aren’t yours?
- How has taking care of responsibilities that aren’t yours built a sense of entitlement in others?
- What conflicts are frequently repeated around these wrongly allocated responsibilities?

**Read Ezekiel 18:1-4.** In this passage God is confronting a culture-wide responsibility-attribution error that had emerged amongst the Children of Israel. They believed – so strongly that it became an accepted proverb of their day (v.



2) – that children were punished by God (that is, responsible) for the sins of their parents. Children felt “cursed” because of their parent’s poor choices. God was very bold in his condemnation of this mindset. God wanted his people to know that each person is responsible for his or her own choices (v. 4). We honor and emulate God when we create a relational context that mirrors this principle.

2. **Overly Involved in the Lives of Others:** Inaccurate responsibility-attributions lead to exaggerated relational patterns. When you believe (or accept because it is impressed upon you) that you are responsible for more than you should be, you will begin to do more than you should do.

This leads to one or both of the twin patterns of being controlling and reactionary. When people surrender responsibility for key components of their life to us and we accept, the result is that we become controlling whether that was our intent or not. Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that being controlling requires “malice aforethought.” In reality it only requires mutually accepted, errant responsibility-attribution.

The other effect is being reactionary. Usually people who relate codependently care deeply; or they would have walked away early in the dysfunction. Because they care, they don’t want to fail or disappoint the person they love. However, because the responsibility-attribution is off, failure is inevitable; there is no way to succeed.

When we fail at someone we care deeply about and that affects someone we love, we react strongly. As a pattern of failure emerges and becomes predictable more and more of our life begins to be marked by these strong reactions.

- Based on this reflection, how does being overly-involved in others’ lives results in you being controlling?
- Based on this reflection, how does being overly-involved in others’ lives results in you being reactionary?

**Read Romans 12:18:** This quality of codependency emerges from the neglect of Romans 12:18. When we accommodate unhealthy responsibility-attributions we are going beyond “so far as it depends on you.” We are trying to do more than depends on us to “live peaceably with all.” Overcoming codependency requires us to come to peace with our limits to create peace in a context where responsibility-attribution is askew.

3. **Relational Style Impairs Ability to Regulate and Moderate Emotions:** The reactionary portion of the previous quality creates a turbulent internal emotional atmosphere. We lose a sense that consequences can be “a little bad.” The drama of addiction and abuse leads us to believe that “any bad” must be “real bad.”

When abuse and addiction become chronic we lose any sense that things will get better. When we lose a sense that things are going to get better our ability to recover from an emotional upset is impaired.

If we score poorly on a test but believe we can make up for it on the final, we are down. If we believe a poor test score is going to fail us out of school, we’re devastated. In a chronically unhealthy relational environment, every event that breaks from expectation feels like the latter.

Consider the child who grows up in an abusive home. She fails to put away her socks and she gets beat. She fails a test and her parents do nothing. She runs away and her parents play the victim. What in this child’s world teaches her to proportionally regulate her emotions? Responses are not correlated to outcomes and consequences. This is the emotionally turbulent world of addiction and abuse.

4. **Perpetual Sense of Failure with Unwillingness to Give Up:** Living in an emotionally and relationally impossible environment creates a perpetual sense of failure. When relationships matter as much as they do to those who relate codependently, the weight of feeling like you’re failing in what matters most to you is crushing.

This sense of failure is often called low self-esteem and the subsequent solution is to elevate one’s sense of self. However, thinking more highly of one’s self seems to treat the symptom more than the cause. In a dysfunctional environment, thinking rightly about what is and is not your responsibility (cause) is the first steps towards alleviating a sense of failure (symptom).

The purpose of placing this reflection at this point in the sequence is to help you begin to doubt the sense of failure that emerges when you’ve been placed in an impossible situation. No one is “dumb” because they can’t solve an unsolvable puzzle.

Your task in this study is to (a) recognize the codependent pattern of relating and its consequences so that you can (b) identify healthier ways of relating in broken relationships, (c) engage the interests and purposes for which God created

you, (d) offer others the opportunity to be in relationship with a healthier person and embrace a healthier life, in order that (e) the highest possible quality of life is available to everyone... to the degree they will embrace it.

**Exercise:** Reflect on this “A” to “E” journey. Does the logic and sequence make sense to you? You are currently in phases A-C. Phase D will begin in Step Seven. Begin to ask yourself, “Can I be at peace if key people in my life do not make the choices necessary for a high quality of life, or will I continue to live in bondage to their choices?”

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5. **Care for Others Resulting in Perpetual Neglect of Self-Care:** This takes us back to Step One; not as a relapse, but as a reminder. You cannot give too much energy to some things without giving too little attention to other things.

It would be easy to think that your response should be to over-compensate for the years of neglect. But distorting priorities in an opposite direction does not create balance. It creates equal-but-opposite imbalance.

Hopefully, seeing the neglect of self-care as a cumulative effect of relating codependently allows you to see how a proper focus on self-care is actually a blessing for everyone in your life.

- Healthy self-care buffers against over-extending to accommodate unhealthy responsibility attributions.
- Healthy self-care provides you with the emotional margin to withstand drama from other people.
- Healthy self-care models that a God-honoring life is desirable and worth pursuing by those around you.

Healthy self-care is not a reaction against or revenge for the unhealthy relational patterns that have existed. Both of these ascribe a punitive motive to self-care. Instead, healthy self-care is part of God’s design to give our lives buoyancy as we do life in a broken world.

**Review:** Go back to your self-care plan you created in Step One. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Which of these practices have created the greatest emotional return?
- Has any sense of guilt or rebelliousness begun to dissipate about these practices?
- What changes would I like to make in order for my self-care plan to better fit me or my life?

## 5 Effects of Living with Abuse

“Abuse doesn’t end when the abuse stops (p. 157).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

Abuse is an event(s) with lingering consequences. That is what the question, “I said I was sorry, why are you still upset?” misses. Abuse is an event more like a house fire than a cigarette burn. A burn produces initial pain, but heals with little more than scar. A house fire has more far reaching consequences.

“Children who witness the abuse often experience their mother’s powerlessness and humiliation. Many lose their childhood innocence because their sense of security has been violated and they feel dramatically unsafe. Children often develop anxiety in anticipation of the next attack, blame themselves for the abuse, and fear abandonment – especially if they should fail to keep the violence secret. They are left isolated and frightened as they carry the weight of shame, responsibility, guilt, and anger (p. 62).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

This section examines five effects of an abusive relationship. These impacts may overlap with addictive relationships.

1. **Physical Pain:** The most tangible effect of abuse may be – if the injuries are not life threatening – the least impactful. That is not to downplay physical pain. It’s just that bruises heal and broken bones mend. It’s obvious when they’re present and they illicit sympathy from others. The other effects we will discuss do not provide these courtesies.

What forms of physical pain have your abusive relationship(s) caused for you? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does it feel to write these events and injuries on paper? This question leads us to the next effect.

2. **Emotional Pain:** Abuse means we have to “deal with” things we were never meant to deal with. Healthy coping strategies were never meant to have to process the violent betrayal of a trusted love one. The result is that our emotions can be all over the place; for reasons that are, at least initially, not very clear to us.

"Destructive relationships make it extremely difficult to think calmly, clearly, and truthfully, especially when we feel frightened, intimidated, or deceived (p. 53)." Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

- a. *Fear* – When our safety is in question, it is natural to be afraid. When we're not sure what will jeopardize our safety, it is natural to be afraid for no reason (at least that the immediate situation would call for). The result is that fear migrates from a response to danger to a persistent emotional state.
- b. *Guilt* – From the time we were young, it has been natural to reason backwards from "if I'm being punished" then "I have done something wrong." Punishment meant guilt. Our emotions habituate to this correlation. However, in abuse, this correlation is no longer accurate, but it may be dangerous to point this out. Guilt over being abused is false-guilt.
- c. *Shame / Embarrassment* – When guilt changes from a response to "what I've done" to a sense of "who I am" it has become shame. Our sense of embarrassment and shame is one way we can take undue responsibility for someone else's behavior. We pay the social price for the sin committed against us.
- d. *Anger* – Abuse is wrong. Anger over abuse is right. Displaying that anger towards our abuser can be dangerous. But that doesn't make the anger evaporates. So the anger often begins to leak into relationships that are safe and spill onto the people with whom we do feel safe.
- e. *Sense of "Going Crazy"* – What happens when your "at home" world doesn't play by consistent rules and your "outside home" world goes on as if nothing is happening? You feel crazy. Imagine driving when the traffic lights and signs lost all pattern and meaning. Now imagine you look around and the other drivers seem calm. You would feel crazy. That's life as part of an abusive relationship.
- f. *Despair* – For a while, you think "things will get better." You're not sure when or how, but it's hard to imagine things will always be like this. At some point that optimism fades, and it is crushing. That is often what prompts people to look for a study like this. While the pain of despair is excruciating, the prompt to begin to respond to the dysfunction differently can be a blessing.

"One of the most important things to know about the impact of abuse is that these mood swings and dysfunctions are a natural and normal way of dealing with trauma. Unfortunately, many people look at these symptoms and think that the problem lies with the victim, when in fact these responses to trauma are perfectly normal (p. 71)." Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

What forms of emotional pain have your abusive relationship(s) caused for you? \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Relational Confusion:** Imagine playing a sport where you were forced to play by the rules and your opponent was not. Now imagine that rules that you were forced to play by were frequently subject to change and came with stiff penalties. That is life in an abusive relationship. It is confusing, because it is both unfair and ever-changing.

There is no profile for an individual who is abusive. Any one, of any personality or history, can be abusive. But the qualities below are relatively common to abusive individuals and account for the relational confusion of abuse.

- a. *Double Bind* – A double bind is a set of expectations that are both individually reasonable and mutually exclusive. A spouse may want more time together or for each partner to work more to retire debt. Either is reasonable; together they are mutually exclusive. A double bind, which is usually unintentional, creates a trap where the other person is set up to fail. In a non-abusive relationship, double binds are unhealthy and hard to identify. In an abusive relationship, double binds are dangerous and unsafe to discuss in isolation.
- b. *Mood Instability* – The more predictable someone's moods, the less likely they are to be abusive. When our responses to life are consistent, the more an agreed upon rhythm emerges between us and those around us. It is normal to have some mood fluctuation (i.e., "waking up on the wrong side of the bed") but as this tendency becomes more pronounced, relationships become more volatile.
- c. *Impulsivity* – Abusive individuals are very self-centered. The willingness to harm another individual reveals how much their desire trumps the well-being of others. Being driven by one's own desires, often results in an impulsive style of decision making. It is not only moods that change, but desires and goals also shift frequently and starkly. We live trying to read the moment because that is what the abusive relationship demands.

- d. *Rigidity* – On the opposite side of impulsivity is rigidity. Some abusers are impulsive – it’s unclear how to please them; other abusers are rigid – unwilling to accept legitimate delays to their desired outcomes. From this we see that abuse is about extremes; the same quality (i.e., goal focus) can be distorted either rigidly or impulsively and contribute to an abusive dynamic. We begin to live as if this “one thing” is all that matters because it is what determines whether we are safe.
- e. *Tumultuous Relationships* – When a primary relationship (i.e., parent, spouse, boss, etc.) is chaotic, it is difficult for other relationships to be unaffected. We often expect others to be as difficult to please as our abusive relationship. We become either too accommodating (to keep the peace) or defensive (to set boundaries) for the other relationship to develop a healthy balance.
- f. *Identity Confusion* – Living to appease someone else distracts us from discovering who God made us to be. We begin to live-to-survive more than to fulfill-a-purpose. Pursuing God’s design is perceived as a luxury that can only be considered after safety is ensured. The result is that we never get around to asking, “Who am I? Why am I here?” because we’re fearfully answering, “How can I keep [name] happy?”
- g. *Recency Effect* – The “recency effect” refers to the tendency to define life by the most recent event or a person by your most recent interaction. The recency effect is very strong on abusive individuals and they train those whom they abuse to be unduly influenced by the recency effect. The result is that whether the most recent event/interaction was great or terrible (the recency effect is usually accompanied by all-or-nothing thinking) disproportionately influences your emotions and perception of life.
- h. *Grandiosity* – Abusive individuals often over-value their own significance. This can be seen in the much larger response to an offense against them, than in their response to an offense against others. The abused individual begins to live with this same priority; “my abuser is more important than I am” for two related reasons. It is a survival skill. There is an assumption that those who can do damage are more important.

What forms of relational confusion have your abusive relationship(s) caused for you? \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Spiritual Confusion:** In unhealthy relationships, God-questions abound. Where is God? Does God care? Whose team is God on? If God doesn’t change this relationship, why do I still bother with him?

Additionally, Scripture is often used as a point of leverage or justification for the abusive patterns. What does it mean to forgive someone in active addiction or who is frequently abusive? Can we forgive and still enforce consequences? Is it a sign of bitterness to draw attention to a pattern of behavior (which involves appealing to past offenses)?

These are the kind of questions we will grapple with in Steps Four through Six. At this stage in the journey, we would want the inclusion of this material to accomplish two things. First, to help you realize you’re not “crazy” for feeling this way. Second, to bring comfort that you’re not being “a bad Christian” for asking these questions.

What forms of spiritual confusion have your abusive relationship(s) caused for you? \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Distorted Self-Image:** In relationships marked by addiction, abuse, or comparable forms of dysfunction, you feel powerless and stupid. Never have you tried so hard at anything only to see it continually fall apart and fail. The longer this goes on, the more it affects your sense of identity and competency as a human being.

One of the first things we look for in chaos is control. We don’t want to live out-of-control lives. Responsibility seems to be the door to control, so we begin to assume responsibility for more and more of the things that are going badly around us. We will pay the price of guilt for the relief of perceived control.

Maybe it worked for a while. But eventually we are either crushed under the weight of guilt for everything that is going wrong or overwhelmed by reality of very limited control over important things. Usually, we don’t choose one or the other (i.e., crushed under guilt or overwhelmed by lack of control), but vacillate between the two.

We learn something important here. Unhealthy coping mechanisms usually give short-term benefits, especially in the midst of dysfunction, and long-term detriments, particularly when we are outside the dysfunctional environment. In this way, we begin to live like an addict; trading short-term relief for long-term pain.

What kept us safe in dysfunction that lets dysfunction into what could otherwise be healthy relationships.

- Avoiding certain topics is safe in abusive relationships, but keeps healthy relationships at a superficial level.
- Taking on additional responsibilities may be a survival skill in an addictive home, but results in potentially healthy relationships always feeling one-sided.
- Adapting to the moment prevents escalation in unhealthy relationships, but when this is all we do, we can make it feel like we don't have a voice even in healthy relationships.

What forms of distorted self-image have your abusive relationship(s) caused for you? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Effects of Living with Addiction

At this stage in our journey we need to name patterns as well as recognize unhealthy moments. If we only recognize unhealthy moments, we will treat each moment as if it were an island. When we begin to recognize patterns, we can better understand the importance and difficulty of changing each moment that reinforces the pattern.

Imagine trying to learn a new skill (i.e., how to drive). It shouldn't be that hard. Now imagine trying to re-learn that skill in a new system (i.e., traffic patterns in England where "they drive on the wrong side of the road"). We can now see why the things we are about to discuss are so hard to change. Now imagine trying to make this change in the context of resistance (i.e., a passenger who is freaking out because their committed to the American traffic patterns).

Don't let this cause you to give up. It is harder to relearn old things with new motives than it is to learn to do new things.

Don't let this cause you to become bitter or cynical. What you are learning is for your good and flourishing.

Do be honest about the frustration or sense of injustice. Hard journeys are harder when we attempt them in isolation.

With that said, we will look at ten patterns that emerge or become more pronounced when we live in a relational context marked by addiction. While each of these is understandable, none of them led to sustainably healthy relationships.

1. *False Optimism* – We want to believe that every story has a happy ending. We want to believe the best about those we love. We see the seeds of potential in our loved one and have a hard time believing they won't sprout and blossom "soon." Those who speak to the contrary seem negative and angry. We don't like what they say or how they say it, so we don't want to believe them.

These are not bad qualities. They represent how we would want people to think about and for us (Luke 6:31). The question is whether they best represent our loved one. When our optimism refuses to acknowledge the severity of the situation, that is what makes it false. If you are wrestling with whether you optimism lacks a realistic assessment of your loved one's situation, review the first two steps of the material at [bradhambrick.com/addiction](http://bradhambrick.com/addiction).

What examples do you have of being falsely optimistic? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. *Nagging / Pleading* – Reminding repeats information people want to know, accept, and believe is important but have a hard time remembering. Nagging repeats information people don't want to know, won't accept, and value less than we do. Reminding is about information. Nagging is about changing.

When we nag, we face the law of diminishing returns. Repetition may be the key to learning, but it is also a sure way to get tuned out. We must get to the point that sharing our concerns is gauged by cues that our loved one is open to our concern more than scratching the itch of our burden for them. Otherwise we will turn the truth our loved one needs to hear into the "Wah, wah, wah" of Charlie Brown's teacher.

What examples do you have of nagging or pleading? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. *Forcing Our Help / Protecting* – Help is helpful when it's wanted. Protection is protection when it doesn't exacerbate a greater danger. Often, in relationships marked by addiction, our help is unwanted; making our actions controlling or intrusive, and our protection actually only silences the warning to a mounting danger.

We should want to be available whenever our assistance (a) is truly desired, and (b) can be a blessing that doesn't create a bigger problem. In older codependency literature, it could easily be mistaken that all “niceness” was “enabling.” This is not the case. We can be nice and not enable, as long as we – likely with the consultation of more objective friends – assess that our help is welcomed and beneficial.

What examples do you have of forcing your help or protecting? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. *Accepted Blame-Shifting / Minimization* – It is common (not right) for those who abuse, or are in addiction, to blame-shift and minimize. It is equally common for those who love them to accept this blame-shifting and minimization. Sometimes it is because their loved one is very convincing. Other times it is simply because “it is easier not to argue, and I know I'm not going to convince them anyway.”

“The gift of truth is certainly one of those gifts that is not always appreciated as valuable or loving, especially when our spouse prefers to be in denial about the reality of his or her sin and its effects upon others in the family (p. 168).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

Regardless of the reason, the result is that you begin to live in the distorted reality of your loved one's making. What your loved one is willing to accept begins to have more influence over your emotions, decisions, and other relationships than what is actually true. Fear associated with “rebellious against” (how it feels) what your loved one is willing to accept is probably what has made these first few steps so difficult.

What examples do you have of accepting blame-shifting or minimization? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. *Speaking for People* – Be honest. You don't trust the person who is hurting you, and it is easy for this mistrust to bleed over into other relationships. In the chaos caused by broken relationships your margin for additional drama seems quite thin. How do we fix this? We speak for people so they won't make things worse.

Relationships become about damage control more than authentic interaction. This is why people around us often feel more managed than cared for. But it is hard for us to see that, because we know the danger we're protecting them from. It is hard to hear that we're being bad (i.e., controlling) when we believe they are being naïve (i.e., if they are ignorant of our circumstance) or unreasonable (i.e., if they are the one who frequently cause our pain).

“Of all the behaviors that hurt us and destroy love, peace, pleasure, creativity, relationships, and our skills – control takes first place (p. 95)... Control is an attitude as much as an action (p. 97).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

What examples do you have of speaking for people? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. *Not Saying What We Need* – If we over speak for others, we under speak of ourselves. After all, if people have already said we're being “controlling” why would we burden them by being vulnerable with our needs? Please hear the unhealthy passive-aggressive undertones in that previous question.

Usually this goes back to trust. If a loved one is hurting us by not managing their life well, why would we trust anyone to care for us? Notice the noun change in that question (i.e., “a loved one” to “anyone”). This is why having a support network is so important.

It is probably unwise to ask your loved one to care for you while they are being actively destructive or focused on the early stages of their recovery. But that does not mean it is unwise to ask for help or support. We must resist the trap of thinking that because the person we most want to be caring will not, that no one will or should.

What examples do you have of not saying what you need? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. *Needy Giving* – What is the logical extension of not asking for help? Needy giving. If we don't make our need known in a vulnerably voluntary way, we will do things to have people feel obligated to provide the help we need. Then when something breaks down, we can delineate why the person should have helped.

This is a good example of the principle that codependent behavior is not about “what” we do, but “how” and “why” we do it. Asking for help (what) is a healthy thing to do. Doing for others to assuage our guilt or insecurity (why) and reminding them of all we’ve done (how) when we ask for help, is codependent and unhealthy.

What examples do you have of needy giving? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 8. *Making Excuses* – Often we think that the great danger of making excuses is passivity. Passivity towards needed change is dangerous. But there is a greater danger. Making excuses demonstrates that we are beginning to voluntarily live in the story of dysfunction and accommodate its requirements.

Consider the old movie *Roger Rabbit*, where half of the movie is recorded in the “real world” and half is an animated “cartoon world.” Actors from each world move between both. Dysfunction is a false, cartoon world. It doesn’t play by real world rules. The more we make excuses, the more we are voluntarily slipping into this cartoon world of dysfunction.

What examples do you have of making excuses? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 9. *Threatening* – What do we do when we don’t want to slip into the cartoon world of dysfunction? We get mad and try to verbally coerce our loved one out of that world. We don’t want to be apart, so if it’s wrong to enter their dysfunctional world we try to drag them into our world; if only that could work.

The “worlds” we are talking about here are not locations but mindsets. Mindsets only change voluntarily and with intentionality. Consider the amount of work you are putting into this material to leave the mindset of codependency. A comparable level of commitment and work will be required of your loved one. You cannot coerce this effort, you can only (a) model that it’s worth is and (b) stop making it easier to live in their dysfunctional world.

“By always being there to fix what goes wrong, you show him that you accept the drinking. Your words may be to the contrary as you scold, nag, and instruct – but your behavior shouts, ‘I’m here to make it easier for you!’ (p. 110).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

What examples do you have of threatening? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 10. *Social Changes / Isolation* – Relationships affect relationships. When a primary relationship is marked by dysfunction, it usually results in either engaging in other relationships marked by significant brokenness or isolation. Isolation is frequently a response to the shame or fear associated with dysfunction; we don’t want people to know what is going on.

“If you have pretty much kept to yourself because of your loved one’s drinking, it can be difficult to reenter the social world (p. 102).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

If, on the other hand, you have a growing number of relationships marked by significant brokenness, that can be attributed to one of several natural consequences: (a) socializing in contexts where addictive or abusive relationships are accepted, (b) being more compassionate towards and aware of those who are living with abuse or addiction, or (c) selecting friends who you don’t feel are “better than you” by virtue of having an easier life.

What examples do you have of social changes or isolation? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Abusive / Addiction Effects Summary:** After having read both sections, what are the key things you’ve learned about how your relationships have affected you? Again, the effects of living with abuse and addiction are not mutually exclusive, so you likely saw elements in each section that applied to you.

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The most important thing you can do with what you’ve learned is to resist a temptation towards shame. The affects are not your fault. You did not cause them. Unfortunately, they are your responsibility. Unless you learn to respond differently, these affects will be your life. That is what the rest of this study is all about.

You will be most effective at changing these impacts if you are not ashamed of them. Shame will make the effort you put into this journey seem embarrassing instead of courageous. Shame will cause you to try to take this journey alone instead of with the support of others. Shame will cause you to interpret progress as “not there yet” and “behind everyone else” instead of growth and movement towards an increasingly enjoyable life.

**Read Romans 5:3-5.** Notice that God cares about our suffering, not just our sin (v. 3). Notice that God recognizes the difficult journey you are on. Notice that God sees that shame is the most difficult obstacle, often even more difficult than the direct cause of suffering itself, on that journey (v. 5). God’s response is to love us even more as a counter to the voice of shame that would tempt us to think we were “too broken to be loved.” Whenever shame attempts to distract you from your journey, recall and meditate on this passage.

### Four Principles for Thinking Well about Boundaries

Christians have often struggled with how to think best about boundaries in broken relationships. Some use the word “boundaries” to communicate that Christians don’t have to be doormats because we want to model grace. Others resist the concept because they recognize that Christ crossed all boundaries to rescue us in our rebelliousness and believe Christians are called to model this same love to the lost world around us.

Both seem to be making valid points. As we think about the impact that relating codependently has had on our lives, we are going to have to navigate this tension.

The first principle to consider is that a healthy concept of boundaries views the barrier being placed as existing between wisdom and folly rather than between me and you. I am not rejecting you or giving up on you if I refuse to participate in foolishness. However, if you insist on living foolishly, you will find yourself on the other side of my boundary from folly. In this sense, a synonym for boundaries would be “reasonable expectations” or “limits of wisdom.”

**Read Proverbs.** Yes, the whole book; it may be easier to read a chapter per day if reading the whole book seems daunting. As you read, underline every use of the word fool, foolishness, and folly (or comparable language). Pay attention to the verbs that accompany the fool-family of words. They are all cautionary. One means of God’s protection for you is his warning against folly. We appreciate the protection, but are grieved when adhering to the warnings creates distance between us and those we love. Both responses are appropriate. Don’t allow the grieving to distract you from the warning.

A second principle when considering the concept of boundaries is that boundaries, when rightly communicated, are an invitation not a rejection. Thinking of boundaries this way will help you communicate your limits in a more receivable manner. When you are confident in what you will and will not do, pressure from others becomes less threatening. You can begin to say, “I will not [describe what is unhealthy in the moment], but I would be happy to [describe a healthy interaction alternative].” In this sense you are not “enforcing” the boundary (as if you were the boundary police), you are providing another opportunity to your loved one to choose wisdom over folly.

A third principle is that “boundaries” can become an unhealthy concept when we use it to mean “walls” that make our relationships less authentic. This use of boundaries can come in the form of a “fake wall” when we are silent or deceitful or a “safe wall” when we are angry or fearful to keep people away. These uses of boundaries do not protect us from folly, but insulate us from authentic relationships; and serve as another example of coping mechanisms that serve well in dysfunctional relationships becoming disruptive to potentially healthy relationships.

A final principle for using the term “boundaries” well is the ability to distinguish felt needs from real needs. Because boundaries are only needed in unsafe contexts, our instinct is to become increasingly self-centered when we think about boundaries. This doesn’t mean that felt needs are less real or unimportant. It means that we should use boundaries to protect our real needs from being damaged and, if someone is living in a way that frequently places them on the other side of these boundaries, we should not expect that person to meet our felt needs. Instead, we grieve the condition of this relationship and find ways, through God and healthy Christian relationships, to fulfill these legitimate desires.

“We should be careful about saying, ‘Jesus meets all our needs.’ It makes Christ the answer to our problems. Yet if our use of the term ‘needs’ is ambiguous, and its range of meaning extends all the way to selfish desires, then there will be some situations where we should say that Jesus does not intend to meet our needs, but that he intends to change our needs (p. 89).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*



**Conclusion**

An important part of overcoming codependency is learning how to be more self-aware about how you’re doing and willingness to progress at a pace that you can endure; instead of just trying to respond in whatever way the situation seems to require. You will not sprint-and-crash your way out of codependency.

This is why we frequently include resources to help you monitor how you are doing. Do not think of overcoming codependency as a race where the fastest runners get the best prizes and everyone else is a loser. Instead, think of it as a marathon where every person who finishes is celebrated as having completed a very worthwhile endeavor.

The tool at the conclusion of Step 3 is meant to be another resource to help you pace yourself. When you feel down or discouraged, it can be a tool you use to tell what part of the journey is becoming hard for you. The most important thing you can do with what you identify in that moment is to share it with a member of your support team, so you don’t have to battle the discouragement alone.



**Self-Awareness on My Journey**

Motivation and Energy Level	Not Motivated			Motivated	
How motivated are you to continue to learn to relate in a more healthy manner?	1	2	3	4	5
How much physical energy and stamina do you have for the journey?	1	2	3	4	5
How much emotional-mental energy do you have for the journey?	1	2	3	4	5
Optimism	Not Optimistic			Optimistic	
How optimistic do you feel about your ability to learn and grow in this process?	1	2	3	4	5
How optimistic do you feel that your loved one will eventually respond positively?	1	2	3	4	5
How optimistic are you that your life will be better regardless of your loved one’s response?	1	2	3	4	5
Self-Care	Struggling			Thriving	
How much sleep are you getting each evening and what is the quality of this sleep?	1	2	3	4	5
What is the quality of your recent eating and exercise habits?	1	2	3	4	5
How involved are you with your personal interests and hobbies?	1	2	3	4	5
How connected are you with your Christian community and support network?	1	2	3	4	5
When you consider your life as whole, how balanced do the various areas feel?	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional State	Struggling			Thriving	
What level of anger do you feel towards your loved one who’s living destructively?	1	2	3	4	5
What level of anxiety do you feel as a result of your loved one’s destructive choices?	1	2	3	4	5
When you have negative feelings how constructive have you been at managing them?	1	2	3	4	5
How resilient (i.e., able to roll with negative feelings rather than get stuck in them) do you feel?	1	2	3	4	5

\* This resource is modified and adapted from a comparable resource in *Beyond Addiction* by Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs (p. 280-283)

**Encouragement Focus (UNDERSTAND):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- Which qualities of codependency best represent your struggle? When and how?
- What effects of living with abuse and/or addiction have you seen develop in your life?
- In what ways do you need to think more clearly or apply healthier boundaries in your life?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

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- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 4. “The Toxic Scripts of Dysfunction”

LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.

**“I formed beliefs [define] about myself, life, relationships, and God based on my suffering.  
I lived out of those beliefs [describe] because they were all I knew and they ‘fit.’**

**Those beliefs became the guiding themes of my life story.**

**Putting those beliefs into words scares me [describe why].**

**I reject living in these destructive scripts and am committed to learning how my life fits into  
God’s great story of redemption.”**

**Memorize:** Psalm 22:1-2 (ESV), “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- Matthew 27:46 – This script also entered Jesus’ story. These words are a common refrain in a fallen world.
- “Forsaken me” – Pain, conflict, and betrayal make it feel like God has turned His back on us.
- “So far” – More than merely having his back turned, pain makes it feel like God is walking away from us.
- “Do not answer” – When God does not end the pain it is easy to believe He is not hearing our prayers.
- “No rest” – In the midst of pain it easy to think God is a liar for not keeping His promises (i.e., Matt. 11:28-30).

### Teaching Notes

“Sometimes the problem isn’t that we didn’t learn a lesson; it’s that we learned the wrong one (p. 168-169).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“Many victims feel that God is punishing them, and they look for causes in themselves. They may think, ‘I haven’t been a good wife or mother, so God is punishing me,’ or ‘I did something wrong when I was a teenager, so God is punishing me,’ or ‘I haven’t been a good enough Christian, so God is punishing me.’ None of these are true. For God is a God of grace, not karma (p. 81).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

“If you are a victim of domestic violence, then that is part of your story that you should not deny [Step 2] or minimize [Step 3]. But if you let it become the reigning story, then your identity will be founded on disgrace (p. 84).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

“Family members (not only parents) and friends usually come to us believing they can only be as happy as their unhappiest loved one (p. 103).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“Children pick up on what makes life work and what’s worth living for through the behaviors they witness at home, including destructive behaviors or attitudes not directed toward them (p. 58)... As long as I believed her words were more true than God’s Words, she had the power to destroy me – because I gave it to her (p. 66).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“The problem is when fear forgets God (p. 60)... With God reduced in our eyes, a fear of people will thrive (p. 85).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

“Whereas Christ’s suffering may be seen as redemptive, suffering from abusive men does not redeem, indeed it guarantees that the violence will continue (p. 108).” Carol Adams in *Woman Battering*

“For many of us, lies feel truer than the truth does. It’s easier to believe that God hates us or is angry with us than it is to believe that we are his beloved children and are precious to him. We meditate again and again on some hurtful words someone has said, yet when another person pays us a compliment, we dismiss it or don’t trust it, even if that person is genuine (p. 69).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

## Embedded Study

At several points in the study you have probably begun to question God, doubt Him, be angry at Him, or wonder if what you think about Him really makes any difference. We’ve brought many painful experiences to mind. When we look at them, we naturally ask, “Where does ‘the buck’ stop?” It stops with God (or whoever, whatever is in control... if anything is).

It has been said that animals divide between herbivores (those eating plants) and carnivores (those eating meat), but that humans are verbivores – we live off of words, or, more accurately, off of the meaning we give to life through words. This is why we’ve emphasized the themes of story, journey, and identity so much. They are how we “digest” life.

“No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do. You are in an unending conversation with yourself. You are talking all the time, interpreting, organizing, and analyzing what’s going on inside you and around you (p. 56).” Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*

In this chapter we will look at the unhealthy ways people commonly make sense of painfully broken relationships. Do not feel guilty if the way you make sense of your trauma is false. An abused child should not feel guilty for believing their abuse happened because they were “a bad kid.” The story is false, but seeing its falseness should bring hope not shame. God invites you to be very honest.

“One bold message in the book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your disappointment—he can absorb them all... God can deal with every human response save one. He cannot abide the response I fall back on instinctively: an attempt to ignore him or treat him as though he does not exist. That response never once occurred to Job (p. 235).” Phillip Yancey in *Disappointment with God*

Don’t get locked down trying to put your confusion into words perfectly or capturing your beliefs just right. Your hope is not rooted in your ability to articulate your experience perfectly, but in the freedom that comes when you doubt these false narratives enough that God can begin to replace them with truth.

“There’s no single correct way to construct a person’s abuse story (p. 147).” Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

One final introductory remark, you should realize you will not reason or re-narrate yourself out of negative scripts of codependency. However, until these scripts are put into words (Step 4) we just assume they are true. After we put these scripts into words we can grieve their influence over our lives (step 5), replace (step 6) these destructive narratives with gospel-rooted messages, and then how to more healthily engage life and relationships (steps 7 and 8) based upon the foundation of God’s love and personal dignity.

To help you complete this step we will break this chapter into two parts:

1. 12 Potential Destructive Codependent Scripts
2. The Journey From Facts to Themes to Story

### 12 Potential Destructive Codependent Scripts

Below we will examine 12 narrative themes or destructive scripts that commonly emerge from relationship marked by addiction, abuse, or comparably unhealthy patterns. This list is not exhaustive, but representative and meant to help you put yourself into words. These themes are divided into four sections: themes related to God, self, other people, and life in general.

As you read them, realize these themes likely began as feelings (i.e., instinctual emotional responses) that became cemented as beliefs (i.e., guiding principles that transcend a given moment and are used to make sense of the rest of life). You didn’t set out to embrace these themes. They just made sense in light of your experience and became the “safe” way to think; even if these beliefs resulted in deterioration in other areas of life.

After each theme a Bible passage and devotional reflection is provided. These are not meant to be holistic rebuttals to these themes; rather they are meant to provide a crack in that theme through which doubt can begin to make room for truth. God knows these are beliefs you clung to for survival, and he wants to replace them in a way that cares for you well in the process.

## God Themes

Give yourself the freedom to articulate these themes. Putting them into words is not wrong or irreverent. They already exist. Putting them into words allow us to consider whether they are accurate and whether we want to accept them as the guiding themes of our life. The fear that you cannot be honest with God about what you actually believe about him would only cement the idea that he is who you are afraid he might be.

1. **God Is Not Good.** "If God is in charge and people in some way bear his image, how could my relationship be this bad? How could God be good when this much pain and dysfunction is possible? I know saying bad-God may feel like saying dry-water or cold-fire, but it represents my experience even if it doesn't make sense."

Often unhealthy ideas follow good logic. That is the case above. However, when we give way to the idea that God is not good, there becomes no basis for peace, hope, or stability. The world becomes governed by a "survival of the fittest" principle in which everyone is either predator or prey; even in a social herd (the closest thing to safety) you want to make sure you're not the weakest-slowest because that simply means "first eaten."

We begin to see that our desire for goodness reveals that goodness exists, in the same way that our desire for food (hunger) indicates that food exists. We do not have fundamental appetites for things that don't exist. Humanities near universal assessment that abuse and addiction are bad (and we don't agree on much these days) reveals that the God in whose image we are made does not approve of these things.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if "God is not good"? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Read Psalm 34.** Begin by realizing that God includes phrases like "the Lord is good!" (v. 8a) in Scripture because he knew we would need this reminder. The fact that the Bible speaks to our doubts is a sign of compassion, not condemnation. Then begin to notice the phrases that reveal the context of this reminder about God's goodness. It involved those who needed refuge (v. 8b), were afraid (v. 4) and in need (v. 5). God reassures us that he hears our prayers (v. 17) and that our affliction is not a sign he has rejected us (v. 19).

2. **God Does Not Care.** "Maybe God is good, but he's just not concerned enough. After all, there are plenty of people with a 'strong moral fiber' who are unmoved about important issues going on around them. Perhaps that explains what is going on with God. I can understand, if with all he's got on his plate, God happened to overlook my life."

It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing God as the "CEO of All Creation, Inc. LLC" rather than our loving heavenly Father when we've experienced major relational brokenness. It eases the internal disruption by depersonalizing God. If God were a system of beliefs, a machine, or even an accountant, then our questions about his seeming lack of involvement or concern would be less intense.

But the implication of this mindset is that we would neither pray nor read our Bible. Prayer would just remind us that God is not listening and reading our Bible would result in the hollow echoes of promises we believe to be false. This false theme transforms two of our primary sources of strength into reminders of our worst fears.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if "God does not care"? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Read John 11:1-44.** Don't just read that "Jesus wept" (v. 35); notice why he wept. This passage is powerful not merely because it reveals that Jesus, as our great high priest (Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-116), has the capacity for tender emotions, but it shows that God is moved by our hardships. Notice that Jesus was moved multiple times (v. 38) even when he was about to intervene in this situation within a matter of minutes (v. 43-44). Even when God is about to make our situation better he does not withhold his compassion from us during whatever interval exists before he does so.

3. **God Is Not Able.** “Well, if God is good and he cares, maybe he’s just not able. This is where we get caught up in that ‘if people are really free to make choices..., then we are going to get hurt’ argument, right? That makes sense, it is just not very satisfying and doesn’t offer much hope.”

We will not get around the obstacles related to people who make real choices and their ability to inflict intense suffering in the lives of others. But this reality does not have to be embraced with a sigh of resignation that makes us feel powerless in light of our pain.

If people are free to make choices that matter, then we also are free to make choices that matter. It is not just “them” (i.e., those who inflict trauma) but also “us” (i.e., those who have experienced trauma) who make choices of consequence. God is active in both – calling traumatizers to repentance and seeking to mitigate their influence; and caring for the traumatized and empowering their ability to stand against trauma.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if “God is not able”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

**Read Numbers 11:16-35.** Before you read this passage keep one finger on this page and pinch it together with the pages that start with Exodus chapter one. That is the account of the life of Moses to whom God said, “Is the Lord’s hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not” (v. 23). Moses had a life long history of pain and provision in his walk with God. We can understand his doubt. Too often we read our Bible as if the people of God lived a “series of epic moments” instead of “a long lifetime” like we do. When we correct this perspective we will be better able to personalize God’s promises and relate to heroes of the faith, like Moses, who struggled to believe, like we often do. The result is our faith will become much more real and personal.

## Me Themes

If we don’t create an unhealthy life story by changing God, the next easiest place to go is blaming or shaming ourselves. While this may sound odd – why would the victim blame the victim – it is surprisingly common. False beliefs about ourselves are usually rooted in a desire for more control over our lives than we actually have; if it was our fault, then we would have more capacity to protect ourselves in the future. We often desire control so badly that we’ll sacrifice whatever narrative-coherence or personal-dignity is necessary in order to get it.

4. **I Am Marred / Crazy.** This theme echoes the insecurity that is common in codependency. It assumes that my excellence is the only barrier between me and being relationally harmed. When this theme becomes dominant in your life, it quickly makes every “off” thing in your life (i.e., area of weakness, mistake, forgetting, etc.) the reason for the chaos. Before long, your inability to always do things “right” is the reason any and everything goes “wrong.”

This often results in comparing yourself to the best qualities of every person in your life. You feel like you need to be as nice as the nicest person you know, as practical as the most practical, as witty as the wittiest person, etc. Whatever is different between them and you is what is “wrong” with you. Life becomes an emotional game where your weaknesses have to compete with everyone else’s strengths.

The world no longer feels safe, because you assume that your deficiency is more obvious to the rest of the world than it is to you. Compliments and words of encouragement can be perceived as words of pity offered to someone who “obviously needs them.” Only those relationships where you have a clear function with measurable outcomes (i.e., work) or where you serve a clear care taking role (i.e., children or parents) may feel safe.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if “I am marred / crazy”? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Read James 2:1-13.** This theme assumes the sin of partiality. It assumes that those who are “better” by a cultural preference (in James’ case it was wealth and fashion) are more deserving of being treated with honor. Any life theme that assumes sin will breed dysfunction. Read James’ words in verse twelve as written to you, “[paraphrased] Think, speak, and act as someone who is not judged by physical appearance or performance but find their value in the God who rejoices when humble hearts live free of condemnation.”

5. **It’s My Fault / I Deserve This.** One step beyond “something is wrong with me” is “this was my fault.” Now my “wrongness” explains your “badness;” my “deficiency” produced your “depravity.” Often the blame-shifting words of the offending person drive this theme home.

The tempting part of this theme, as we saw earlier, is that it provides a façade of control. If it really was your fault, then you could make sure it never happened again by doing better. Its seeming utility makes this theme very appealing when everything seems out of control.

The problem is that it turns everything you do to bless your relationships into acts of self-protection. This slowly turns blessings into bitterness. With this destructive script we end up feeling used (we wouldn’t be accepted or “good enough” if we didn’t do this) and the other person feels controlled (perceiving we need something from that and that is what motivates our action).

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if “It’s my fault”? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Read John 9:1-7.** The pattern of explaining one person’s sin on the person who is suffering has a long history. This is the mindset behind most of the conversations Job had with his friends about his suffering. If you are prone to thinking in this destructive script, you are not alone. If you feel like your friends are asking questions that imply there are “easy changes” you could make to remedy the addiction or abuse, you are not alone in that either. Take comfort in the fact that Jesus does not blame you and expresses God’s desire to worked redemptively in your situation (v. 3).

6. **My Identity Is Lost.** Sometimes the impact of an event is felt more in the questions it causes us not to ask than in the questions it prompts us to ask and answer destructively. When we are focused on preventing pain or containing chaos, we don’t have the reserves to ask, “What do I want to pursue? How did God make me? What would fulfill the purpose God has for my life?”

These questions are placed in the “luxury” category when day-to-day life is marked by uncertainty. The result is after years of living to survive, we take a moment to reflect and become dissatisfied because living is about more than surviving. We feel cheated. We want our life back. But then we realize we don’t know what that means.

Don’t let this concept overwhelm you. You are on a journey to get your identity back (or discover it for the first time). In Steps 4-6, we will move your life story from a destructive script to a redemptive script. In Steps 7-8, we will learn how to live productively (not just to survive) in a chaotic context. In Steps 8-9, you will recognize how this journey has freed you up to explore God’s design for your life and begin exploring the possibilities.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if “My identity is lost”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Read Ephesians 5:1-2.** Identity is a big concept. Often we get overwhelmed by the question, “Who am I?” and shut down because it feels like we’ve been asked, “What is the meaning of life?” Allow your pursuit of healthy identity to begin with the foundation “I am a beloved child of God” (v. 1). Whatever becomes important after that is you imitating God’s redemptive purpose with the gifts and opportunities in your life. It would be easy to mistake “God’s redemptive purposes” with “being stuck in codependent relationships” but, as a good Father, it is important for you to remember that what God might want to do through you does not take precedent over his care for you and what he is doing in you.

**Other People Themes**

After an extended time in chronically unhealthy relationships, it can be very difficult to discern the difference between “safe pain” and “unsafe pain.” This makes it very easy to generalize other people as “unsafe.” Often when this happens we go through cycles

of isolation and blind trust that are painful on both sides of the experience; confirming the belief that relationships are too dangerous to be worth the risk.

7. **All Relationships Are Dangerous:** People have a lot in common: they have good intentions upon which they do not always follow through, they are selfish and have a tendency to consider their own interest first, they are busy and have trouble remembering the things are important to others, etc... These things are true even of "good people" (i.e., those it would be reasonable to trust).

When you have had experiences with "bad people" (i.e., those it is unwise to trust) and these experiences have had a profound impact on your life, these similarities between "good people" (those it is wise to trust) and "bad people" (those it is unwise to trust) are more than odd; they feel unacceptably risky.

Begin doubting this theme by realizing two things. First, it is reasonable for your sense of suspicion to be heightened. You should not be judged for that. Do not retreat from feared rejection into self-imposed isolation.

Second, the cycles of isolation and blind trust (reacting to the loneliness of isolation with accelerated, over disclosure or over dependence when you do trust someone) is unsustainable. Even if parts of this theme are very reasonable, it is unhealthy and reinforces a dynamic that increases your pain.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if "All relationships are dangerous"? \_\_\_\_\_

**Read James 5.** This is an odd passage in light of the discussion above. But notice that God is acknowledging two things in these verses. First, God is affirming that there are "unsafe people" who are to be condemned and avoided because of their abuse of others (v. 1-6). Second, God is affirming that those who have been hurt by "unsafe people" still need community (v. 7-20). James knew the suffering described in verses 1-6 could easily have caused these believers to turn on another – being impatient (v. 7), grumbling (v. 9), not supporting one another in hard times (v. 14), not being vulnerable in areas of needed growth (v. 16), and not pursuing one another (v. 19-20).

8. **If I Were Good Enough, They Wouldn't...:** One of the dominant experiences of relating codependently is insecurity. We feel like everyone is better than us and that is why they get treated better than we do or why life just goes better for them. The script of "not good enough" becomes the explanation for every hardship we face.

The blame-shifting, condemning voice of self-destructive loved ones only exacerbates this theme. Maybe we are trying to discuss the ramifications of our loved one's latest binge or are excusing ourselves from a disagreement showing the signs of instability. Our loved one turns the tables on us with the question, "Who do you think you are?" We pause. What should our answer be?

The question would seem to imply that unless we're someone exceedingly special (i.e., a celebrity, a PhD, a member of the royal family, etc.), our expectations are too high. Our lack of an answer to their loaded questions leaves us thinking, "If I'm not 'special,' why am I upset about being treated as common?"

The problem with this line of thought is that decency is not just for the "elite." While it may be unproductive or dangerous to make a forceful counter-argument in the moment, at the very least, we need to resist embracing the destructive script that these loaded questions in awkward moments have a proclivity to force upon us.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live as if "If I were good enough, they wouldn't..."? \_\_\_\_\_

**Read James 2:1-13.** This, again, may seem like an odd passage to reference. It could easily be taken that we are reinforcing the "less than" script with which you already struggle. But this entire passage is about how much God despises social decencies being altered because of social rank. So take this reflection to teach you that, even if your loved one's condescension was right, their treatment of you would be wrong. Take the previous reflection on Ephesians 5:1-2 to assure you that your loved one's perspective of you is not God's perspective of you.

9. **Intensified Male/Female Stereotypes:** “This is just what men/women do!” can be the summary statement that we use to make sense of broken relationship with the opposite gender. Gender becomes an enemy. Differences of character and integrity no longer matter because gender explains everything.

With this theme, almost inevitably, come a set of unhealthy rules that have to be used when relating to the opposite sex (i.e., always give them what they want or they’ll betray you, never trust them, put them in their place, etc.). These kinds of rules become self-fulfilling. Either you will feel used, or the relationships will deteriorate to the point you were “proven right.”

Beyond this, this theme codifies foolishness as “common sense.” Anyone who disagrees with you either “doesn’t understand” or just hasn’t experienced what you experienced... yet. Maybe more than any of the other themes, once embraced this theme becomes impenetrable. The evidence necessary to disprove it or even the context in which the evidence could be revealed is rejected out of hand.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live with “intensified male/female stereotypes”?

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**Read Genesis 2:24-3:24.** God is aware of how sin affected gender differences. But we also see that God was in control of how sin affected gender differences; the consequences were not random and did not catch God by surprise. God took decisive action where needed – removing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (3:22-23). But He did not dissolve the institution of marriage. The differences were not so great that the damage of irreparable. Rather, God chose to make marriage a picture of the Great Reconciliation work He was doing through the gospel (Eph. 5:29-32). To say that men/women cannot be trusted is to focus our attention on gender instead of the real enemy of sin—of which men and women are equally susceptible.

## Life Themes

As we search for a way to make sense of the inexplicable, the lack of a satisfying explanation for our relational hardships leads us to ask very large, philosophical questions. We begin to wrestle with questions that have perplexed great minds for centuries, but we ask these questions not as students, but as survivors. This level of personalization adds to the intensity with which we rely on the conclusions that are typically engaged from the safe distance of the “ivory towers” of higher learning.

10. **“It’s not fair!”:** Relating codependently is all about imbalance. What we do never seems proportional to how we’re being treated. What we’re willing to do does not commensurate with what people are willing to do for us. The scales of justice always seem to be falling in the other person’s favor.

When this script begins to demoralize us, there are two perspectives we need to assess. First, is the imbalance dangerous; for us or the other person? If the imbalance threatens our safety or perpetuates life altering choices for the other person, we need to take action; either enacting our safety plan (Appendix A) or get consultation about the wisdom of having an intervention (Appendix B).

Second, is the imbalance more a series of benevolently-foolish choices on our part that have a low likelihood of being reciprocated? If this is the case, then our continued “niceness” is only fueling our bitterness and creating a relational economy where the other person knows that honor is not necessary to continually get their desired results. We have become the boss who writes paychecks even when jobs are not done but complains about decreasing work productivity.

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live with an “It’s not fair!” mindset? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read Psalm 73.** Feeling like those who “work the system” win without consequence is not a new experience. God devoted an entire psalm to putting these frustrations into words. The reality is that God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7), but this eternal reality does not settle all of our temporal angst. Notice how the psalm ends. The psalmist acknowledges how his sense of unfairness negatively impacted him (v. 21-22). In light of this the psalmist recommitted to living wisely,



even with this tension-of-fairness (v. 24). Ultimately, the psalmist acknowledges that even this renewed commitment would require moment-by-moment reliance on God (v. 25-28).

- 11. **Life Is Meaningless:** “Maybe the problem is that I’m looking for order in something that is random; like trying to find the rhythm in the static of a radio that can’t find a station. Maybe I am frustrated because what I am desperately seeking does not exist. That would make sense of why I’ve never tried so hard at anything, as I’ve tried at finding meaning for my suffering, and failed.”

This theme is very tempting and, initially, relieving. There is rest to be found when we can stop searching. But it’s the backside of this theme that becomes destructive. If life has no meaning to explain evil, then it has no meaning to pursue virtue or purpose. Relief comes at the cost of motivation. It is hard to get excited about a life that “just is.”

It is healthy to come to the place of accepting, “I may not understand why this happened,” but dangerous to assume, “There is nothing to be understood.” Bad things happened. They mattered. This reveals the moral fiber of our world and vulnerable significance of people. Your experience was part of that larger story in a way that cannot be considered meaningless if God’s will is ever “to be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live with as if “Life is meaningless”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Read Matthew 6:7-13.** Read this not just as a model prayer but as the mindset of prayer. Focus particularly on the phrase from verse 10 referenced above, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Notice several implications of this prayer. It acknowledges our world is broken in ways that are at odds with God’s will. The continuous tense verbs, implying believers will need to pray like this until we reach heaven, means many of our “why” questions will not have satisfying answers now. The fact that this model prayer is given to the church-at-large means we are not alone in this experience. The phrase “as it is in heaven” means we will come to a place where the sense of meaning that has been disrupted in this broken world will be (already is) made right in heaven.

- 12. **Evil Wins:** “I give up. Whatever God has done, is doing, or will do, I don’t care. I can’t take it anymore. God may win in some cosmic sense, but I am conquered. Even in many books with happy endings there are characters who die in the early chapters and never get to see ‘the good times.’ I guess that is me.”

As a point-in-time statement about the level of hope you feel, there is nothing wrong with this statement. It may provide relief to say it out loud and have someone understand the level of pain and darkness you feel. As a final-statement of your appraisal of your life, this is obviously (even to you) a destructive life theme.

When this theme seems to press in on you, reframe it this way, “Evil is winning, but it will not win in the end. I am behind in a way that feels absolutely hopeless, but I also know the final score. I do not know how things will get from here to there, but I also know I am not responsible for the turnaround. I will reach out to others who care for me and lean on their faith until I begin to see the hope that I know exists but cannot feel.”

How has your history in unhealthy relationships led you to live with as if “Evil wins”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

**Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 and 4:8-10.** Notice that Paul was as honest as you have been. Faith did not silence his despair. Faith is what allowed him to give voice to his despair. Being able and willing to give voice to his despair is a large part of what prevented Paul from drowning in his despair. God does not reject you because your experience overwhelms you. Notice that even though Paul’s hope was set on God (1:10) he emphasized the essential role of prayer and encouragement from others (1:11). The more this theme becomes large in your story, the more important it will be to involve other people in your life.

These are not the only twelve destructive scripts for suffering that can be used to make sense of your relational pain. Hopefully, they are representative of the kinds of thinking that make suffering the unrelenting main theme of your life story.

More than this, it is hoped that this section gives you a pattern (1) to *articulate* the destructive messages of your suffering, (2) to honestly *acknowledge* the pain, and (3) to *counter* them with Scripture even before you see (4) how they are *replaced* with the gospel (chapter six).

Articulate: What other destructive themes do you use to make sense of your relational pain?

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Acknowledge: How do these messages contribute to or intensify the pain that you feel?

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Counter: How does Scripture counter the core beliefs or perspective of your suffering story? Which passages?

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Replace: Knowing truth is different from having that truth become the dominant theme of your life. You may be discouraged as you’ve read counters to your suffering story, which haven’t yet seemed to counter your relational pain. Begin now by praying a simple honest prayer to God about where you are. Use the simply, desperate prayer of the father who feared for the life of his child as an outline, “I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)!”

### The Journey From Facts to Themes to Story

How do we develop an experience or set of experiences into a story? The answer to this question will be unique to each person. While we may all interpret painful life experiences with similar themes or combination of themes, the way we move from events to story is not uniform.

At the end of this step we want to provide you with a chart to help you identify potential connections between the material you’ve been learning about yourself, others, and your style of relating in these first four steps. Two cautions needs to be made about these potential connects.

First, a potential connection is not a relational-emotional formula. In the sample given, not all arguments will lead to the same destructive scripts or behavioral outcomes; and there may be times when you second guess yourself for legitimate reasons (i.e., “Have I already told my son’s teacher they would be absent next Tuesday?”). The value of seeing these questions is not turning them into absolute rules, but to understand your emotions and actions better, so that they become more pliable to change (when change is needed).

Second, a potential connection is not a justifying causal connection for the harm done. For too long, “understanding” has likely been confused with “justifying;” both in your own actions and the actions of others. Our goal at this point is to make destructive accommodations to unhealthy patterns seem understandable (so we will not feel ashamed of them) without validating them as “good” (so we will not perpetuate them); both de-shaming and change are needed.

Situation or Marital Trouble (Step 2)	Impact (Step 3)	Destructive Script (Step 4)	Behaviors (target of Step 7)
<i>Argument about details of a situation</i>	<i>Increased Second Guessing</i>	<i>It's all my fault</i>	<i>Excessively apologizing &amp; planning</i>

\* Chart is modified and adapted from Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* (p. 38)

Some individuals benefit more from reflective questions than a chart exercise. The questions below are meant to provide a guided, inductive tour of how you have moved from experience to story. Start by reflecting on what you have learned to this point in the process.

- How you have already begun to make sense of your life with the 12 themes above or ones you added to the list?
- Which of the theme(s) do you most naturally gravitate towards?
- Is this gravitation new (only beginning with your recent relational pain) or a long standing tendency?

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- How have these themes distorted your interpretation of *new life events* not directly related to your conflicted relationships? Your interpretation of *past events* not directly related to your conflicted relationships?
- How have these themes distorted your anticipation of future life events or relationships?
- What phrases or thoughts capture your preferred theme(s)? How often do you say them to yourself or others?
- Who or what has become more and less trusted or enjoyable as your conflicted relationship(s) has endured?

As you reflect on these questions, it should help you see how you are moving from facts to story. If you do not like what you discover, do not be alarmed. The fact that you can see the destructive themes as “not good,” means that the destructive themes do not have the place of dominance in your heart and mind.

**Encouragement Focus (SUFFERING STORY):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- When you have identified with the various themes of a suffering story / destructive scripts, were you able to have the comfort of a shared experience without using them as confirmation that these themes were right?
- What common connections were you able to draw from the materials you’ve learned in Steps 1-4?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 5.

### “Starting a Healthy Relationship with God”

MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.

**“I am willing to agree with God emotionally about my suffering.**

**I can see that God does not just want me to ‘get over this’**

**but to ‘love me through my pain to healthier relationships.’ [describe difference]**

**I will accept that ‘blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4)’  
as expressed by God’s loving me personally through this group.**

**Mourning my suffering with God and this group has changed me [describe].”**

**Memorize:** Zephaniah 3:18-19 (ESV), “I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame, and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “I will” – God is voluntarily involved. You do not have to beg. God is more eager to help than you are desperate.
- “You who mourn” – God has a special compassion for those who are mourning (Psalm 56:8).
- “Suffer reproach” – God understands that your grief comes with all the challenges and stigma we’ve discussed.
- “Deal with your oppressors” – You can trust God with whoever has harmed you; in judgement or redemption.
- “Lame... outcast... shame” – God knows your experience: feeling powerless, rejected, and embarrassed.

#### Teaching Notes

“But the denial, obsession with what we lost, guilt, bargaining, controlling, anger, and sadness – if we look close enough we’ll see how similar codependency is to grief. Most people with codependency issues have lost a lot (p. 16).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“One of the surest signs an abuse survivor is healing and coming alive is that, after staring straight into the ugly vortex of his or her past trauma and pain, he or she can mourn the losses and yet look toward the future with hope (p. 154)... Morning loss is an honest response to what has actually happened, and it’s also necessary for thorough healing (p. 154).” Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

“A godly response in the face of abuse is to grieve—for the perpetrator’s sin and for the damage done to our soul; but the natural response is to cower in shame, condemning our own soul for being so foolish as to hope, want, or risk (p. 65).” Dan Allender in *The Wounded Heart*

“She lost the opportunity to be a child, the knowledge that her parents loved her no matter what, a sense of safety in her own body, a sense of competence, a sense of moral integrity. All of these losses need to be grieved (p. 164)... Hope is a new thing for the survivor. What little has grown up with in her during the course of therapy is usually not strong enough to carry the weight of grief (p. 166).” Diane Langberg in *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*

“The survivor needs help from others to mourn her losses. All of the classic writings ultimately recognized the necessity of mourning and reconstruction in the resolution of traumatic life events. Failure to complete the normal process of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction (p. 69).” Judith Hermann in *Trauma and Recovery*

### Embedded Study

It is likely that we have related codependently, not just with other people, but also with God. This is not meant to call into question our assurance of salvation, but to recognize the likelihood that we have:

- Served God in order to get leverage over him to do what we think needs to be done.
- Thrown our emotions at God in prayer more than had a genuine conversation with him.
- Tried to make God feel bad because we interpret our hardships as if he were being mean or insulting towards us.

This chapter is where we, if needed, change this dynamic in our relationship with God; as the foundation for changing our codependent pattern of relating to others.

Step Four reveals a large amount of “bad news” – destructive narratives or scripts we place upon our unhealthy relationships which leave us feeling shame or like God is absent. What are we supposed to do with that kind of bad news?

The tempting answer is “make it better... spin it positive... fast... if we can use the Bible, all the better; that way we’re more likely to believe what we’re telling ourselves.” Chances are you’ve tried that and have the scars which rushed emotional change produces to prove it.

So let’s ask a better question, “How does God want to care for you as you come to grips with these destructive scripts?” Does God want to free you with truth (John 8:32)? Yes, but he also wants to free you in a way that is bearable and sustainable. God wants your change to be enduring and motivated by grace instead of shame or fear.

That means God wants you to grieve the presence of suffering in your life. God does not think you are whining when you acknowledge that the relational pain has been a heavy burden. God wants you to know his care during your suffering so that we will rely upon his care in the midst of both our future blessings and hardships.

Mourning is the focus of this chapter. We want you to feel free to mourn the presence of relational hardship (agreeing with God about your suffering) instead of feeling shame about it (hiding it from God and others in order to appear strong). Mourning our suffering allows us to quit faking strength so that we are free to rely on God’s strength and his people.

We will examine the subject of mourning in three sections:

1. What Is Being Mourned?
2. Mourning vs. Bitterness
3. How to Mourn

### What Is Being Mourned?

Most of the losses that come with destructive relationships are not tangible. Rarely do we have scars or missing limbs that would provide evidence to others of the trauma we faced. It can be argued both ways whether these physical marks would make the experience of relational turmoil easier or harder. Regardless, the majority of losses related to relational hardship do not have indicators which can be seen.

This makes it easier to believe, “I should just get over it. If there’s nothing to show, then there’s nothing to complain about.” If this were true, then you would not have studied this far into the material. Below we will examine ten losses commonly associated with destructive relationships.

Don’t use these items as a check-list to compare your hardship to others, but as a prompt to make vague things clear. You may identify your “top 3 losses” or you may find better language to articulate losses which are not precisely captured in this list. Either way, if you are able to put into words the losses you’ve experienced, then this list will have served you well.

1. *Sense of Safety*: Relational chaos makes it harder to trust the world around you. When calm means “the threat is hidden” or “motives are unknown” instead of “all is well,” your relationship with the world around you has fundamentally changed. The impact of this loss can be mitigated with time, but for as long as there is a persistent absence of sense of safety, this is a loss to be grieved.

An often overlooked aspect of this loss is its effect on our sense of humor. When the world is not safe, it is “no time for laughter” or laughter becomes a veil behind which we try to hide how uncomfortable we are. Either way, the pure and free ability to laugh and enjoy the ironies of life is, at least temporarily, lost.

2. *Loss of Trust*: The loss of a sense of safety often takes on a more generalized interpersonal dynamic; feeling unsafe in one significantly broken relationship begins to be experienced as mistrust in all (or, at least, most) relationships. Your ability to enjoy relationships and other’s ability to enjoy relationship with you is disrupted when trust is strained without cause... at least without cause that emerged from an offense in that relationship.

The result is strained or superficial relationships in your casual friendships and work relationships; feeling lonely and unknown even when you are with people. The first step towards resolving this dynamic is grieving. Allowing yourself to admit and feel sad about this loss is the type of vulnerability that will need to be expressed in the kind of relationships you long to have. As we will see, many times grieving is part of healing.

3. *Sense of Competence or Confidence:* Destructive relationships perpetually (whether overtly or covertly) deliver the message “You’re not good enough” as the explanation for what’s going wrong. When you throw in the normal short-coming and failures we all commit, this messaging easily begins to eat away at our sense of competence and confidence.

The resulting insecurity (as the emotional indicator that confidence has been lost) is an experience to be grieved. Understanding the root of confidence’s absence and grieving it (instead of feeling ashamed about it) is an important step towards restoring an appropriate level of competence and confidence.

4. *Loss of Emotional Regulation:* “How important is this event?” is the baseline question of emotional regulation that is impaired by abusive or addictive relationships. A minor offense or miscue often results in a major outrage. A relatively minor bad choice results in a binge drinking episode or relapse. To make it worse, you are not the one making these choices-of-disproportional-impact, but you are the person who must adjust your life accordingly when they happen.

This sense of powerlessness only adds to the challenge of emotional regulation. However, when you quit trying to fix the situation and allow yourself to grieve the loss created by your loved one’s choices you’ve made a significant change. Your emotions now match your role in the situation much more accurately and that is an important first step towards emotional regulation.

5. *Loss of Sense of Proportionality:* Accurate comparison is a life skill that we don’t appreciate until it becomes difficult. As we’ve already mentioned, our sense of humor and conflict resolution skills are strongly rooted in our ability to discern the appropriate size of things: in conflict, “over-reactions” assume proportional reactions and, in humor, dry humor assumes the listener can pick upon the difference between “normal” responses.

Imagine shopping and seeing a sign that says “50% Off” but not finding any original price. This is a depiction of trying to gauge the “size” of an event when living in a destructive relationship.

At various times, you know it would be healthier to feel “less” or “more” about particular events, but all of the factors above impair your capacity to gauge that well. In these moments of disorientation, your emotional options are anger, fear, passivity, or grief. Grief is the healthiest.

6. *Loss of Identity:* Who am I now? Like it or not, major relational dramas usually become a before-after moment in our lives. We locate events by identifying whether they happened before or after these disruptions. We also tend to think of people who have not had to endure these crises as different (interpreted as better) than us.

This does not mean you are a “new person” but it does mean you’re not “the same person” you were or would have been (which is true as a result of dozens of experiences across our life). Because this level of relational fallout is so profoundly negative, it is appropriate to mourn these changes in identity, even if God promises to use them redemptively. Often we silence our grief by believing that sorrow over past events dishonors what God has done to provide salvation or promises to do in the future.

7. *Loss of Innocence:* It would be nice not to automatically assume the worst. Innocence assumes things will “just get better” or “be okay in the end.” Major relational hardships have a strong tendency to remove this assumption. In some cases, it makes this assumption feel offensive, not just absent.

Innocence is not the same as naivety. Innocence is good. One of the things that will make heaven a place of eternal peace is the restoration of our innocence. Because innocence is good, the loss of innocence should be grieved. Grief is how we rightly celebrate the goodness of something lost until God restores it; partially-progressively here on earth and completely in heaven.

8. *Peace of Mind:* “Quiet and stillness” lose their “peace” after significant, unhealthy relational discord. Solitude gets filled with rumination and trying to guess what problem will need to be circumvented next. We don’t realize what we’re missing because we’re perpetually consumed by what we’re trying to prevent.

Grief is a form of stillness. We grieve when we slow down enough to acknowledge our losses. Soldiers on the field of battle do not grieve, even though their friend and comrade beside them dies, because they are unsafe and must focus on the battle. Grief is a sign that we are beginning to be in an emotional position where peace of mind is returning.

9. *Sense of Reality*: “How stupid do you have to be to believe that?... I’m not angry! It’s going to be okay, I’ll find a way to pay the bills.” When these kinds of statements are made repeatedly (and don’t match up with reality), you are not sure what to believe. You begin to feel crazy.

In chronically broken relationships, the only option seems to be “I’m losing my mind” or you’re lying. When you have to vet and verify things that should seem self-evident, you begin to question everything. When skepticism becomes a survival skill, you don’t know what to believe. Acknowledging and grieving your losses becomes a solid point of reference in which you can begin to have certainty and receive God’s compassion at the same time.

10. *Loss of a Sense of God’s Presence*: When pain is near, God feels far. When pain is “up in our face,” God often feels “out of sight.” Pain is such an intense, internal experience that the idea of God being with us, near us, or in us no longer matches up with our experience of life.

While this experience is real (it accurately depicts our experience), it is not true (it does not accurately represent reality). The realness of this experience merits grief. God does not require that our responses be theologically accurate in order to receive his compassion. In the next step, we will seek to counter the falseness of this experience. In this step, it is okay to grieve the felt-realness of God being less close than your pain.

**Read Matthew 5:4.** It is easy to resent mourning. Whatever causes mourning is bad. But God calls the experience of mourning “blessed.” Why? It is the tenderness of grief that prevents our hearts from growing hard in a broken world. This is why mourning may feel risky; it is the first step in being vulnerable again. You cannot acknowledge the impact of your suffering and be honest about your suffering story without being vulnerable. Mourning requires placing yourself in a position to be comforted by another. This should begin with God. Let the thoughts you have as you go through these materials to become conversations with God. Let God’s knowing be prayerful-confiding not divine-ease-dropping. Then your mourning should be expressed with your counselor, mentor, or close circle of friends who are going through this material with you.

“It is only when we have the courage to truly face the hurt, disappointment, and loss created by abuse that we meet God face to face. Ironically, mourning the losses from past abuse allows us to meet God in the present and provides hope for the future (p. 156).” Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

### Differentiating Mourning from Bitterness

Before we talk about how to mourn, it is important to take a moment and define what mourning is not. Mourning has an evil twin that initially looks, sounds, and feels very similar to grief. But when it grows up, this twin looks very different. The twin is bitterness. Mourning is the good twin, but the one we often avoid because we’re intimidated by it.

Unfortunately, there is no emotional litmus test to verify the difference in these two experiences. However, we can (a) clarify what bitterness and mourning share in common, so we are less prone to assume the overlapping experiences necessarily indicate their counterpart. We can also (b) identify distinguishing marks between bitterness and mourning so that we know what to look for in order to rightly identify the emotional experience.

Let’s begin by considering the similarities in the experiences of mourning and bitterness.

- Both are triggered by events that are personal and negative.
- Both exist on the unpleasant end of the emotional spectrum.
- Both feel very justified and make sense in light of the event.
- Both feel very natural; like we are not “doing” them but that they are “happening” to us.
- Both involve a high degree of mental repetition.
- Both are seeking to make sense of life in light of the negative event.
- Both begin to shape the way you interpret the events and people around you.
- Both shape the way you anticipate and prepare for the future.
- Both change the way that you think of past events.
- Both have lingering effects after the intense experience is over if not processed in a healthy manner.

What do you gain from this bulleted list? A realization that none of these criteria are able to differentiate mourning from bitterness. Each criterion is true for both. It is as if you were asked to distinguish a square from a rectangle. You could say, “It has four sides and each corner formed a ninety degree angle.” These statements are true for both a square and a rectangle, so it does not help you differentiate the two shapes.

Why take the time to draw these parallels? Often people believe some of these symptoms always indicate either healthy mourning or unhealthy bitterness. When you have these experiences all you know is that you’re hurting. It is not clear whether this pain is part of a healthy or unhealthy process; contributing to a redemptive or destructive story line.

This should give you freedom to consider the criteria that follows. Never will our emotions or motives be as pure as we would like. Your goal at this point is not that you “mourn perfectly” but that your experience be increasingly free from qualities that are indicative of bitterness.

**Read Hebrews 12:15.** Bitterness is such an awkward subject because it resides at the intersection of sin and suffering. The event that would make you bitter was painful and wrong. You are a sufferer. But this suffering carries with it the strong temptation to become bitter. The similarity of mourning (a necessary part of the healing process) and bitterness make it seemingly impossible to flee the vicinity of this temptation. It would be easy to read this section on bitterness and the biblical instruction to pluck out bitterness by the roots as pressuring condemnation. Just like the prior steps took time, this one will too. Don't feel like the clock is ticking for you to “just do it.” Notice the compassion in God's instructions on bitterness—He does not want additional trouble to spring up in your life.

Mourning can be understood as an early stage of forgiveness. Being able to face the reality of sin's impact and the losses it brought without succumbing to a desire for retribution is an important step in garnering the strength to say, “I forgive you.” If forgiveness implies a restoration of the relationship (not all forgiveness goes this far), then learning to be self-controlled in the offender's presence is an important step towards responding wisely towards them.

As you read through this section, hopefully you will begin to see that (a) bitterness is rumination over your loved one's sin with the suffering story [Step 4] embedded and (b) mourning is processing the effects of and losses related to your loved one's sin [Steps 2 and 3] while resisting the tendency to define life by the themes of the suffering story.

- *Bitterness Disrupts Peace vs. Mourning Makes Peace Possible Again* – There is no peace where evil is called good or is overlooked. That is denial and is a pseudo-peace that gives no more “peace juice” than a plastic orange gives orange juice. However, simply looking at a wrong does not bring peace. Thinking about a wrong over and over again is the essence of bitterness. One litmus test for gauging bitterness is the level of detail in our memory about the offense. This detail is maintained through repetition.

It is mourning that drains a wrong of its emotional power over you. As we grieve, we quit placing our loved one on trial in our mind and we quit trying to live as if the impact of their sin was not real. Our sadness is a form of surrender; surrendering our loved one to God's justice (either through redemption or punishment) and surrendering to the reality of the challenges their sin have created (not passively but productively).

- *Bitterness Destroys Joy vs. Mourning Is Foundational for Joy* – Bitterness keeps pain in the present. Bitterness knows no boundaries of time. Bitterness does not have memories; it has experiences. If a memory hurts, the offense is responded to as if it is happening all over again... in the “now.”

Mourning allows pain to be in the past. It may still hurt, but you can see that the past hurt and present pain exist in different time zones. The present losses you are mourning can be restored even if the past hurt cannot be undone. As you mourn, you realize that those things in your present are capable of being good or becoming better. You can acknowledge this without the self-deception of declaring your loved one's sin (past or present) to be good. This provides a foundation for joy as your present improves without having to play mental games about the past.

- *Bitterness Depletes Strength vs. Mourning Replenishes Strength* – Bitterness is a form of anger and anger requires a great deal of energy. Anger feels strong, but that is because it is pulling from your bodily reserves to artificially amp up your emotional and physical stamina. The result is an inevitable crash. Bitterness is the equivalent of an emotional parasite that feeds off the life of its host. The longer bitterness resides in your life, the weaker you become.

Mourning, by contrast, is a form of rest. When we mourn we quit fighting to control a pain that we did not cause and which is in a time zone we cannot touch (the past). We surrender; not to the evil in our past but to living in the present. This surrender does require including our loved one's sin in our life story redemptively (Step 6), but stepping out of an unwinnable battle with bitterness through mourning provides the rest that replenishes our strength.

- *Bitterness Distorts Focus vs. Mourning Restores Focus* – Bitterness cannot think of anything for long without returning to the offense that ignited it. Every subject feels like derivative of our pain. Emotionally our pain feels relevant to everything and when our pain is relevant it trumps anything else.

Mourning is the process that allows current events to stand on their own. Having grieved the losses related to your unhealthy relationships, the sin of others does not have to be “relevant” at irrelevant times.



Immediately after losing a close loved one everything reminds you of them. It is hard to think of anything else. After grieving you still remember them, but you are able to engage fully in life (even activities of which they were a part) without losing focus.

- *Bitterness Defiles Relationships vs. Mourning Honors Relationships* – Bitterness defines a relationship by the painful event. Often bitterness defines an entire gender by the painful event. When we are bitter, cynicism becomes mistaken for wisdom. The guiding questions of life become, "When are you going to hurt me again? How are you going to hurt me this time? How can I stop it?" Even if the relationship is maintained, the environment created by bitterness makes it inhospitable for the relationship to be healthily restored.

Mourning recognizes the painful event as real but sees the relationship as larger. Mourning can see the other person's sin as "part" of the relationship; not the whole relationship. The relationship is honored as it is recognized as good, while the sin is grieved as being bad. It is mourning that allows us to make this distinction. Honor is given to someone when we recognize they are not defined by their worst moments.

- *Bitterness Displeases God vs. Mourning Pleases God* – Bitterness is a sin (not "the sin"). Like every other sin, it displeases God and creates distance in our relationship with Him. At a time when we are already feeling separated from our close relationship(s), this can be particularly hard to accept.

However, God is pleased with our mourning and draws close to us in our sorrow. When we resist the approach captured in the old adage, "It is easier to be angry than hurt," God approves of the courage represented in our grief. God does not delight in your pain, but He is pleased when you display His character with His strength in the midst of your pain. While mourning may not feel like faith, in the midst of suffering it can be the essence of faith.

How would you describe your current emotional response to your relational pain: more bitter or more mourning? \_\_\_\_\_

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### How to Mourn

Hopefully you have identified what you are mourning and learned more about the destructive counterfeit of mourning—bitterness. But the question remains, "How do I mourn? There is no funeral. There is nothing to bury. So how do I mourn?"

**Read Joel 1:1-2:25.** Often we quote Joel 2:25 without seeing the journey that preceded it. Christian grief is grief-with-hope because of the power of God's resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18). We know that God can, and ultimately will, "restore to you the years that the swarming locust have eaten." But notice how God used mourning as preparation to receive this promise (1:8-9, 1:12-14, 2:12-13). In this passage of Scripture Israel was mourning their personal sin. You are mourning your suffering. But the principle remains applicable, mourning is an important preparation to the work God intends to do in our life. When we miss this, we begin to feel guilty and condemned by God for participating in this preparatory work of redemption God is doing in our lives.

Mourning is not nearly as active or voluntary as we want it to be. We want to master it so we can accelerate the process. Attempts to do so are generally unhealthy, so if that is what you are hoping for, the points below may disappoint you. But the five points below will give you as practical and active guidance as possible to help you grieve the losses you have experienced related to your broken relationships.

**1. Realize mourning is not an event you can calendar.** There is no recipe or time table. Mourning is not a matter of crying for five consecutive hours with intermittent twenty minutes breaks of written reflection on painfully relevant questions concluding with a ceremony of destroying what you've written. Mourning may involve crying and reflection. It may even be assisted by symbolically destroying what you've written. But these steps, nor any others, "are mourning."

Mourning requires letting yourself be weak and cared for by God in light of your suffering. The experience of relational pain has made being "out of control" like this seem very unsettling. But it is this willingness to surrender yourself to God's protection that is the primary evidence that mourning is having its intended redemptive effect.

**2. Do not feel rushed.** We would rather know if we are "on pace" than if we're "mourning healthily." If there was a set time table, then we would know how close we were to being finished. But time's role in grief is more similar to a gymnastics floor routine than a stop-watch in sprinting. Sprinting is all about making the time number as small as possible. Gymnastics has to do with how well you perform your allotted task within the given time.

If the gymnast tries to "go fast" there is no advantage (likely a detriment) to her final score. Similarly, when we try to accelerate the grieving process we usually introduce unhealthy practices or beliefs that add to the emotional disruption. When we focus upon being as healthy as possible in the process we experience healthy outcomes that honor God and result in our flourishing.

**3. Rest in God's care before next stage of journey.** A primary indicator that you are ready to begin the next step is when you can view this step as revealing God's care for you. When you can view this step as God giving you rest rather than putting you in "emotional time out" you are likely ready to continue.

However, with that said, you will not finish mourning before beginning Step 6. There will still be times when your losses illicit fresh sadness. But you will have the skills to process those emotions and, more than the skills, you will have a trust in God's care for you that will give you the emotional freedom to process those moments.

**4. Your goal is to assimilate Steps 1-3 without the contamination of Step 4.** The goal of healthy grief is to accept hard realities without the destructive scripts. In this material, that means you accept the things you learned in Steps 1-3 without encasing them in whichever narratives you were most prone to in Step 4.

Initially this may feel disorienting, especially if you have held to the destructive narratives from Step 4 for an extended period of time. In Step 6 we will examine the redemptive narrative that can make healthier, better sense of your experience.

In the meantime, you may feel like a person without a story. Realize that is like the sprayer being unloaded of herbicide (plant killer) before it can be reloaded with fertilizer. You are being emptied, not to be left bare, but to be filled with something life-giving instead of emotionally toxic. Your narrative loss is actually a gain. Once it is replaced it will be an incomparable gain.

**5. Realize sadness is not the final chapter.** The previous bold promise should be tempered; otherwise it could easily become false hope. Losing your suffering story is a gain. Embracing the gospel narrative for your suffering is incomparable gain. But you are still living in the middle of the story.

With the gospel we always live between the "already" and the "not yet." The power of sin is already broken, but the presence of sin is not yet removed. The promise of heaven is already given, but the experience of heaven is not yet known. The remedy of suffering is already guaranteed, but the existence of suffering is not yet eliminated.

In the gospel we are able to live without doubt but with only partial relief. Through sanctification – living out the character and mind of God in our circumstances by his grace – we experience incrementally more relief. But this relief is not total until God wipes away our last tear as we permanently enter his presence (Rev. 21:4).

"It occurs to the survivor that perhaps the trauma is not the most important, or even the most interesting, part of her life story... She will never forget. She will think of the trauma every day as long as she lives. She will grieve every day. But the time comes when the trauma no longer commands the central place in her life (p. 195)." Judith Hermann in *Trauma and Recovery*

### Conclusion

Realize that God is not rushing you on your journey. If anything, we are often disappointed by God's patience. We want God to push us through the process faster. But God is the ultimate gentleman, honoring us on at every stage of our journey.

There is no added merit in a slow or fast journey. All God desires of / for us is faithfulness. This step has been intended to help you embrace this truth. As you take the remaining steps, do so with the full assurance that God agrees with your tears when you cry out "this is hard." You do not have to argue with one who is well acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3). He is the Good Shepherd who is willing to tenderly walk at the pace of his sheep.

#### Encouragement Focus (MOURN):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- Have you honestly accessed the losses you are mourning related to your relational pain?
- Are you actively guarding against allowing this time of mourning degenerating into bitterness?
- What part of what it means to mourn was most pertinent for you to focus on?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 6.

### “Narratively Resetting Before Relationally Re-Engaging”

LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.

**“I have already told you how loved one’s sin shaped my life [review step 4].  
Letting go of that story, identity, and set of beliefs left me with only God.  
It was good to begin rebuilding my life from that solid foundation.  
Now I am beginning to understand my life with God and the Gospel at the center  
[examples from previous list reinterpreted].”**

**Memorize:** Romans 12:14-18 (ESV), “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Bless” – Living in healthy relationship patterns is a blessing to others; even if they don’t like it and resist it.
- “Do not be haughty” – You are not saying you’re “better than” the other person when you relate healthily.
- “Repay no one” – Part of living redemptively is resisting the desire for revenge.
- “Honorable in the sight of all” – Regardless of the outcome, you want to be proud of how you conducted yourself.
- “As it depends on you” – God does not put pressure for the outcome of the relationship exclusively on you.

#### Teaching Notes

“Your life was intended for more than shame, guilt, fear, anger, and confusion. The abuse does not define you or have the last word on your identity. Yes, it is part of your story, but not the end of your story (p. 17).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

“True healing happens as we learn to live holy lives by growing into the identities God has already given us, which is what will make us whole (p. 193).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“The cross doesn't answer all of our questions about human suffering, but it assures us of God's compassion for human misery (p. 176)... Those who suffer often feel isolated and disconnected from others. They often feel no one really understands what they are experiencing... The beauty of the cross is that it connects Jesus with our suffering, particularly the suffering produced by abuse (p. 176).” Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

“That belief gets ingrained in me, affecting how I live. So I want to release the emotion and inaccurate belief, then let Life teach me – through a series of experiences – something new, healthier, more enlightened, for instance, that I’m loved by God. But it’s not an intellectual process. It’s discovery, and we integrate it (p. 230).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“The most radical treatment for the fear of man is the fear of the Lord (p. 19)... Our goal is to love people more than need them. We are overflowing pitchers, not leaky cups (p. 179).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

“We're more than what we have suffered, and that is the reason we can do something with our memory of it – integrated into our life story, turn it into a junction from which we set out on new paths, for instance (p. 80)...All three elements of the healing of memories – a new identity, new possibilities, and an integrated life story – drew their basic content from the memory of the Passion understood as a new Exodus, a new deliverance (p. 103)... Wrongdoing does not have the last word. If we remember a wrongdoing – no matter how horrendous – through the lens of remembering the Exodus, we will remember that wrongdoing as a moment in the history of those who are already on their way to deliverance (p. 108-109).” Miroslav Volf in *The End of Memory*

### Embedded Study

When you experience major relational upheaval, it feels like the rest of life should be put on hold. Yet, so often, when we face addictive or abusive challenges in our relationships, life continues “as normal” because no one else knows what’s going on. This can be both disorienting and offensive. Doesn’t anyone care? Can’t anyone see? We feel hurt, angry, and alone.

However, so far this study has primarily been a major deconstruction project; we have broken down your experience and its fallout in many ways (hopefully insightful and helpful). The result is, while you may feel like there is hope for things to be better, you likely also feel like a person without a story.

That is what this chapter begins to address. In this chapter you will begin to put the pieces you deconstructed into a new narrative; not a narrative that makes the “sad things untrue” but a narrative that allows you to understand yourself, God, your life, relationships, and the future in ways that are healthy and hopeful.

This new narrative will likely not answer the nagging “why” question. Think about most suspenseful movies you’ve seen or books you’ve read. When is the “why” plot revealed? At the end. Where are you in your journey? Still in the middle. It is unlikely at this stage in the journey that, however God intends to redeem your experience, that this could be clear to you now. Guessing at God’s intention will likely place you in a series of all-or-nothing moments; the kind of thinking that tends to add to the destructiveness of unhealthy relationships.

Instead, at this stage in your journey, it is recommended that you seek to understand yourself, God, others, your setting, and your future in a way that both sets you up for stable-healthy living now and allows for redemptive moments in the occasions when healthier styles of relating hold promise to be fruitful (the focus of Step 7). We will seek to do this by walking you through six questions that help you identify key ways God would have you understand your experience.

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| 1. Who Am I Now?                         | 4. What Should I Expect from My Friends? |
| 2. Who Is the Person(s) Who Hurt Me Now? | 5. Where Am I?                           |
| 3. Who and Where Is God?                 | 6. Is Love Worth Pain?                   |

### Who Am I Now?

The experience of major relational hardship does not allow us to “move on” with life “as if nothing happened.” At the same time, we do not want to believe that these experiences define us. We have an identity and dreams that transcend these experiences, yet our closest relationships invariably affect our sense of identity. How do we make sense of this?

#### Changed and Unchanged

You are living with a real tension. You are the same person you have always been. There is a core-you who would still exist even if these relational hardships never happened. But also life is different and you are different because of these events. Both realities have to be reckoned with in order for you to make sense of your experience in a healthy way.

First, you are you and will always and only be you. You are the person living the life and story God has given you to live. The “new you” cannot write a letter to the “old you” (or vice versa) and it be read by two different people. When you think of yourself as “a different person” you give your relational hardships the same significance as your birth and conversion (new birth). It is important for you to remember that there is a “you” that transcends these painful events.

Second, you are less naïve or innocent than you were. Events and experiences cannot be unlearned. You may begin marking time as “before” or “after” your certain events. This is appropriate for any major life event – graduation, marriage, having children, the loss of a parent, retirement, etc. Certain actions, words, places, or emotions may not be experienced the same way again. This is the effect of every life experience (we are changing day by day), but powerfully negative moments create more change that is unwanted in a very short period of time.

**Read Galatians 2:20.** In this verse we see Paul wrestling with the changed-unchanged dynamic. Paul is changed – “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Paul is unchanged – “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith.” Paul was no less dependent upon God after his conversion than he was before. It was just that after his conversion, Paul realized how dependent upon God he had always been. Similarly, as you grapple with how you are both changed and unchanged many of the things you “know-know” now, were true before you appreciated their full weight. Paul was probably shocked at how cavalierly or unprepared he lived before his conversion. Similarly, you may experience a sense of fear-guilt for how naively you may have lived before your relational hardships. After conversion we see God’s protection over our pre- and post-conversion life. Similarly, you need to begin to see God’s protection over your changed-unchanged life.

**Question:** How has trying to make sense of life as either-or, changed-or-unchanged, made it harder for you to gain a sense of peace or stability? How does this both-and mindset alleviate those challenges?

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### Strong Enough to Be Weak

Hopefully one of the primary things you’ve gained from this study is the strength to acknowledge weakness. Few things make us crumble at our core like the perceived need to be stronger than we are. Conversely, nothing maximizes the strength God gives us like the freedom to acknowledge our need for grace, help, and encouragement.

Having the language to describe your experience and the awareness to know that others face similar relational challenges should give you the social strength to be weak. Knowing that God understands your experience and is compassionate towards suffering should give you the spiritual strength to be weak.

Realizing that “weak” is not a derogatory social class under “the strong” (which is a fictional class of people we think would be immune to relational challenges like ours), should remove the shame associated with being weak.

**Read Matthew 5:3-6.** The beatitudes are the epitome of being “strong enough to be weak.” In each beatitude, Jesus describes a state of being that we would find undesirable as “blessed.” Yet, with a little reflection, we realize that it is trying to be what we consider “strong” that exhausts us. When we are willing to be poor in spirit, meek, hungry, and thirsty we find that life is better. We find there is more strength in willful God-dependency than in self-sufficiency.

**Question:** How have you grown in your willingness to be “strong enough to be weak” during this study? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Capable of Influential Choices

Being weak does not mean being voiceless or lacking the will to challenge things that are wrong or undesirable around you. Balancing the emotional freedom of being able to be weak with the volitional freedom of having a voice is one of the primary tensions to be navigated in overcoming codependency. It is another area where we are prone to think in either-or categories rather than both-and.

Begin by making a list of important choices you are free to make. Never allow yourself to view these parts of life as insignificant. If you do, then only those parts of your life where relational hardships have their strongest influence will be deemed significant. That centralizes these relationships in a way that will cause them to always dominate your life story.

- Examples: the freedom to walk away from a destructive conversation, the ability to involve law enforcement when disrespectful behaviors become criminal, practicing your faith, caring for people who are important to you, eating a healthy diet, exercising to care for your body, pursuing your passions and interests etc...

Now make a list of the important choices you can make in the midst of or in response to dysfunctional relational patterns. The longer and more effective this list becomes, the less powerless you will feel.

- Examples: If you struggle to identify choices to place on this list, you will receive examples in Step 7.

**Read Psalm 127:1-2.** It is easy to become overwhelmed by the influence of your choices and begin to think that all the pressure to make the world a safe place again is on you. Psalm 127 speaks to this experience. It does not refute the efforts of house builders and watchmen. Both are good and warranted. But it emphasizes that God makes effective our efforts. Our role is merely faithfulness. As you think about the influence of your choices, remind yourself that it is God who blesses these choices so that he can give to “his beloved sleep” (v. 2).

**Question:** How have you grown in your ability to see the influence of your choices while resting in God’s utilization them?

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### Who Is the Person(s) Who Hurt Me Now?

Every story has good guys and bad guys. In all probability, when the relationship(s) in question started, the person now harming you was one of the “good guys” in the story. After the hurts of abuse or addiction, however, it is easy to permanently label this

person(s) one of the “bad guys.” If the gospel story is going to take root, then it must be allowed the potential to alter this mentality in a way that balances personal responsibility with the possibility of redemption.

### **A Sinner, Not “Sin”**

In a day of psychological diagnostic labels, we have a strong tendency to name people by their weakness and failure. We make strong “I am” or “You are” statements about things that used to only be descriptive (i.e., I feel, I did, I struggle with). We say, “I am an addict. I am depressed. I am anorexic.” With this mindset the label that will capture the person(s) who has hurt you is “addict” or “abuser.”

This may be an accurate description, but it impedes the gospel story from breathing appropriate hope in your life when it is the defining label you use to identify this person’s role/character in your life. This person(s) is a sinner who sinned in those specific ways, but with surrender to God’s grace that does not have to be “who they are.”

When you fail to make this distinction it keeps you trapped with his/her sin. Anyone who hurts you this badly is a major figure in your life story. Therefore you will think of him/her often. If you define their personhood by their sin, then each time you think of them their sin will flash in your mind.

To gain an image of what is being discussed, recall the movie Bambi when the little deer fawn is learning to talk and sees the baby skunk. Bambi says, “Flower.” Everyone laughs and the skunk says, “You can call me flower if you want to.” When you look at the person who hurt you, you will identify them in some way. What you call them will go a long way towards both your personal and potential relational healing.

**Read I Corinthians 6:9-11.** Paul is speaking to a church that was filled with sexual sin in a city known for sexual sin. That means the vast majority of his readers would have faced great betrayal in their relationships. Paul does not minimize sin. But in verse eleven he indicates that their character/name was capable of change when he says “such were (past tense verb) some of you.” As you seek to accurately identify those who hurt you in this gospel story, it is not healthy for you to allow the type of sin they committed to become their character/name in your life story.

**Question:** What “name” do you give to those who hurt you? What other names are currently true (i.e., not minimizing) and would be less destructive (i.e., centralizing pain in your story) than defining them by their sin against you?

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### **A Fruit Bearer**

For better (i.e., repentance, other-mindedness, authenticity, vulnerability, patience, concern) or worse (i.e., continued sin, self-pity, selfishness, isolation, defensiveness, demanding) the person(s) who has hurt you will bear fruit that reveals the current condition of his/her heart. If your question in the previous section was, “What do I call him/her then?” The answer would be, “Their present fruit.”

Depending on the nature of their sin – addiction ([bradhambrick.com/addiction](http://bradhambrick.com/addiction)) or abuse ([bradhambrick.com/anger](http://bradhambrick.com/anger)) – there are complementing studies to this one that would walk the person who has hurt you through a comparably structured journey tailored to their struggle. Willingness to humbly-honestly acknowledge and engage their struggle is a key indicator of the fruit of their current condition.

**Read Matthew 12:33-37.** The summary phrase of this passage is we are “known by [our] fruit (v. 33).” Unlike trees people can change fruit when we are grafted into the trunk of submission to God (Rom. 11:11-24). However, like fruit from trees, personal character takes time to produce. The type of fruit discussed above does not show up in the hours, days, and weeks after sin acknowledged. But fruit can be discerned in weeks and months that follow. By the time the other person(s) reaches Step 5 in their respective studies – if they are willing to participate – you should see more clearly what their fruit would be; this is the step where interpersonal confession and amends are made.

**Question:** What fruit do you see in the other person’s life? What fruit does his/her counselor or accountability partner see?

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### **Capable of Change**

Hope is not about where we are but where we can get to by God’s grace. Few people affected by abuse or addiction see all (by type or quantity) the fruit they want to see at this stage. If the fruit you desired was fully present, you would have probably stopped this study and resumed “normal” life again.

Remember the gospel story is a living story that concludes with a face-to-face encounter with Christ (our death or His return). Until then, the story is "in process" with lots of plot twists. During a season like this, we are prone to wonder, "When is it going to be finished?" That leads us to think that if "it" hasn't fully happened yet, then it's not going to.

This tendency towards hopelessness or cynicism is most easily attached to either (a) the other person's perceived inability to change or (b) your perceived inability to trust again. In the next chapter we will discuss what wise trust looks like. But if the other person is faithfully working through either the anger or addiction materials and trusted people around them see more change than you do, it may be that you don't have enough hope (yet) to see the change that exists. Fear has a way of blinding us to hope. Ask for an opportunity to talk with their accountability partner, sponsor, or counselor about your concerns and their evidence that change is happening.

**Read I Corinthians 1:18-31.** Paul is writing to the highly fractured Corinthian church about the possibility of change and what would bring it about. The Greeks thought change would come from wisdom and deep insight, while the Jews thought change would come from power and bringing outside forces to bear on the situation (v. 22). The Christians didn't fit in either camp and were mocked by both. Paul shows how the gospel is the power to change (v. 23-25) and uses the example of the Corinthians' own testimony to verify his claim (v. 26-31). The fact that Paul would have to write a second letter to the Corinthians reveals they were far from perfect. But there was still enough fruit to verify God was at work in their lives.

**Question:** What phrases do you tell yourself to convince yourself change is not possible? How do these phrases shape your thoughts, emotions, responses, and sense of hope more than the God presence or Word?

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### Who and Where Is God?

There are many God-questions that arise during and after relational upheaval. It is nearly impossible to persistently battle for hope and peace without asking questions directed to or about God. The things discussed below should not be new. They are meant to be crystallizations of what you've been learning. Allow these truths about God to become cemented in your story; these truths should increasingly feel like "refuges" as opposed to "wouldn't it be nice" statements.

"Because Satan seeks to distance us from God by distorting all of his wonderful attributes, it's essential for abuse survivors to clarify who God really is (p. 172)." Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

### God is Near to Those Who Are Suffering

There is a danger in reading our Bibles in search for God's answer to the stresses of relational turmoil. It begins to feel like God is an absentee father; as if all he offers us is a letter. A letter would mean both that God cared and that he was far away. This would be both encouraging and disheartening; God's words would seem sincere but powerless. This is why we must pay careful attention to the thing God most repeats and we most overlook when he speaks about how we are to face major hardships.

**Read I Peter 5:6-9 and Philippians 4:5-9.** The most neglected aspect of both of these passages is the nearness of God. We come to these passages seeking God's "answer" for the thing that causes us to be afraid. As we search for principles and practical steps, we miss that the first and main thing God offers is himself. When we doubt or rush past God's presence, we begin to expect knowledge to accomplish what only relationship can provide. Yes, God does offer us strategies and truths to combat effects of relational hardships, but these are not the first and most important things he offers.

Pause and ask yourself, where have you seen evidence of the nearness of God? Don't short-circuit the question with; "if God were near, then these things would not have happened." This criterion blinds us to God's care. We become like the children who cannot receive any of their parent's love or care after an event that damaged their trust. The response may be understandable, but it makes the damage of mistrust permanent.

**Question:** As you reflect on the evidences of God's nearness, how can you call these to mind during hard times?

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### Our Pioneer

People who have major relational dysfunction want to know that someone has been where they are and come out on the other side. Has anyone known this level of betrayal, pain, neglect, and rejection? If so, can I learn from their example? Even better, could I draw from their strength and find a way to be infused with their victory? These kinds of questions are generally met with an awkward smirk that communicates "wouldn't it be nice." But the answer to these questions is, "Yes!" The answer to these questions is, "That is what the gospel is all about."

“[Jesus] is a Man of Sorrows and intimate with grief. He was left alone, regarded with contempt. He is scarred for all eternity. His suffering has left its tracks across his face. His hands and feet carry marks of the violence done to him. He was afflicted, struck, crushed, stripped, and oppressed. Suffering does that, you know; it leaves its mark over those who must endure (p. 31)... Jesus was storming the gates of hell even while he bowed himself to our finitude and brokenness (p. 57).” Diane Langberg in *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*

God pioneered the road you are traveling. It was an impossible road before His God-man feet cleared the path you are struggling to walk. By His grace, we have in the gospel both the map and the resources by which to travel it. As you find yourself wanting to give up or wondering if it’s possible, reflect on what it was like to walk this road with no forerunner carrying the weight of the world’s sin. Don’t use that image to discount your struggle, but to grow in appreciation for Jesus’ sacrifice. Your experience should magnify your understanding of what Jesus did. What Jesus did doesn’t minimize what you’re going through.

**Read Hebrews 12:1-3.** Notice it says to “consider” Christ “so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (v. 3).” What does it say you should consider in order to gain this encouragement? Part of the reflection is that Jesus walked “despising the shame (v. 2)” of his journey. Jesus really did walk the road you are on. He has carried the weight alone and offers to share your load with you (Mathew 11:28-30). In this way, the summary of how the gospel ministers to sin is the same as the summary of how the gospel ministers to suffering – Jesus in my place.

**Question:** What encouragement do you take from knowing that Jesus was your victorious pioneer on this difficult road?

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### Capable of Transforming Suffering

We often think that transformation requires elimination. We want the transformation of our hardships to result in the elimination of symptoms related to them. This is not a bad desire, but it would require removing this experience from our story (the impossibility of rewriting history) rather than redeeming the presence of hardship within our story.

We think of the elimination model of transformation because it is most common in our experience. We see it when a water droplet is transformed to vapor; the droplet no longer exists. But God’s transformation of suffering is usually much more like the change in our memories of a loved one during grief. These memories transform from experiences of pain to precious treasures (that may still evoke sadness).

The memory of our hardships will never have the sweetness of our memories of a loved one who has passed, but this example does provide us an example of something painful that has been transformed without being eliminated and helps us remember that the presence of pain does not mean the absence of God’s redemptive work in our suffering.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16.** Notice this awkward interlude in the midst of Hebrews 11, a chapter commonly referred to as the “Hall of Faith.” We would say that God worked mightily in the life of each of these individuals. They are the upper echelon heroes of the Bible. But also notice that the cliff note-highlights we read from their life are not the same as their experience of these events. Their experience of following God by faith is much more similar to your experiencing of trusting God in the midst and aftermath of your relational hardships than you might have thought.

**Question:** How does the idea of transformation without elimination change your expectations of what it would mean for God to work redemptively in your experience?

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### What Should I Expect from My Friends?

When relationships are the source of our pain, there are twin errors we are tempted to believe. First, we can believe that the next relationship will be the answer. Second, we can believe that all relationships are so dangerous they must be avoided (or, at least, only engaged at a surface level). Third, we can vacillate between errors one and two. This section is meant to help you narrate healthier expectations for relationships.

### Presence More than Deliverance

Community is wonderful; it is not divine. Often loneliness and insecurity lead us to think that acceptance and compassion from others will make “everything better.” With this unrealistic expectation we either become disappointed in the benefits community can provide or demanding, thinking that people are not doing enough (because our struggle is not resolved).



One of the common patterns of codependency is to do more for others than is healthy or sustainable. Then, when our life crashes, we get upset that others – especially those we've helped – won't over extend in the same way for us. Inadvertently, our unhealthy life pattern becomes the standard that others must match in order to be considered "good" or "caring." We begin to impose our lifestyle on others through these expectations and subsequent expressions of hurt and disappointment.

**Read Galatians 6:1-5.** To allow others to care for you is to create an opportunity for them to "fulfill the law of Christ (v. 2)." Because this is a one-another-command it should be mutual. You should be looking for ways to bless those who are blessing you. The goal is not to become dependent upon their help, because it is God's design that "each will have to bear his own load (v. 5)." As you strive to bless those who bless you, you will balance out the care provided to/by you and foster a healthy relational environment that is the antithesis of codependency.

Question: Is your tendency to expect too much from or share too little with friends?

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### Two-Way Love and Service

Broken relationships breed the habits of imbalance. When we've been taken advantage of for years, we can either take on the role of care-giver or feel entitled to care only in relationships not marked by dysfunction. Either way, our expectations (another way of saying the "script" in which we're living) are going to perpetuate brokenness.

Hopefully, at this point in the journey, you can begin to look at your relational habits and take a more honest inventory of how balanced your expectations of others are. Chances are you will have to expect more / excuse less in some people (i.e., relationships marked by dysfunction) in order to not over rely / be fake with other people (i.e., healthy relationships).

**Read Proverbs 11:25.** In God's relational ecology he accounts for the care of all by calling on everyone to care for others. Relationships should be like the transference of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals. What one breathes out the other takes in for life. Too often, we allow the effects of sin to cause us to grow cynical to this cycle (as if there was an alternative) and everyone begins to relationally suffocate. We become good relational ecologists, not by "looking out for number one," but by fostering an environment that contributes to the flourishing of all.

**Question:** How balanced are the relationships in the support network you began establishing in step one? How can you better set them up to be a long-term sustainable, relational eco-system? \_\_\_\_\_

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### A Call to Engage Common Pleasures

Friends are an excellent "excuse," in the best sense of the word, to enjoy life. Often, in the midst of relational discord, we become so focused on making things better that we fail to enjoy what is already good. A good meal, a good conversation, a good round of golf, or a good time shopping can be enjoyed even while other stressors are being addressed. The presence of a friend can give us a reason and the needed focus to enjoy these common pleasures. As we've already emphasized, savoring simple pleasures is an important part of not living in bondage to dysfunctional relationships.

**Read Proverbs 17:22.** If this is true, then why do we not more frequently take this "good medicine"? One of the primary reasons has to be isolation. A person alone in their unhealthy relationships will find little time for life's simple pleasures. We quickly begin to live as if this medicine "is not for us." This is not about being an extrovert, but a recognition that the passivity-paralysis of shame related to addiction or abuse often stifles out the pleasures of life. A friend's presence is an excellent reminder that it is good for us to enjoy these common pleasures again.

**Question:** What are the common pleasures you need to initiate more with your friends?

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### Where Am I?

Confidence in your ability to accurately interpret your relational surroundings is important. After prolonged relational hardship it can begin to feel like your assessment of your relationships is either too optimistic or too pessimistic; either you're trying to convince yourself everything is fine or looking for the pending source of danger. The result is either a fluctuating sense of mistrust or blind-trust that makes rest seem very difficult.

## In a Dangerous World

Hardships do not make our world more dangerous than it was before; it opens our eyes to dangers of which we were once blissfully ignorant. The beauty of ignorance is that it allows us not to ask certain vexing questions. The question now becomes both, how do we see what we know is possible (avoiding denial) and not see danger when it is not present (avoiding the temptation to become controlling)?

We don't “unsee” it through willful denial. Willful denial is a means of silencing your own voice. We know when we've just taken the batteries out of our relational smoke detectors, and silence no longer brings peace. Instead, acknowledge and gauge the danger that is around you, while not labeling any danger or uncertainty as “code red.” Part of the journey to peace of mind after major hardship is re-establishing more degrees on your relational safety thermometer.

This can be done by asking yourself two questions, “What is the actual level of concern my situation warrants? What is an appropriate response to this level of concern?” It may take a while to be satisfied again with situationally-appropriate responses. But learning to accept and respond to day-to-day levels of danger is better than fluctuating between the all-or-nothing responses of denial-and-panic.

**Read Matthew 10:16-24.** Notice that Jesus goes out of his way not to minimize the dangers his disciples would experience. Reading his descriptions may even be unsettling. In response to these, Jesus calls his disciples to be “wise as serpents” (v. 16). Knowing and assessing the danger, Jesus wanted his disciples to take appropriate pre-cautions. Yet this vigilance, not hypervigilance, should still leave them “innocent as doves” (v. 16). There is an awareness of danger that does not rob us of peace. Likewise, there is a sense of trust that does not make us passive or naïve. Whether you feel like you consistently live in that spot now or not, know that God does not expect you to live alternating between bracing and pretending.

Question: What evidences have you seen of your ability to live in the relational space between bracing and pretending?

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## You Are Not Alone

This merits repeating. We can feel alone because (a) we don't think anyone understands or (b) because we don't feel like we have anyone to talk to. This study is designed to counter both of those isolating narratives. Hopefully in this study you have found vocabulary and concepts that make sense of your experience. Whereas, before, you might have felt unable to articulate your challenges and that was part of what made you feel like you were “crazy;” now you can invite someone into your journey. Allowing Christian friends to support you is what it means to experience the Body of Christ.

“The cross doesn't answer all of our questions about human suffering, but it assures us of God's compassion for human misery (p. 176)... Those who suffer often feel isolated and disconnected from others. They often feel no one really understands what they are experiencing... The beauty of the cross is that it connects Jesus with our suffering, particularly the suffering produced by abuse (p. 176).” Steven R. Tracy in *Mending the Soul*

Also, this study provides you with a resource you can use to educate those close to you on how to support you. Sometimes we avoid people, not because we think they don't care, but because we don't think they will understand. The thought of being the educator about our experience before we can be supported on our journey is exhausting. By merely asking someone to study this material along with you, you can avoid being stuck in this dual role.

**Read Romans 12:15 and I Corinthians 12:14-26.** God does not call allowing others to care for you “being a burden;” instead God views it as “being part of his body, the church.” God made us to live in community so that our pain could not exist without affecting others. God did this as a means of protecting his people and ensuring their care in hard times. These passages are more descriptions of the kind of relational balance we are seeking to establish after a prolonged time living in relational imbalance because of addiction, abuse, or comparable struggles.

**Question:** What are the experiences of being less alone that you've already begun to experience? How can you tell that these relationships are remaining balanced in the level of care given and received?

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## On a Journey

When the scenery is changing, it can be hard to get your bearings. As you come to understand your destructive relationships better, you are changing. As you change, you begin to relate differently. As you relate differently, the relationship changes; sometimes giving resistance, sometimes improving. All of this change likely feels a bit disorienting.

Rarely is any journey all good or all bad. There are times of action and times of waiting; times of change and times of stagnation; times of positive anticipation and times of dread. If you feel these conflicting emotions (ambivalence), that doesn't mean you're losing your mind; it means you are on a real life journey for which the destination is unknown.

**Read Psalm 23.** Notice that this well-known psalm depicts a journey of a sheep with the Good Shepherd through perilous times to a place of safety. The sheep, with whom you are invited to identify, travels through barren country where skill is needed to find green pastures and water (v. 1-3) and traverses dangerous places where the terrain is unsafe and a staff is needed to protect against predators (v. 4) before coming to the place God had prepared for them to dwell (v. 5-6). Imagine the doubt and fears the sheep experienced along the way. Realize that the hope of the sheep was not in its surroundings, but in its companion.

**Question:** How does understanding your experience as a journey help you not feel as lost or dismayed in moments that are disorienting or feel like a regression?

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## Is Love Worth Pain?

This is one of the big narrative questions of relational turmoil. If love can leave me vulnerable again, is it worth it? After abuse, neglect, and manipulation we begin to believe that not bracing against impending doom is naïve. This leaves us with a façade of safety, but not much hope. While there is only one healthy answer to this question, after major relational hardships it is normal to consider writing the rest of our life story without such vulnerability.

“Remember wrongs so that you can protect sufferers from further injury, remember them truthfully so as to be able to act justly, and situate the memories of wrong suffered into the narrative of God's redemption so that you can remember and hope rather than despair (p. 115).” Miroslav Volf in *The End of Memory*

## Absolutely Yes!

Maybe you're not convinced this answer deserves an exclamation point. That is okay at this stage in our journey. But it is important that we understand that “progress” after relational hardship will require loving, in the form of trust, again. Think of trust as a good friend who we've grown to doubt because of our hurt. Trust may feel like the person we are intimidated by because we believe trust “is too good to be our friend.” Even though we may have acknowledged we were wrong about trust, we still must allow ourselves to rely on this friend again before things will fully be “made right.”

How does this happen? Like it does in any other relationship. Acknowledge to God your hesitancy to rely on trust and allow the tenderness of his response to prove his faithfulness merits your trust. Begin to allow yourself to trust in “small” areas of your life with safe people and stretch yourself to hope in increasingly larger areas of your life. Realize that God is willing to take this journey to restored trust with you at whatever pace you can bare.

Because relational drama usually comes “all at once” it can be harder now to think about trusting in smaller, incremental areas of life. We allow drama to force our life into all-or-nothing categories, and because we do not feel like we can be completely trusting, we begin to think we cannot trust at all. God is not that impatient or demanding. Don't allow the theme of trust to be sucked into the all-or-nothing narrative that drama would want to create for it.

**Read Romans 5:1-5.** Don't feel rushed by this passage. Even if its conclusion does not represent where you are, it reveals where God plans to take you. This passage represents the promise that guarantees our answer to the question “is love worth the possibility of pain” can be “yes!” Notice there is a journey: endurance (we don't think we can make it) to character (a growing confidence in God's faithfulness) to hope (a confidence in God's faithfulness that can become contagious to others) to the removal of shame (our fear and despair no longer carry a sense of stigma, but are a marker of God's tender grace). Wherever you are on this journey, simply continue to take the next step.

**Question:** What are some of the “small areas of life” in which you could begin to live with greater trust? How would a growing sense of trust in these areas boost your morale for the rest of the journey ahead?

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### But It's Okay to Doubt and Believe

Belief and doubt are not mutually exclusive. Like the person who is shoveling their driveway after an ice storm can sweat, so a person with assurance that “love is worth the possibility of pain” can still have doubts. The dominant experience of cold does not prevent the temporal experience of heat; likewise the dominant theme of trust does not preclude seasons of doubt.

It might be easy to work through step-work material like this and think that life should be a steady, uninterrupted progression towards trust and hope. If that is your expectation, then each intrusion of fear about relationships or codependent habits will feel like a relapse (borrowing from addiction language).

What does this mean at the practical level? It means you can listen to your doubts without fear that they mean you're back at step one. It means you can learn from your doubts without feeling like you've betrayed God. It means you can doubt your doubts, seeing them as a subplot of your story instead of the main story, without being a hypocrite. It means doubt does not have to be as dangerous as it feels when you handle it in the overarching story of God's care for you.

**Read Mark 9:14-29.** As you read, let verse 24 be the apex of the story; where the father says to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Notice there is no rebuke from Jesus towards the father. This belief-with-acknowledged-doubt was enough. As you seek to cling to these themes of a gospel narrative against the suffering scripts you articulated in step four, this prayer is all God expects of you as well. Rest in the fact that you don't need perfect faith, but merely honest faith that clings to God even during the dark times of doubt.

**Question:** How would this relationship to doubt change the hard times when you just want to give up? How is being vulnerably honest with God about your doubts its own form of faith in God's care for you?

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### What Am I Living For?

Whenever a struggle is prolonged, it can begin to define our life. The longer we battle relational turmoil the more we can measure “a good day” exclusively on the basis of what the other person does or does not do. This distorts how we think about life. We should not surrender the quality of our days to another person. The points about purpose and meaning below are meant to help counter-act this tendency.

#### The Same Things Differently

This is an extension of the you-as-unchanged script. In Step 9 you will spend more time reflecting on this, but at this stage in your journey, realize that anything that was important or enjoyable to you before is still viable. What talents did you enjoy expressing? What causes brought you joy to advance? What activities added energy and vitality to your life?

Now you may enjoy these things differently. The poet may find new themes emerging in his poetry. The runner may find new significance in the endurance required in a long run. The caretaker may see those she cares for with new eyes. The leader may have new appreciation for the challenges of those being led.

Too often, however, life-changing experiences like major relational turmoil are believed to change everything. This need not be the case, although it's not bad if certain interests do change. Allow yourself to re-engage your previous interests. Be open to new perspectives on the same interests. If the interest is no longer satisfying or feels tainted beyond enjoyment, grieve that loss.

**Read Philippians 3:1-11.** This may seem like an odd passage for this section, but notice that both before and after his conversion Paul was a leader. His cause radically changed, but his interest did not. This is the typical pattern for life-changing events in Scripture. Often the disposition and interest of the person does not change all that radically. God takes that same person, with the same personality and same skill sets, but uses them in a new way. They were both “a new person” and recognizable. No one would have been surprised to see Paul being a leader at whatever he did and Paul would not have enjoyed life doing anything but being a leader.

**Question:** What are things you enjoyed or were passionate about before? What did you enjoy about them? How has that changed? How do you see God using your personality and gifting at this time?

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## And Maybe Some New Things

This is an extension of the you-as-changed script. Major challenges have a way of showing us what really matters. Doubtless, some things that were really important to you before seem trivial now; making room for new interests. Other things that you took for granted are probably now treasured; requiring more time than you gave them before.

Unlike most of the other changes experienced as you assess the effect of living in broken relationships, these changes are almost universally considered "good." When we begin more intentionally to arrange our priorities, the things that we choose to give our attention to are generally the "most important things."

If this theme results in significant changes for you, don't spend much time repenting or regretting your misguided priorities before. Repent and then begin to live a life investing in the things that are most important. Don't allow this redemptive theme to become a reason to get stuck in regret.

**Read II Corinthians 1:3-5.** Let your focus be on the phrase "in any affliction" (v. 4). Realize that God comforts us in order to equip us to care for others, but what we learn about God and his care in our affliction is not limited in its application to only similar afflictions. As you begin to consider what the next stage of life holds, do not allow your relational hardships to be a limiting factor on your considerations; centralizing these challenges in your life story in a new way. You may choose to make helping people in similar relational contexts part of your life calling, but let it be because it is the best fit for how God has equipped you and not because you feel like it is a necessity of honoring God in light of your personal history.

**Question:** How have you seen your interests and passions change as a result of your difficult relationships? Which of those changes are good? What new interests or priorities have emerged?

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**Summary Reflection:** As you have worked through this chapter what would you say are the most important aspects of your story that you are beginning to see differently? As you begin to embrace those things as the accurate interpretation of your relational struggles, how do you anticipate that changing your characteristic patterns of relationship?

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"We're more than what we have suffered, and that is the reason we can do something with our memory of it – integrated into our life story, turn it into a junction from which we set out on new paths, for instance (p. 80)...All three elements of the healing of memories – a new identity, new possibilities, and an integrated life story – drew their basic content from the memory of the Passion understood as a new Exodus, a new deliverance (p. 103)... Wrongdoing does not have the last word. If we remember a wrongdoing – no matter how horrendous – through the lens of remembering the Exodus, we will remember that wrongdoing as a moment in the history of those who are already on their way to deliverance (p. 108-109)." Miroslav Volf in *The End of Memory*

"We do not need for all of our life to be gathered and rendered meaningful in order to be truly and finally redeemed... No need to take all of our experiences, distinct in time and bind them together in a single volume so that each experience draws meaning from the whole as well as contributes meaning to the whole. It suffices to leave some experiences untouched (say, that daily walk I took to school in the second grade), treat others with the care of a healing hand and then abandon them to the darkness of non-remembrance (say, the interrogations by Captain G.), and gather and reframe the rest (say, the joy in the struggle of writing this book) (p. 192)." Miroslav Volf in *The End of Memory*

### Encouragement Focus (GOSPEL STORY):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- What are the healthy themes of the gospel that you most need to assimilate into how you make sense of your relational hardships?
- Are you able to identify the specific times in your life when you most need to allow these new interpretations to penetrate your thinking, emotions, and choices?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 7

### “Functionally Relating Within Dysfunction”

IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.

**“I can now see that innocence and powerlessness are not the same thing.  
I used to think ‘it was not my fault;’ was the same as ‘there is nothing I can do.’  
My old suffering story came with a way of life that I lived.  
The new story, identity, and beliefs that come with the Gospel  
allow me to actively live differently without giving into the old false shame or regret.  
I can change [describe how] without a sense of condemnation [describe why].”**

**Memorize:** Jeremiah 17:5-8 (ESV), “Thus says the Lord: ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Cursed” – Is this how you have felt? Over-relying on people leaves us vulnerable, because the best of us are sinful.
- “Trusts in man” – This passage is not condemning all trust, but when we rely on people to be our strength and security.
- “Shrub in the desert” – The result is that we feel perpetually depleted and completely dependent for any “water.”
- “Blessed” – There is an alternative. This chapter is a practical picture of trusting God in long-term broken relationships.
- “When heat comes” – Notice the blessing of wise relating does not remove the periodic season of drought and hurt.

#### Teaching Notes

“Antibiotics have a helpful effect on strep throat, but they didn’t cause it. You can help, but you’re not to blame for the problem and you’re not responsible for the outcome. You’re only responsible for trying in the ways that you choose to try (p. 140).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“What often stops us from taking responsibility or ownership in a situation is that we don’t see our choices, or perhaps more truthfully we don’t like our choices (p. 134)... We learn to live differently by living differently, not by thinking about living differently (p. 126).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“The louder and angrier the borderline gets, the quieter and more composed the other person should become, thereby refusing to collaborate in aggravating the emotional atmosphere, and spotlighting the comparative outlandish intensity of the borderline’s rage (p. 129).” Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus in *I Hate You – Don’t Leave Me*

“When we remember that our real enemy is Satan, we do not do good in order to get our spouse to change; we do good so that we are not overcome by evil (referencing Romans 12:21) (p. 70).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“By tolerating what you can’t change right this second, you can avoid adding suffering to what is already painful (p. 105)... Tolerating distress when it is not really an emergency (and staying calm when it is) creates time and space to consider options and act in ways that are more likely to help (p. 110).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“Because codependent behaviors protected us, letting go of them can feel frightening at first (p. 11).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“[Forgiveness] doesn’t mean I approve of the person’s actions. It just means I simply acknowledge my feelings, stop replaying the event in my mind, and give up the idea of revenge or punishment (p. 51).” Pia Mellody in *Facing Codependence*

“The fear of the Lord simplifies life (p. 228).” Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small*

### Embedded Study

One of the biggest challenges in identifying goals for combatting the effects of codependency is to be active without accepting false guilt or distorting how you allocate responsibility for change again. It is easy to think if there is something I can do that would be more effective than what I have been doing, then if I had been doing it all along everything would be fine.

In order to help you avoid this mindset, we will order the strategies for relating more healthily in a progression that builds from intrapersonal strategies (inside of you) to interpersonal strategies (between you and the other person). The intent is to reinforce the idea that you can get healthier even if the other person does not and that their possible resistance to change does not have to be interpreted as your personal failure.

- |                        |                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Gaining Perspective | 3. Alleviating Emotional Triggers |
| 2. Building Resilience | 4. Growing Positive Influence     |

As you learn from and practice each strategy, pray that God will use it for restorative purposes in the life of your loved one. Ask God to soften their heart towards their need to change and provide them the courage to vocalize their need to change.

But, just as fervently, pray that God will give you the strength to continue on your journey towards healthier relational patterns whether your loved one is cooperative or not. If distance is created by your healthier choices, that is not “turning your back” or “leaving them behind.” Instead, it is you removing your cooperation with their dysfunction and pioneering a healthier life as an invitation for them to follow your example as you follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

**Note:** The relational restoration methods advised in this step presume that safety has been restored to the relationship. Until your loved one has taken the steps to acknowledge their destructive patterns and evidence change, then you should (a) only seek to implement those components of this chapter that pertain to your personal-emotional well-being, or (b) apply the interpersonal strategies to relationships that were unduly harmed by the mistrust developed because of your abusive-addictive relationship. Until safety is honored, then restoration is not wise or possible.

### Gaining Perspective

This entire journey has been about gaining perspective. Things that once seemed hopeless and overwhelming, hopefully, now only seem difficult and frustrating. If things are not good, then “gaining perspective” does not mean generating a falsely positive perspective on them. Rather, it means having an accurate perception of the situation and, based on that accurate assessment, identifying what you can (and can’t) do to be a positive influence on the situation.

We will consider how to gain perspective with two approaches. The first is to allow consequences. We place this one first because we do not want the active-approach of the second strategy – process for problem solving – to take you back into the mentality of trying to solve problems over which you have no jurisdiction (i.e., being controlling or feeling powerless).

1. **Allowing Consequence:** Before exploring this subject further and to assess how much you’ve already grown in the course of this study, define the two concepts below in your own words.

Allowing Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_

Punishing: \_\_\_\_\_

Come up with recent examples for:

- When you allowed consequences for unhealthy actions in the life of a loved one
- When you unhealthily resorted to punishment for undesired choices in the life of a loved one
- When someone wisely allowed consequences in your life, but you were tempted to view it as punishment

The first part of gaining a healthy perspective on an unhealthy situation is rightly assessing (a) what you are responsible for and (b) what you can influence. The practical expression of these two realizations is the willingness to allow negative consequences for those actions that you are not responsible for; meaning you do not have adequate influence to change in a healthy way (i.e., without reverting to controlling or over-compensating behaviors).

**Read Luke 15: 11-32.** Make a list of all the consequences the father allowed. Make a list of all the unwise choices the father allowed his adult child to make. This is a parable, so there was not a real father talking to a real son who had real conversations from which we could get a literal transcript of the dialogue. But we see in this parable, in how the drama is set up, a willingness of God to honor our autonomy even when it hurts us and breaks his heart. Notice the balance in

the father’s response – he is neither closed off to the son’s repentance, nor trying to rescue his son from the consequences that would eventually bring him to repentance.

You are healthily allowing consequences when:

- You were willing to be available for advisement and accountability *before* the destructive choice
- It was reasonable for your loved one to have known that his/her choice would result in negative consequences
- You take no delight in and do not add to the suffering of your loved one for his/her choice
- You remove yourself from situations when you become a target for outbursts about the consequences and, thereby, become a distraction from the potential redemptive benefits of those consequences.
- You remain willing to be available to help address life patterns that would prevent future bad choices

If you have done those things then all you can do is: (a) pray that God will soften your loved one’s heart towards their need for change, (b) think through healthy problem solving approaches – see below – with the indirect influence you have, and (c) continue to enjoy your life so you do not become an emotional hostage to your loved one’s choices.

2. **Healthy Process for Problem Solving:** Pause and consider, “What was your old model of relational problem solving?” Chances are it was reactive and trying to make everyone happy. While these are generally ineffective ways to make decisions, reflect on what you’ve learned in the first six steps and consider what your probability of success was.

Once you have settled your soul to be willing to allow consequences, then your problem solving approach can begin to be proactive and looking for the healthiest possible outcome (whether it makes everybody happy or not).

When your loved one brings you an urgent dilemma you should invite them to participate in the process outlined below. If they are unwilling to walk through a deliberate process that defines the problems and considers solutions, then they are not inviting you into a healthy conversation and you should remove yourself from the interaction.

More often, at least until your loved consistently acknowledges their need to change, this will be a process you and your support network engage together. Initially, forcing yourself to walk through these stages intentionally will be a helpful way to retrain your decision making habits. With time you should begin to notice that you approach emotion-laden decision less frenetically. This decision making process is modified and adapted from *Get Your Loved One Sober* by Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe (p. 126 ff; italicized text only).

- a. *Define the Problem:* Be as specific and concrete as possible. Focus on the behaviors of you and your loved one, along with their triggers, more than the emotional reactions. The quality of the description of the problem will go a long way towards determining how effective the other problem steps can be.

Vague, Emotion-Focused Definition: “She came home drunk and ruined the entire evening I had planned for us to enjoy. She ranted until I couldn’t take it and then I lashed out and watched television for the rest of the evening. When I shut down, she just kept drinking.”

Concrete, Behavior-Focused Definition: “She had a conflict with her mother and coped with it by stopping for a ‘drink to calm down’ on the way home. After the conflict, even before drinking, she forgot about our evening plans. She came home already mad, but only mildly buzzed (her sentences were mostly coherent and she was trying to tell me about the conflict). As soon as I smelled alcohol, I immediately allowed my disappointment to become the most important part of the evening and engaged an argument I knew would be unfruitful.”

Write a concrete, behavior focused description of your latest instance: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- b. *Brainstorm:* Come up with as many ideas as you can. Some of them will be ridiculous; providing little more than comic relief, but you are breaking out of the mentality of powerlessness. As you brainstorm, consider ideas that would influence the problem at each stage of its development (i.e., before the problem arose, at first awareness of the problem, during the middle of the problem, and after everything “returns to normal”).

Before: Block all calls from her mother, move to another country without cell phone access, send a text during the day talking about what I’m looking forward to in the evening, encouraging her to think about bad times to take a call from her mother, develop a habit of talking on the phone together as she comes home



**First Awareness:** Discipline myself to assess situations better before I react, create a list of indicators that give me a better idea of her level of drinking, have a better plan for what I will do when she is intoxicated so I am less prone to be reactive, know which friend I should talk to about my hurt so I don't feel like my choices are rant or silence

**Middle:** Threaten to go on a hunger strike if things don't change, establishing a ground rule (when she's sober) we will not try to have a difficult conversation unless we are willing to remain seated during the discussion, know where I would go if she follows me through the house after I try to get out of an unproductive conversation

**After:** Continue pretending that nothing happened, disrupt something that is important to her so she knows better how it feels, ask her to share with me her recollection of the argument, type out my recollection of the argument and invite her to write what she remembers differently if she unwilling to talk it out.

Brainstorm for the event you described above to begin the habit of thinking in these categories.

Before: \_\_\_\_\_

First Awareness: \_\_\_\_\_

Middle: \_\_\_\_\_

After: \_\_\_\_\_

- c. *Evaluate and Select Solution:* Now that you have options, you need to begin to weed them down to what you will actually implement. Begin by striking those ideas that are unrealistic, but it made you feel better to write them down. Then use the chart below (or at least the logic of its organization) to arrive at your best options.

Options	Probability of Effectiveness	Ease of implementation	Temptation to control	Temptation to enable	Now	Later
	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	Y / N	Y / N
	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	I to 10 Scale	Y / N	Y / N
<i>Text about end of day plans</i>	6	9	3	1	Y	
<i>Hunger Strick</i>	1	9	9	1	N	N

For each idea you want to assess how likely you believe it is to be effective and the amount of effort required implementing the idea. Unless there are temptation variables, you would want to choose the idea(s) that have the highest effectiveness score and lowest effort score.

You also want to evaluate whether each option would result in you controlling or enabling your loved one. If there is concern in either of these areas, you would want to consult with members of your support network before implementing the idea and, if you use the idea, while you implement it.

- d. *Try It and Track It:* Take your best ideas (criteria above) from your brainstorming list, make sure they are well defined, implement them for a defined period of time, and track the results.

Example: Because the drive home is a time when my wife frequently argues with her mother on the phone and becomes a temptation, I will call her on her drive home. I will do this for at least 4 weeks to see what it's impact and sustainability is like.

Example: When we have evening plans, I will text my wife notes about things I'm looking forward to in our time together as a way to serve as a positive reminder of our plans.

It should be noted, plans like these will be much more effective when there is acknowledgement of the problem and engagement in recovery. If there is not acknowledgement and cooperation, then the husband making these plans would need to weigh whether these actions were an attempt to control his wife even though the actions are constructive (remember, control is a motive, not an action).

- e. *Evaluate, Refine, or Try Another Idea:* As you implement the idea, evaluate how it works and how it could be refined. If it's not working (after a period of time long enough to make that assessment), scrap it and try another idea from your list.

Example: Initially this worked well and led to less conflict, but her mother began to feel shut out and was even more agitated when they finally did get to talk. We decided I would call three days a week and my wife would text me her stress level before leaving work to help identify the days that would be most beneficial for me to help her be “unavailable to talk” with her mom.

Example: This worked really well. Led to more flirty communication about things we were looking forward to and became a fruitful marriage enrichment practice; not just an addiction preventative strategy.

**Read Ephesians 5:15-18.** This section is all about “looking carefully at how you walk” so that you are not living “unwise, but wise” (v. 15). It requires forethought and assessment to determine how to “make the best use of your time” (v. 16). While the distinctions made in this section may seem very mundane, they are vital parts of spiritual and relational maturity (i.e., avoiding folly, v. 17). Even if your loved one is uncooperative, these are practices that you can begin to implement and know you are doing those things in your power to honor God with your life and in this relationship.

### Building Resilience

As we look at building resilience, the approaches in this section will form a sandwich: caution-freedom-caution. Healthy resilience, especially in the context of chronically broken relationships, requires both. Because you've lived in unhealthy relationships for an extended period of time, we will place the emphasis on caution.

However, caution alone leaves us feeling emotionally incarcerated. In order to be emotionally healthy, we must maintain the emotional freedom to be “nice” at whatever level of trust a given relationship currently merits. Without this freedom, a demeanor of suspicion begins to deteriorate all of our relationships and cause our lives to be marked by anxiety.

- I. **Wise Trust:** “Either you trust me or you don't,” is the epitome of an abusive-addictive, all-or-nothing statement. Whatever degree of trust you choose to give, and it is your choice, this decision should be made with a different mentality. Trust is something that develops. Wise trust grows as a relationship becomes more mutual and authentic.

The ten step progression provided below begins with a relationship at its most trust-broken point. Not all relationships will start at level one (most broken). As you read through this progression, two key questions to ask are, (a) “Where was I (or, should I have been) at the darkest point in this relationship?” and (b) “Where am I now?”

The wise progress you have already made should be a source of encouragement for the journey ahead. Unwise “progress” (moving too fast) should be a reminder that taking this journey well is better than taking this journey quickly.

The goal for this section is to help you see that even if you currently think, “I could never be at a ‘ten’ of trust again,” that there are many practical steps that can and should be taken between where you are and a “ten.”

Your goal should not be to regain a “level ten trust.” That would be an example of you taking responsibility for something that is not yours to control. Your goal should be to trust at the level that you're loved one's life makes it wise for you to trust. Trusting too much is not a virtue; it hurts both of you.

Movement through this progression will be a dance between your loved one's effort at change and your willingness to take relational risks. Your loved one's growth alone will not create trust without your willingness to take a relational risk. Your willingness to a relational risk alone without your love one's growth will not produce trust. The dance may not be one step by your loved one followed by one step by you. But unless both of you are moving, you're not dancing.

It should be noted, this progress is meant to represent “what is.” This progression represents how trust generally grows back after it has been damaged. The benefit is that it provides smaller steps towards what trust-restoration looks like, instead of one giant leap of faith.

- i. *Require Third Party Mediation:* At this level of trust-brokenness you do not feel safe to be with your loved one without someone else present. This is the stage in which your loved one has been actively resistant to acknowledging his/her need for change and responds aggressively (physically or verbally) to the subject. At this level of trust deterioration, you want to hear your loved one be honest about the extent of the problem with someone else (usually a counselor), so that you are not left alone to assess the level of ownership and wise next steps. As your loved one cooperates, you begin to trust your spouse vicariously through the trust that you build for the counselor. Willingness to get help becomes the basis for your trust.
- ii. *Listen and Require Validation:* Now you are willing to talk with your loved one in a one-on-one conversation, but you are skeptical of most everything he/she says. You don't believe your loved one. You believe facts. If your loved one has facts to back up with he/she says, you will trust that much and little more. This is a tedious way to communicate, but feels necessary in order to avoid greater pain. Any statement that is not factual (i.e., future promise, interpretation of event, expression of feeling, etc...) is viewed as deceptive, unsafe, manipulative, or insulting. As a pattern of validated facts emerge, you begin to trust that there is some commitment to live in reality and do the hard work of relational restoration.
- iii. *Listen and Require Less Validation:* At this stage in trust-restoration, listening to your loved one feels less like work. The rate at which you are searching for questions and processing information as you listen decreases. Giving the "benefit of the doubt" for things you are uncertain about is still unnatural and feels dangerous. Any statement that is incomplete or slanted too positively is assumed to be intentional deceit and creates a trust regression. As your loved one's statements prove to be majority accurate, the practical necessities of life create an increasing reliance upon your loved one. However, each time you notice this happening you may still feel anxious. At this stage, a track record of validity begins to be established and serves as the foundation for trust.
- iv. *Rely on Loved One Functionally:* Now you begin to "do life together" again. A process of basic life tasks (for instance, if married; budgeting, scheduling, transporting children, etc.) begins to be created or reinstated. This level of trust within a marriage feels very much like "living as roommates." In other relationships, it feels like a less bonded relationship than you previously had. The dissatisfying nature of this arrangement can often discourage continued growth, but this discouragement should be decreased by understanding where it falls in the process of trust restoration. The absence of crises due to addiction or abuse and the faithfulness in following through on basic life commitments now becomes the basis for trust.
- v. *Share Facts:* As you functionally "do life" with your loved one, there is the opportunity for you to begin to share more of you again. To this point you have been receiving information much more than giving information. You begin the process of "giving yourself" in the relationship again. You allow yourself to be known at a factual level. Questions that start with "Why" or "How come" may still be met with defensiveness. During this stage questions that start with "Would you" become more comfortable as you allow your loved one to influence the "facts" (for instance, schedule) of your life again. Your loved one's honoring the limits of this burgeoning trust becomes the basis for assessing that it is wise to trust more.
- vi. *Share Beliefs:* As you become more comfortable sharing facts, that naturally leads into sharing what you think about those facts. Conversations become more meaningful as you share more of what you like, dislike, agree with, disagree with, and want from the events of life. You can now talk about the way you believe things "should" be without a tone of judgment, sadness, or guilt overpowering the conversation. As you share your beliefs, you feel more understood and honored. At this stage, you and your loved one may have to relearn (or learn for the first time) how to have different opinions or perspectives while honoring the relationship.
- vii. *Share Feelings:* Up until this stage emotions have likely been "thrust at" or "shown to" more than "shared with" each other; loved one *at you* before the problem was acknowledged and you *at them* to try to get engagement towards change. At this level of trust you are willing to receive support, encouragement or shared participation in your emotions. An aspect of a "one another" relationship, mutual care, is emerging. You are beginning to experience your burden being reduced and your joys multiplied as you share them. The friendship or marriage is beginning to feel like a blessing again; like the reason you were willing to sacrifice so much to preserve it.
- viii. *Rely on Loved One Emotionally:* Now you find yourself able to relax when he/she is away. You are able to believe your loved one is transparent and sincere when he/she tells you about their experiences or shares with you how he/she is feeling. It is now the exception to the rule when suspicions arise within you about your loved one's motive for saying or doing something.

- ix. *Allow Your Loved One to Care for You:* Allowing your loved one to express appreciation or endearment has lost a sense of wondering what they’ve done or what they want. When your loved one offers to serve you, you no longer think he/she is doing an act of penance or is indebting you for something later. Your loved one’s efforts to bless you can be received as blessings rather than being treated as riddles to be solved or dangerous weights on the “scales of justice” that will be used to pressure you later.
- x. *Relax and Feel Safer with Loved One than Apart:* This is trust restored. Your love one’s presence has become a source of security rather than insecurity. Your loved one’s presence reduces stress in troubling circumstances. You find yourself instinctively drawn to them when something is difficult, upsetting, or confusing. Even when he/she doesn’t have the answer, their presence is its own form of relief and comfort.

**Trust and Ultimatums or Time Tables:** There is intentionally no pacing guide for this trust progression. In this regard, growing in trust requires trust. It is an act of faith not to say, “I’ll give it three months and if we’re not at level seven, then I’m done.” That kind of time-pressured environment stifles the growth of trust. Ultimatums are even more ineffective. When you try to make a deal (i.e., “Unless you stop [blank] or tell me [blank], then I am not moving to the next level of trust”) you undermine actual trust being built (i.e., “You only did that, because I made you”). Your goal in reading this progression is merely to gain an understanding of where you are in the development of trust. Efforts at artificially accelerating the process will ultimately do more harm than good.

“Threats or ultimatums haven’t worked in the past and learning newer ways to handle situations that use to confuse you is difficult in the beginning. By pacing your responses, you allow yourself time to gain perspective in an objective way, which distances you from personalizing the behaviors and empowers you to act in more effective ways. The addict acts out because of difficulty in relating to life in a responsible and adult fashion—not because of who you are (p. 71).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

- 2. **Freedom to Be “Nice”:** Being intentional about trust can easily make you feel guarded about being “nice.” Being guarded about being nice, can lead to feeling bad about yourself. Feeling bad about yourself, can lead to compromising on things that are wise (i.e., trusting) before it is wise. That is why this section is essential to the application of the previous section.

First we need to define the word in quotes. What does it mean to be nice? Being nice is being pleasant to another individual in ways that contribute to a pleasant emotional atmosphere without pretending real problems do not exist or taking relational risks (i.e., trusting) that are unwarranted.

By contrast, “enabling” is being pleasant to another individual in ways that foster continued dysfunction by pretending real problems do not exist or taking relational risks (i.e., trusting) that are unwarranted.

In this, you should see that the difference between niceness and enabling is not activity, but context and motive. With that in mind, use the chart below to help you grow in kindness towards your loved one. This kindness will extend your emotional resilience and create a context that is optimal for growth (if you loved one is cooperative).

Your goal is not to out-nice your loved one (as if “niceness” were a competition) or to be so kind that your loved one “has to” change (as if you had that much influence). Instead, your goal is to be intentionally kind, in ways that are situationally wise so that you leave your loved one without excuse for his/her needed changes and your conscience is clear if he/she chooses not to make their needed changes.

Now, use these three questions to help you discern whether the kind actions on the chart would be unproductive.

- 1) Am I using this form of kindness as a way to pretend that our relationship is in a better place than it really is?
- 2) Does this form of kindness bestow a level of trust that is unwise for my safety or my loved one’s recovery?
- 3) What forms of kindness would clearly be temptation towards enablement or control at this time?

If the answer to either of the first two questions is “yes,” then pray that God would move them to a place where this form of kindness would be wise. This protects your heart from becoming cynical and blesses them. If you are uncertain how to answer these questions, consult with members of your support network.

**Read Romans 2:4.** Reflect on this in light of the parable of the prodigal son. God is not lenient with sin (2 Peter 3:9). God is not mocked in any relationship (Galatians 6:7). Yet, it is God’s kindness that draws us to repentance. The previous section was about you modeling the firmness of God towards sin. This section has been about you modeling the kindness of God towards sinners. As you do this, remember you can only create an atmosphere that is ripe for

change. If you grow impatient towards your loved one, that likely means either you are trying to use kindness to compel change (well-intended manipulation) or that your level of trust has gotten ahead of their level of change.



## Expressions of Kindness

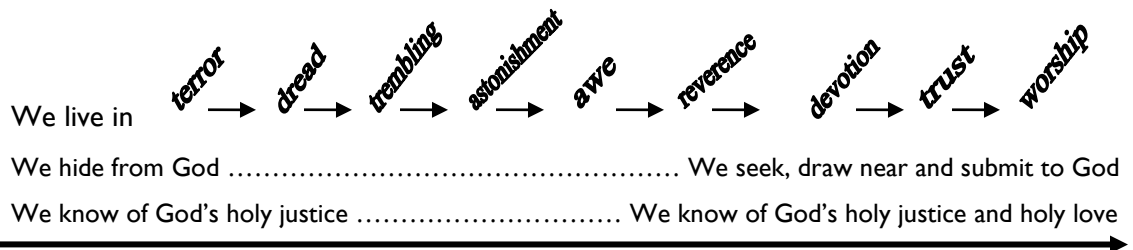


Expression of Kindness	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Communicated that I value our relationship							
Complimented something they did well							
Gave them a pleasant surprise as encouragement							
Listened when they were burdened							
Initiated a conversation in their area of interest							
Asked about an upcoming event in their life							
Offered to help without being asked							
Wrote a positive letter / note							
Talked about positive changes I've seen in them							
Participated in an event or hobby they enjoy							
Remembered a special day in their life							
Reflected on "good times" we spent together							
Read an article about their area of interest							
Made time to "just hang out" together							
Sent something I know would make them laugh							
Other:							
Other:							
Other:							
Other:							
Other:							

3. **Fear of the Lord:** What is it that allows us to wisely trust another person without allowing our muddled fear/desire to be kind to lead us into foolish choices? The fear of the Lord. It is the fear of the Lord that enables us to live in the space between foolish enablement and cautious distance.

Another way to ask this question is, “Whose agenda has both my best interest and my loved one’s best interest at heart?” God is the one who desires to redeem us both. God is the one who can sustain us both until we are ready to have our relationship restored. Relying on God as “enough” is what allows each of us to prevent our perceived needs from rushing relational restoration or writing off the possibility.

The diagram below from Ed Welch in *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (p. 97) provides a visual for what growth in the fear of the Lord looks like.



Trace your journey in the relationship(s) that prompted you to embark on this study through this progression. Chances are you will notice that your relationship with this other person(s) bordered on worship: whatever they said must be “right” and whatever they wanted must be “good,” so you bent your will accordingly.

When the other person was god (little “g”), then God was likely scary (far left on this spectrum), especially if the person with whom you had a toxic relationship quoted Scripture and appealed to God to justify their actions.

When you began this study, it required your acknowledgement that other person was actually the one who merited being responded to with terror, dread, or trembling (partially filling God’s role). That was the first part of the script that needed to flip. They had to get out of God’s rightful position in your life, in order for the seat to be vacant for God.

But that was only half of the change that needed to happen. In order for someone or something else not to tyrannically claim God’s rightful role in our lives, that seat must be occupied by God; which is what allows for the devotion-trust-worship end of the spectrum to be experienced. The throne of our lives will not remain vacant. If we do not continually place God there, then other things will claim the role and enact their dysfunctional (i.e., scary) reign.

**Read Proverbs 9:10 and Psalm 111:10.** Both these passages state, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs states it as a wisdom principle. Psalms makes it a matter of worship. It is only when the main thing (God) really is the main thing (our top priority and allegiance) that life works and our worship is pure. We all struggle to maintain this priority every day. Allow the diagram above to give you a visual measure for when a human relationship is beginning to take on a God-sized role in your life. Realize the most effective way to fight against this distortion happening in your horizontal relationships with people is to maintain your vertical relationship with God.

### Alleviating Emotional Triggers

Broken relationships, addictive or abusive, can have a traumatic influence on our lives. Trauma is marked by at least three primary symptom clusters.

- 1) **Intrusive Symptoms:** Thoughts and memories are intrusive when they enter our mind against our will and do not leave our mind when we want them to. Normal thoughts and memories we can pick up and put down as we wish. Not being able to control our own thoughts can make us feel “crazy” and out of control. Intrusive symptoms include things like nightmares, strong trigger responses, flashbacks and other anxiety responses that make it feel as if past events are controlling our thoughts and emotions in the present.
- 2) **Constrictive Symptoms:** Intense experiences can make common experiences feel muted in the same way that jumping on a trampoline makes jumping on the ground feel like you have concrete in your shoes or attending a rock concert makes normal conversations feel like people are whispering. These parallel the way that the spike experience of trauma changes our experience of day-to-day events and emotions. Constrictive symptoms include things like social avoidance, numb emotions, or experiences of dissociation.
- 3) **Hypervigilant Symptoms:** “Hyper” means elevated. “Vigilance” means watchfulness. Hypervigilance is an elevated sense of watchfulness and accounts for the generalized anxiety that often accompanies traumatic experiences. After a trauma, it is normal to want to ensure you are not surprised by another crisis. But this watchfulness can begin to negatively impact your ability to rest – physically, mentally, or emotionally; and it can create a sense of suspicion that impacts how you interpret the people and events around you.

If you resonate with these descriptions, it is recommended that you study the corresponding material (Step 7) in the “Post-Traumatic Stress” seminar in this series ([bradhambrick.com/ptsd](http://bradhambrick.com/ptsd)). That study provides multiple strategies to help you mitigate the effect of these responses to traumatic experiences.

Appendix C is an article that describes a process for gaining greater clarity and confidence in identifying your emotions. Often, after years of relating codependently, we either have a hard time naming or emotions accurately or lack confidence that our emotional responses are well-suited to the moment. Appendix C is meant to provide guidance for these struggles.

### Growing Positive Influence

One of the typical impacts of being in an unhealthy relationship is the habit of being reactive; merely responding to the crisis created by your loved one or trying to predict how to prevent the next outburst. The result is that your loved one begins to exert more influence over your world than you do.

“Yet by believing that she had no choice in the matter, she was not able to realize any of the self-respect or satisfaction we gain when we know we are making good or right choices (p. 107).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

This section looks at how you can begin to grow the amount of positive influence in the space and time you share with your loved one. Again, these approaches are not presented as having the force to coerce unwanted change in your loved one’s life.

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However, they can (a) prevent your loved one’s negative behaviors from having an undue influence on you and (b) create an environment that is more conducive for healthy behaviors.

We will consider this subject in two ways. First, we will describe four options for responding to problematic behaviors. Second, we will think through an approach to fostering desired behaviors.

- I. **Responding to Problematic Behaviors:** When your loved one behaves in a way that exemplifies the destructive patterns that prompted you to start this study (or in ways that demand unwarranted trust for their initial efforts at change), then you have four possible healthy responses. By this point in the study, these responses and the explanation of each should begin to feel fairly intuitive.
  - A. *Allow Natural Consequences:* This is not punishment (which we’ll discuss in a moment). It is simply you removing yourself as the buffer between your loved one and life. Unless doing so would unduly harm an innocent person, this response should be your new normal.
 

“People learn from the direct consequences of their actions. When it comes to negative consequences, you only have to step out of the way (p. 134)... We call this strategy ‘quiet confrontation’ because allowing natural consequences helps relocate the stress, frustration, and fight within your loved one, rather than between the two of you (p. 196).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*
  - B. *Ignore:* Some problematic behaviors are not worth addressing; addressing them would only give them more negative influence. Ignoring is particularly effective when there is reason to believe your loved one’s problematic behavior was engaged with the motive of punishing you. The most effective (and enjoyable) means of ignoring problematic behaviors is by engaging one of your personal interests.
 

“We can’t sell ignoring without a product label warning. Sometimes ignoring the behavior you don’t want results, initially, in an escalation of the behavior, a phenomenon called ‘behavioral burst.’ Bursts are often seen right before the behavior extinguishes, or stops altogether, and they are hard for everyone involved (p. 201).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“We don’t have to yell to show power. The more certain we are about our limits and our rights to have them, the softer we’ll speak (p. 38)” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*
  - C. *Punish:* Punishment should be the most seldom used strategy. Punishment tempts you towards controlling motives and allows your actions to become a distraction from the natural consequences of your loved one’s choices. The lack of punishment does not mean you allow your loved one to “get away with it.” Rather, it means you refuse to become enmeshed in a parental style relationship with someone for whom you do not (or no longer) play a disciplinary role.
  - D. *Withhold Reward:* Next we will look at the use of reward as a way of fostering an environment conducive to desired behaviors. This response is stronger than allowing natural consequences (because its volitional on our part) without crossing into punishment (adding to natural consequences). We want to be kind enough (previous section) that the removal of our kindness in response to abusive-addictive behaviors is felt by our loved one. This is part of the power of kindness.

**Read I Thessalonians 5:14-15.** First, notice that there are a variety of responses advocated for in response to problematic behaviors in this passage. We see that there is no one “biblical” response to problematic behaviors. The premise of this study is that the behaviors we are addressing fit in the “unruly, disorderly, disruptive” (depending on your translation) category. This study also presumes that initial appeals to admonish (verbally ask for change) were not received. The approaches above are meant to be next tier responses for how to continue to have influence with someone who persists in problematic behaviors without having their choices dominate your life.

2. **Fostering Desired Behaviors:** Part of being “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16) is endeavoring to create a context in which a godly life is as easy and desirable as possible to pursue. In the same way that we do not personally grow without intentionality, we will not create environments that foster the growth of others accidentally.

Below we outline a five step process for cultivating an environment which promotes a more godly, or at least healthier, life for your loved one.

- i. *Create a concrete list of concrete behaviors between how your loved one currently acts and what would be God honoring* (not exactly the same as “what you want”). All growth involves knowing what we want to become; not just

what we want to stop. Too often with destructive relationships what needs to stop is clearer than what needs to start. Behaviorally define the journey from terrible to bad to less bad to acceptable to good.

“A doable goal is put in positive terms – what will be done rather than what won’t. Here ‘positive’ doesn’t refer to your feelings or demeanor. It doesn’t mean ‘cheerful.’ For the purposes of goal setting we define a positive goal or communication by what you do want rather than what you don’t want (p. 146).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

In times when your loved one seems open to constructive conversation ask for the behavior that is “next” for them on their journey to honoring God in your relationship. If they are receptive, thank them for hearing you without defensiveness. If they are not, then use a responding to problematic behaviors strategy (see above).

“Simply asking permission to offer your thoughts can communicate respect for your loved one’s feelings before you say another word, and set a better stage for what follows (p. 167).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

- ii. *Be content with progress* (not just perfection). You have worked hard to get to this point in your journey. It is understandable for you to expect your loved one to work equally as hard. But your effort is not their standard. When you are not content with progress, then you reinforce the idea that your loved one will never get it right enough to please you and reinforce your own destructive script that the relationship is hopeless.
- iii. *Refuse to be a distraction for non-progress* (see – responding to problematic behaviors). One of the values of this study is that you should feel like there is plenty for you to work on while you prayerfully wait for your loved one to engage God on their journey. By engaging your own journey you are both serving as an example and refusing to be distraction for your loved one’s non-progress.
- iv. *Reward incremental progress* (with joy). It is easy for those who struggle with addiction or relate destructively to begin to believe that everyone is against them. Once we are free from feeling like we have to appease them to have stability in our world, we can consider how to counter this destructive narrative in their world.

Remember, we are not taking responsibility for their destructive actions or their change. But our response to their progress can foster a sense that additional effort at change would be “worth it.”

“The most common mistake people make in reinforcement is choosing rewards they would like rather than what’s most rewarding for the person they want to reward... The power of rewards to effect lasting change come from their integration into the fabric of your lives together, so they should be affordable and sustainable (p. 178).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

What are the rewards that your loved one would appreciate that would not involve enablement, denial, or undue relational risk on your part? \_\_\_\_\_

- v. *Creating a satisfying homeostasis that does not involve addiction / abuse* (creating a new, healthy normal). Over time and with your loved one’s cooperation, your actions can create a new homeostasis for your relationship. “Homeostasis” is a term from biology that refers to an environment in which an organism thrives.

If your loved one is not a believer, the trust-equity that is built during this process will create an opportunity for you to share more overtly about the motive behind your love (i.e., a response to Christ’s love for you that enabled you to endure the difficult season in the relationship and that you long for them to know).

When your negative response to their destructive choices can no longer be used as an excuse for their destructive-addictive choices, they will be left more bare before the eyes of God. You can be praying God would use this experience to open their eyes to their need for Christ.

**Read I Peter 2:13-3:6.** Often this is a scary passage for people in destructive relationships. It is interpreted to mean that the only biblical response to abuse is to endure it. Hopefully, at this point in your journey, you can both understand (a) that God does not call you to be a doormat for addiction and abuse and (b) that God’s call to undermine destructive patterns through quiet means is wise; more aggressive methods tend to only further destabilize the situation. The goal of this study has been that God would both restore your life from the effects of abuse or addiction and redeem your loved one from the snare of their sin. Whether the latter has



happened, you can rest knowing that you walked a journey that honored God, relied on His Word, and afforded your loved one every opportunity to change.

### Conclusion

What should you do with all this material? At first, probably nothing. Don't move fast. That reinforces the habits of being reactive that we're trying to offset. Mark the things that you think hold the most promise to be helpful for your situation. Then rest. Allow your soul to settle before you start to “do” anything.

As you begin to introduce some of these strategies to offset the impact of your suffering, consider beginning with an approach that you believe holds the most promise to provide relief. Give yourself permission to practice with each approach. Don't pressure yourself to “make it work.” Just get used to approaching the difficult moments differently.

In approaching the content of this step this way you are caring for yourself in a way that mirrors God's care for you. You are caring for yourself as a person instead of a performer. Get used to that. Enjoy it. Rest in it.

### Encouragement Focus (IDENTIFY GOALS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- Which of these strategies in this chapter do you believe hold the most promise to be beneficial? Why?
- What would be the primary indicators you are using the strategies of this step in a way that enables?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8

### “Contentment as I Continue to Grow”

PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

**“Some of the pain related to my relational history remains [describe] but it defines me less and less.  
But I am also experiencing more of what God has for me.  
I never knew life could include [list of experiences] again.  
I see now that God was not withholding these things from me, nor were they forfeited.  
I am learning to enjoy them without guilt, fear, or guardedness.  
I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than the absence of pain or sorrow.  
I am learning to trust and enjoy God in the rise and fall of my circumstances.”**

**Memorize:** Romans 5:3-5 (ESV), “More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through this Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Rejoice” – If you read the passage carefully, you’ll see we rejoice in the fruit of suffering; not the pain.
- “Endurance... character... hope” – In these words you can likely see the journey you have been on in this study.
- “Shame” – God is faithful not only to redeem the suffering but remove the shame associated with suffering.
- “God’s love... poured” – You may fill empty many times on this journey, but remember God’s supply is constant.
- “Holy Spirit” – This seal (2 Cor. 1:22) of God’s permanent covenant cannot be broken, as hard as life may have been.

#### Teaching Notes

“Sometimes when we put a stop to our own destructive habits, our relationships actually get worse (p. 142).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“Families often have an end goal of getting someone into treatment, but it is not the end of the road. Your work is not yet done. More hopefully: it’s not the first piece of change you’ve witnessed, and it won’t be the last. Treatment is part of the process, not the destination... The most important thing we can say about supporting your loved one’s treatment can be summed up in five words: *keep doing what you’re doing* (p. 247).” Foote, Wilkens, Koskane and Higgs in *Beyond Addiction*

“Something indeed was happening in David through his troubled marriage. God was teaching David personal lessons on how to grow and to become more and more like Jesus. God was teaching David how to be more loving, even when Julie didn’t love him in return. He was teaching David how to forgive, even when Julie never apologized. He was showing David how he could overcome evil with good and how to be content in all things. These things could not be learned from a book or in the context of marital bliss, but in hardship (p. 15-16).” Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*

“Progress happens each time you attempt to change the way you respond to a difficult situation. Whether your attempt is completely, partially, or not at all successful, having made the effort weakens the negative, unproductive habit pattern that you have practiced in the past (p. 92).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

### Embedded Study

New and normal are words that do not belong together. But that is precisely what step eight is all about, establishing a new normal. In steps 2-4, you looked at the things that created an unhealthy normal. In step 5, you grieved that these things were ever “normal” for you. In steps 6-7, you began to piece together a new, healthy normal. Now, in step 8, you will begin to rest in that new normal and allow it to solidify.

Unfortunately, prolonged relational dysfunction created a way of life that made it easy for us to wonder if “normal” could ever be good again. Hopefully that skepticism is beginning to fade by the time you’ve reached this point in your journey.

Realize, the phrase “new normal” seems to imply more intentionality than it actually requires. You do not need a spreadsheet with seven columns and twenty-four rows to itemize and color-code. As you live wisely, a new-healthy normal will happen. This chapter will be devoted to identifying the defining marks of this new normal so you can be comforted as this occurs.

The chapter will also include three other sections. First, we will look at how this new normal assimilates into your life story. This will be a place for you to summarize what you learned and how you have grown over the course of this study. You will seek to combine the narrative you built in steps four through six with the practices you implemented in steps seven.

Second, guidance will be provided to help you think through how to prepare to transition from your current formal helping relationship (i.e., support group, counseling relationship, or mentor relationship) into general small group ministry of your church for continued encouragement and growth. You are about to enter a new season of transition: from healing to living.

Third, consideration will be given to those who are considering divorce. “Overcoming Codependency,” as we have entitled this study, does not require ending relationships. But some participants may find themselves in marriages where the covenant has been repeatedly violated and there are no signs of willingness to honor it. This unfortunate reality requires guidance.

### Marks of a New Normal

The marks below are not portraits of what your new normal will look like. Each life is unique, so trying to create a list that would capture the new normal of every person would be impossible. Rather, the marks below capture the emotional, relational, and spiritual development that should be occurring as a new healthy normal emerges.

Many of these points are modified and adapted from H. Norman Wright’s book *Experiencing Grief* (bold text only, pages 79-80). At this stage in the process, re-engaging life after a prolonged relational hardship and processing grief are similar. Both involve beginning a new season of life after an event that significantly impacted your “life narrative.”

As you read through this list, do not view it as a to-do list. That would be the equivalent of a teenager reading about puberty as something he/she must accomplish. As you continue to live wisely, you will find these traits developing in your life.

Begin by marking with an asterisk ( \* ) those items that you have already seen occurring during your journey. Allow this to remind you of God’s faithfulness and give you confidence that those things that have not yet emerged will do so. Pray for those things that have not yet emerged and, each time one of these qualities appears, celebrate it as another fulfillment of God’s promise (Philippians 1:6).

**1. Treasuring the Lessons You’ve Learned from Your Journey through Codependency:** Pain is excellent at distracting us from things of value. You do not have to say that the lessons you learned are the “reason” God allowed you to experience the hardships we’ve discussed in order to see the value in what God has done on the journey. Doubtless you are stronger in many ways; your spiritual-emotional endurance muscles have been stretched. How could you not be a more compassionate person towards those whose life-struggles are hard to articulate, see, or overcome? You’ve learned a great deal about yourself and what it means to have faith in hard seasons of life.

**Read James 1:2-4.** Your experience of relational hardship qualifies as what James calls “various trials” (v. 2). How do we count it joy? Not by volunteering to do it again, but by giving the lessons we’ve learned as much emotional weight as the trial we endured. One does not have to be minimized to value the other. The lessons we learned and the character we developed are part, not the whole, of what God uses to bring us to the point of being “complete” (v. 4).

**2. Energy Level Returns to Normal:** For so long life was hard. Everything required effort, thought, and intentionality. Decisions felt overwhelming. Conversations were intimidating, superficial, or awkward. Sleep was hard, interrupted, or an escape. That is an exhausting way to live. With the establishment of a new normal you are coming out of that way of life. Rest can be rest again. Rejoice in this as an indicator of God’s faithfulness on this journey.

**Read Isaiah 40:27-31.** You have likely felt disregarded by God (v. 27) and this added to the exhaustion (v. 30), but you have waited faithfully for God and are experiencing His renewal (v. 31). It is after experiences like yours that we realize how much our energy level is a gift from God. We so often take it for granted as "ours" but even in our prime (v. 30) we can be wasted away by a life of suffering where God feels far away.

**3. Decision Making Becomes Easier:** Decisions are not simply made on the basis of principles. Decisions are influenced by mood, level of hope, stability of relationships, longevity of our current perspective (i.e., immediate relief vs. long-term benefit), and other dispositional variables influenced by our relationships. We can intuitively sense this impact and often become hesitant to make decisions; at least until decisions pile up and then we may become erratic-impulsive. The journey through this material should have helped you not only sort through your emotions, but your life as whole, so that decision making can become both more intentional and free.

**Read Isaiah 46:3-4.** It is in the reality of this passage that clear and wise decision making exists. During the experience of significant hardship we gain a first person experience of God's promises, "I will carry you... I will bear... I will save (v. 4)" and realize how much this has been happening since our birth (v. 3). An abiding awareness of God's care and guidance provides the foundation for good decision making. We no longer feel compelled to over-compensate in our striving for these things that are already ours in Christ. Further, having come to this knowledge through suffering, we know ourselves better and are able to make decisions more clearly within the passions and interests with which God created us (Psalm 37:4).

**4. Appetite and Sleep Cycle Return to Normal:** One of the more profound ways suffering impacts our lives is by creating a sense of chaos. One of the indicators the effects of suffering are abating is a return of rhythm. While you may never be (or want to be) an "organized-scheduled person," having biological rhythms of sleep and metabolism (key influencers on the body's health) are important factors in emotional regulation. When your body knows when it will receive rest and appropriate nutritional supplies it can be much more of an ally in your recovery.

**Read Psalm 4:6-8.** After major hardships we are the ones who asked the question of verse 6. Now we bear the testimony of verses 7 and 8. We see that enjoying a good meal and the ability to enjoy good sleep are very God-dependent blessings. We now can savor them for what they were meant to be all along. Verses 7 and 8 would be good passages to memorize and use in your prayers before meals and before bed.

**5. Able to Enjoy Time Alone:** Solitude has long been recognized as an important discipline in the life of a Christian (see Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* chapter 7). After major relational hardship being alone with one's thoughts can be a frightening experience. At this stage in our journey, the gift of solitude is returned to us as a blessing and we are better able to treasure this gift. If you have struggled with being alone even before your difficult relationship(s), then consider reading Richard Foster's chapter on solitude. It contains several pages reflecting on the benefits of solitude during a "dark night of the soul."

**Read passages about Jesus and solitude:** Matthew 4:1-11, 14:13 and 23, 17:1-9, 26:36-46; Mark 1:35, 6:31; Luke 5:16, 6:12. In His full humanity, Jesus regularly sought solitude as a source of strength. How much more do we need to do the same? It is during this time of establishing a new normal that it would be wise to evaluate how healthy and balanced your practice of spiritual disciplines are. It may be a while before life is as moldable again. If you are unsure what this would look like, then either Foster's book or Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* would be very a useful read.

**6. Begin Looking Forward to Events:** While battling the effects of relational turmoil you had to remain tenaciously rooted in the present. You didn't know what your loved one might do or how they might respond. But an indicator that you are entering a new phase of life is losing your fear of the your loved one's response and gaining the ability to prepare for the future in a way that is not merely accommodating their reactivity. Now you look to the future with intentionality and believe that your choices can influence it for the better.

**Read Philippians 3:12-16.** This passage is often misapplied for suffering. Paul is not laying out a principle of forgetting the past or living in denial about painful events. In Philippians 4:9 Paul asks this church to remember how he handled his unpleasant experiences of anxiety while with them. In Philippians 4:12 Paul remembers being "brought low" and being hungry and in need. The principle is that the pain of our past should not become a mental block to pursuing the mission of our future. At this stage in the process you should begin to sense that turning of perspective within your own heart.

**7. Able to Use Your Experience to Comfort Others:** Initially, sharing the load of someone else’s relational hardship might have only served to magnify our own. When our suffering is intense, we can become pain-saturated. Our goal, at that time, is to process our own experience wisely. At this stage you will experience God’s comfort in a way that begins to make the challenges of others less overwhelming. You can relate to their pain and have a real sense of empathy to let them know God will not allow them to drown in their hardship. You do not have answers for all their questions—their relationships likely have features yours did not—but you have a testimony about the Shepherd of their journey and what it was like for you to walk with Him on your journey.

**Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.** Notice the time lapse implied in this passage. God comforts us. He is our Father of mercies and God of all comfort in any affliction we face. Pause, with no time table for how long this part of the process lasts. So that we can testify to God’s comfort to others in whatever affliction they face. The pause is essential to the comfort. If we think God has put us “on the clock” to get “a return on His comfort investment” in us, then we would not feel like we had much comfort to offer. Once we experience God’s patience before the “so that” (v. 4) we begin to share abundantly in Christ’s comfort (v. 5).

**8. Freedom to Worship Returns:** After suffering, worship can feel like a charade; the epitome of hypocrisy. The joy implied in the word worship may have been notably absent for an extended period of time. As the gospel story becomes the foundation for our new normal, we realize our hardship serves to remind us of the general hopelessness of the human condition. In worship, we begin to celebrate that there is hope for the emotional chasm we experienced to be closed. We realize afresh that we only experience emotional darkness as darkness because God made us to experience the full joy of his presence; we only find repelling those things that are contrary to our created design.

**Read Psalm 23.** This Psalm traces the journey of many in emotional turmoil from when worship is hard and painful (v. 1- 4) to when it becomes a source of joy and strength again (v. 5-6). Be reminded that God put this Psalm in His Word to comfort you wherever you are on this journey. It is the psalmist’s reflection upon his salvation (v. 5) which allows him to sing and see that God has dealt bountifully with him (v. 6). This is because it is in the gospel that we see God agreeing with our assessment of sin’s influence (via the addiction and abuse of our loved one) in our life to such a degree that he brought the ultimate remedy to the ravages of sin in our world.

**9. Sense of Humor Returns:** Proverbs 14:13 can be the testimony of many, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.” We feel like suffering made our laughter hollow or “just polite.” Humor is built upon irony and proportionality. Abuse and addiction tend to flatten or over-inflate the meaning of everything to the point that humor dies. But we serve a God who used joy as His motivation to conquer death (Heb. 12:2). Our God truly gets the last laugh (Psalms 2:4) and our laughter can echo His victory. Without the gospel any laughter would be a form of denial. In light of the gospel, our pain becomes what is temporary (2 Cor. 3:16-18) and our joy is eternal. The return of our sense of humor then becomes an expression of healthy faith rather than an unhealthy distraction.

**Read Psalm 30:5.** God does not use his victory as a reason to forbid our sorrow. God is not a temperamental, insecure king who only allows happy people in His presence. God allows us to grow—not only in character, but also in our emotions—into what He has made for us to be. We find repeatedly in Scripture that God did not become impatient with our reaction to abuse or addiction just because He conquered sin and death.

**10. New Relationships are Built:** It is hard to build new relationships while you’re in the thick of the battle with the effects of broken relationships. Your choices do not seem fair: (a) be honest and allow your emotions to be at the forefront of your new friendship, or (b) be fake and allow the relationship to build in a way that seems disingenuous. However, at this stage, you should begin to feel like you are in control enough that two things can happen: (1) you are emotionally free enough to show genuine interest in others without it being a form of escape, and (2) you have a sense of who you are that is separate enough from your difficult relationship that these experiences can be introduced into new friendships when it is natural and allows for appropriate encouragement-support.

**Read Proverbs 27:9.** This proverb connects new friendships with the presence of joy. It also connects the sweetness of friendship with “earnest counsel.” This is the balance you should be seeing in your new relationships. The friendships are sparked by mutual interests that create a sense of connection. But these relationships are also vulnerable enough that each of you is able to speak into the other’s areas of struggle. Hopefully the authenticity you learned walking through this material with a group or counselor provided an example of how good these kinds of relationships can be.

**11. Experience Peace Even During an “Emotional Bump”:** Often the near-panic that comes with a new conflict or disappointment is correlated with the realization that the journey isn’t over yet or fear that we are “going back there again.” One of the best indicators of progress is that ability to be unsettled and not be alarmed. “Success” is not the

absence of all relational hardships, but the ability to experience a relational disruption at situationally appropriate levels without getting stuck. Your ability to not feel threatened by these responses is an important part of that.

**Read Philippians 4:12.** Notice that Paul says he knows how to be “brought low.” It almost sounds as if he is bragging about this ability because it was part of the “secret of contentment” (v. 11) and relying on God’s strength in all things (v. 13). Paul’s experiences of being brought low were intense (II Cor. 11:23-12:10). Doubtless present hardships triggered painful-intrusive remembrance of these past experiences for Paul. But he seems to be saying “having seen God’s faithfulness in the past experience of being ‘brought low’ gives me confidence in God’s future faithfulness when I am brought low again. I will use what Satan meant for evil to remind myself of God’s unfailing presence.”

**12.Appreciate Your Growth Because of Trauma:** You did not just learn (point one) and become better equipped to serve others (point seven). You’ve grown (point twelve). You’re not just an emotionally smarter person with more helping strategies in your toolbox. You’re a more mature person. Having a skill is different from having maturity. Maturity transcends skills. Maturity allows the development of new, situationally-effective skills for yet-to-be-experienced circumstances. This is what God has done in your life. God’s work of maturity is one of the things that should give you comfort about the future.

**Read Job 42:1-6.** At the end of the book, Job still does not know “why.” Yet he can see that God is good and has been good to him in spite of his many hardships. Verse 5 summarizes Job’s journey well. Job wanted answers he could hear with his ear and make sense of his suffering. Job got to see the character and redemption of God and received a peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). At this stage in our recovery we may not have answers to all the questions we wanted. Job didn’t either. But we will have come to the place where the answers we do have – an awareness of who God is and his faithfulness to us – are sufficient to allow us to live with hope.

### Writing Your New Narrative

At this point in your journey, with the new normal settling in, you are at a place to see your story come together to a single, meaningful narrative again. This does not mean deciphering the “reason” for your hardships, but to understand the pieces of your life as parts of one larger, redemptive story.

Return to the seven questions you examined in Step 6. Use the chart below to reflect on how the larger narrative in which you process your suffering has changed. In the left column summarize how you would have answered each question before this study. You will likely complete the entirety of the left column before reflecting on how you are approaching each question now; which is what you put in the right column. This should provide you with a better sense for how your larger life-narrative has changed.

If there are particular truths, experiences, or practices that have been most helpful to reinforce the kind of narrative change represented in each question also record those. This will allow journaling to remind you not only of “what” God has taught you but “how” he has made these lessons come to life and persevere in your thoughts-habits.

Before This Study	Now
<b>1. Who Am I Now?</b>	
<b>2. Who Is the Person(s) Who Hurt Me Now?</b>	

<b>3. Who and Where Is God?</b>	
<b>4. What Should I Expect from My Friends?</b>	
<b>5. Where Am I?</b>	
<b>6. Is Love Worth Pain?</b>	
<b>7. What Am I Living For?</b>	

### Preparing for Transition

This third section of Step 8 may feel like a change of pace. That is because it no longer has past hardships as its focal point. This section asks the question, “What should my life begin to look like now that it’s not focused on recovering?”

**Make sure you are in a small group.** Trust takes time. If you have been going through this material with a counselor or group, the baton of trust will soon be passed from those more formal-private relationships to a set of more natural-authentic relationships. One-way helping relationships are not long-term healthy as your primary source of support and encouragement. This needs to be experienced in two-way friendships.

The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you, talk with your pastor, mentor, or counselor.

**Learn accountability and encouragement on a broader scale.** Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability and encouragement. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God’s definition of “healthy.” People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles, seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming “unhealthy.”

As you move from a counseling relationship focused primarily upon codependency to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability and encouragement will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

1. Voluntary – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through this material will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.
2. Trusted – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your formal counseling or mentoring relationship.
3. Mutual – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In a small group you will hear the struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burdens as they help carry your burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).
4. Scheduled – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.
5. Relational – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations, not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are doing accountability and don't realize it.
6. Comprehensive – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce “success” to trusting God in a single area of life.
7. Encouraging – Too often the word “accountability” carries the connotation of “sin hunt.” When that is the case, accountability is only perceived to be “working” when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about discouragement in addition to questions about temptations.

**Have a plan for future study.** We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to your life struggles, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality out of a recognition that time minus direction equals decay; not healing.

This entire study has been filled with devotional Bible studies. If you have not been taking the time to read the passages and reflect on the devotional thoughts / questions that accompany them, consider using those as a guide for daily Bible reading. This will be a way to reinforce what you've learned in this study and further solidify the biblical basis for what you've learned.

Another recommended resource would be the seminar “Finding Your Identity, Security, and Confidence in Christ” ([www.bradhambrick.com/identity](http://www.bradhambrick.com/identity)) as a tool to help you solidify your progress.

**Make a formal transition plan.** Write out your transition plan.

- List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your formal counseling relationship or group.
- List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don't wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your counselor or group. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

### The Divorce Decision

There are at least two groups of people who would have a hard time reading this chapter: (1) those whose spouse is still committed to their addiction or abuse – at least, will not seek help, and (2) those who are struggling to forgive, grow in trust, or consider marriage restoration efforts. If you do not find yourself in one of these two groups, you can skip this section. There is little benefit to deliberating on a question that would only serve to disrupt the good things God is doing in your life and marriage.



However, others of you cannot avoid this question. You are faced with a choice to either (A) remain in a strained marriage trusting that God can change your heart, your spouse’s heart, or both; or (B) pursue a divorce. At several points in this study we have indicated that overcoming codependency does not require leaving a marriage. The encouragement to you has been to wait until you were in a better place emotionally, spiritually, and relationally before considering a decision of that magnitude.

If you have worked through these materials, that type of work has been done. Assuming there are no other emotionally traumatic events currently occurring, you are likely in a place to make this decision.

There is a scenario in which the choice to accept divorce is clear. Your spouse has been unwilling to live in a marriage where his/her sin is not tolerated and abandons the marriage for his/her “freedom.” In this case, you are morally free before God to accept the choice of your spouse (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

The more difficult scenario occurs when your spouse will not acknowledge and seek help for his/her destructive pattern but wants to remain married. Abuse and addiction can fit under Scripture’s abandonment exception for divorce.

“Marriage is a covenant; divorce is the breaking of that covenant. When a man chooses to be abusive, he breaks the covenant. An abusive man forfeits the right to remain married unless the woman wants to stay married. If his wife chooses to divorce him, she is making public his breaking of the covenant, and this does not go against what the Bible says about divorce. It is the abuser who needs to be confronted concerning his or her breaking of the marriage covenant and victims need to know that leaving is well within their rights as a child of God (p. 137-138).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

If you find yourself in this situation, it is recommended that you consult with your counselor and church’s pastoral leadership to determine how to proceed.

1. If your situation is unhealthy-but-safe, you may choose to live with your spouse and seek to win them back to God through your example of godly character and selfless love (1 Pet. 3:1-7).
2. If your situation is not safe, you may choose to be separated from your spouse for the purpose of reinforcing the seriousness of their sin, but not seek divorce. If this option is chosen, you should (a) be prepared for an indefinite separation and (b) have a clear expectation for what would end the separation.
3. If your situation is not safe and continuing to deteriorate in spite of your efforts to create a healthy relational environment, you may choose to pursue divorce as a means of alerting your spouse to the seriousness of their sin. This step is best taken as part of the formal discipline process of your church as a way to demonstrate your actions are not punitive or out of bitterness but an expression of a collective concern about the soul of your spouse.

**Encouragement Focus (PERSEVERE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- Have you demonstrated a significant number of the “new normal” characteristics?
- Am I beginning to be able to talk about my recent life events with God as the main character in my story?
- Have I created a wise and well-developed transition plan as I move towards a traditional small group?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 9

### “From Codependency to Salt and Light”

STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.

**“God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my pain.  
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.  
That has pushed me to ask the question,  
‘How can I be a conduit of God’s grace to others?’  
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,  
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God’s grace now.”**

**Memorize:** Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV), “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Salt... Light” – An implication of this passage is a recognition that we live in places of darkness and decay.
- “Lost its saltiness... under a basket” – God does not intend for us to lose our voice in our hardships.
- “Gives light to all” – Living out of God’s love and for God’s purpose is how God intends of us to have influence.
- “So they may see” – Our freedom in Christ is either attractive to those who want to be free or infuriating for those who want to be in control (abuse) or are satisfied to live in bondage (addiction).
- “Give glory to your father” – We find the most freedom when we don’t personalize other’s response to our freedom.

#### Teaching Notes

To “steward” something means to use it for God’s intended purpose. It is important to remember that what is being stewarded is the life of the group member in general, not your experience of suffering exclusively.

“One of the tests for an intimate relationship is answering the question, Can I be most myself in your presence? Can I be creative, funny, vulnerable, productive, strong, weak, flamboyant, shy or even smart? Can I couple any of those words with sex and romance? Can I be tough, forgiving, generous, spiritual, intuitive, graceful, clumsy, lazy, self-indulgent and disciplined? Do I feel equal, successful, attractive, encouraged, trusted and believed? Can I be fully as competent as I can be and not have my partner disappear? Do I feel challenged? Can I be accountable and hold my partner accountable? Is it OK to make a mistake? Does our time together really seem to matter (p. 66)?” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“If I had to reduce this book to four words, I’d write: Be who you are (p. 17).” Melody Beattie in *The New Codependency*

“The odd thing is that fear and anxiety are running away from something, but they don’t know what to run to. They know danger, but they don’t know where to find peace and rest (p. 63)... It’s as if fear needs to be replaced in our lives, and it is replaced with a simple question, ‘What does my Father, the King, want me to do now?’ (p. 241) .” Ed Welch in *Running Scared*

### Embedded Study

It would be easy to want this study, like this season of your life, to just be over. But this study, like your life, has at least one more chapter (and several appendices) left. When you put a great deal of effort, as you undoubtedly have, into getting past something, it can be easy to forget that there is something next. The fact that God has brought you to this point should be evidence enough that He has more in store for you and more to do through you.

In this chapter you will be doing most of the writing, because it is your life that is being stewarded for the glory of God. No one else could write this chapter but you. What you will be given is nine questions that walk you through a life assessment to determine where God wants you to serve now and where He may want to prepare you to serve in the future.

**Read Luke 11:24-26.** This is a terrifying warning about comforting suffering when that comfort does not result in serving God's purposes with your life. Comfort alone does not satisfy the human heart. In the absence of mission, life becomes purposeless. This lack of purpose is often experienced as a form of depression or disillusionment. When depression sets in after we have done all we know to do in processing our suffering, then we truly begin to believe that there is no hope. If we lose hope, then the last state truly is worse than the first.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** In this study we have traveled through the Gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). The nine steps are merely the Gospel in slow motion. They show us God's general pattern for redeeming and restoring our suffering. We are not exiting the Gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the Gospel. Paul says that there are "good works" that "God prepared" for every believer and that these should define our daily lives ("that we should walk in them") (v. 10). There are answers to the questions you will be asked next. You have the confidence that comes from the promises of Scripture that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer the next nine questions, remember God's patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God's design that you can engage in immediately. But there may also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to be more mature or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God's servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

**1. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me?** This is a "do not pass go" question. If your answer is "no," it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that it is "yes." Rather, identify the obstacle. What aspect of your suffering story (chapter 4) makes this sacrifice seem too risky?

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

**2. What roles has God placed me in?** The first part of being a good steward of one's life is to fulfill one's primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to "understand what the will of the Lord is," he goes on to describe God's design for each of our major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

**3. What are my spiritual gifts?** Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual's life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

**4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened?** From God's earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for, it allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

**5. What am I passionate about?** At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:4 fulfilled in your life. There is a level of vulnerability involved in being passionate again, but allow yourself to express faith in God through this vulnerability and pursue the life He has for you.

**6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me?** These need not be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

**7. What are my unique life experiences?** Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our suffering from flaming darts of Satan meant for our destruction to bridges of ministry carrying many people to life in Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

**8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community?** We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expanding your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact your service can have on those you are seeking to bless and protecting yourself from discouragement through isolation.

**9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him?** This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5

#### **Encouragement Focus (STEWARD):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in your journey.

- Are there necessary changes you have omitted that would make it unwise for you to finish this study?
- Have you demonstrated a significant number of the “new normal” characteristics evidencing readiness to finish?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the five ways listed in Step One?

## Appendix A

### How to Develop a Safety Plan

If you need a safety plan, do not feel guilty about developing one. Even if you never use it, having a plan that you can enact will help you remain calmer (i.e., think clearer) in moments when conflicts are escalating.

“The best way to get an instant grip on your emotions in those situations is to be prepared for them (p. 62).” Robert Meyers and Brenda Wolfe in *Get Your Loved One Sober*

Often, as Christians who place a high value on marriage, forgiveness, and unity, we feel inherently guilty for leaving in a dangerous domestic situation. While we want to affirm these values, consider it this way: *the best way to honor someone you love but acts with volatility is to remove the opportunity for them to do greater damage with their anger.* Your self-protection is not selfish; it is actually the most loving thing you can do.

“If there is anything you take away from this book, we hope this is it: God knows and sees you in your experience of violence and abuse, He loves you through it all, and He greatly desires your safety and protection. God has not forgotten you. He grieves with you. And we hope that knowing this will embolden you to be honest with both Him and others, and know that it is courageous – not shameful – to reach out for support (p. 179).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

However, it is vital to realize that the initial act of leaving for safety is not a complete plan. Taking the initial step of leaving, which may or may not result in a prolonged separation, without knowing what you intend to do next (and why) can actually increase your danger.

“Domestic violence does not end immediately with separation from the abuser... It is also dangerous. Over 75% of separated women suffer post-separation abuse (p. 64).” Justin and Lindsey Holcomb in *Is It My Fault?*

The purpose of this appendix is to help you think through whether separation is needed, and if so, how to wisely walk through the process of separating for safety.

However, if your situation requires more immediate help than walking through this material allows, please call one of these emergency organizations.

- National Domestic Violence Hotline      1.800.799.7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline      1.800.656.4673
- National Child Abuse Hotline      1.800.222.4453

#### Three Types of Separation

It is important to know what type of separation you would be enacting with your safety plan. It can be helpful to think in terms of three types of separation; two of which are potentially productive, the third being common, but unproductive.

- I. **Separation for Cool Down:** For this separation, you plan to be gone for a few hours up to a night or two. The purpose of this separation is to prevent a combustible argument from escalating or removing children from being exposed to an irrational display (either intoxicated or emotional).

This type of separation is usually best communicated about directly by stating the reason for and desire to resolve the matter later.

“Honey, I love you. This situation is spiraling and I don’t want it to harm our marriage further. I am going with the kids to [location] and we can talk about this more when we’ve both had chance to calm down.”

After a statement like this, no further explanation or defense should be given, but you should begin to enact the safety plan you develop below. This approach should not be used more than once or twice or it will be perceived as a manipulative tactic. If it is frequently needed, a separation-for-change may be advisable if counseling will not be engaged.

2. **Separation for Change:** When the destructive behavior is frequent, the cooperation towards change is low, and there is probable danger to you (or your children), then separation-for-change is warranted. In this approach, you make arrangements to remain separated until acknowledgement of the problem is made and key markers of change achieved.

The indefinite duration of this separation means that more preparation is needed. Because this separation is enacted after resistance to acknowledging the problem has been established, the separation is not disclosed until after it has occurred. The potentially longer duration of separation means you need to have adequately planned for where you will be able to live. If these arrangements have not been made, then the domestic violence hotline can connect you with local safe homes.

After relocating to a safe place you would communicate the “markers for change” that would need to be met in order for returning home to be considered. In any conversation about returning home these same points should be repeated each time. While there may be secondary changes each of you are tempted to discuss (i.e., spending more time with the children, being more helpful around the house, spending more time as a couple), separation means there are safety-level concerns and these need to be at the forefront of any conversation about returning home.

Standard markers for change would include:

- Meeting with a counselor experienced in the area of struggle (i.e., domestic violence, addiction, etc.)
- Describing the life struggle to the counselor without minimizing or blame-shifting
- Signing a release of information to allow you to be a guest at your spouse’s counseling to share your perspective on the history of the relationship
- Confirmation from the counselor that the two accounts reasonably reconcile with one another (to verify the absence of minimization or blame-shifting)
- Initial steps towards change complete (as defined by the counselor)
- Mutually agreeable accountability pursued within the your shared network of natural relationships
- Commitment to continue in counseling process after you return home; stated to counselor and accountability relationships
- *Short Summary of Markers:* Being honest with a counselor and trusted friends about the real history of our relationship, tangible evidences of change, and a commitment to continued marital restoration.

A separation-for-change is a declaration that the relationship has deteriorated to such a degree that non-intensive measures will not be sufficient for restoration. It can be hard to know that the marriage is in this condition. That is why making this assessment in concert with your pastor and/or counselor is advised. This social support will be beneficial in following through on your commitments if there is not early cooperation (i.e., crying-pleading phone calls, rants to friends, lies to children, etc.).

3. **Separation as Expulsive:** This may be the most frequent and is definitely the least effective form of separation. In this case, separation is used as a behavioral demonstration of exasperation. The intended (misguided) intent is usually to shock or scare your spouse into changing. The hostility in the moment of leaving (unlike separation-as-cool-down) and the lack of any follow through (unlike separation-for-change) result in the event being seen as a “stunt” that will require a larger demonstration of exasperation next time to coerce comparable change; making the relationship more volatile.

### **Making Your Safety Plan**

Making a safety plan requires taking steps that may seem awkward in a moment when there is not active conflict or intoxication. However, the preparation you put in during safe times will ensure that you have options if unsafe times arise again.

**Pack a bag** with all of the supplies you would need to be away from your home for at least two to three nights (i.e., clothes, medication, cash, important documents, extra set of keys, etc...). Keep this bag either in your vehicle or at the residence where you would stay if it were needed.

**Inform key people** that would need to cooperate with your safety plan and secure their commitment to be cooperative. This would include the person with whom you planned to stay and, if you do not desire this location to be known by your abuser, informing anyone who knows where you would be staying that you desire this information to remain private.

**Plan your exit.** Mentally walk through the steps you would need to take. The following points are meant to help you walk through this planning process.

- I can keep a bag ready and put it [blank] so I can leave quickly.
- I can avoid [blank] places when conflict is possible so I am not trapped without access to an exit.
- I will abstain from retaliating verbally or physically to prevent the situation from escalating further.
- I can tell [blank] about the violence and have them call the police when violence erupts.
- I can teach my children to use the telephone to call the police and the fire department.
- I will use this code word “[blank]” for my children, friends, or family to call for help.
- I will be aware that my partner may have access to my cell phone record and use prepaid phone cards or a pay-as-you-go mobile phone if needed.
- If I have to leave my home, I will go [blank].
- I can teach these strategies to my children.
- When an argument erupts, I will move to a safer room such as [blank].
- I will leave money and an extra set of keys with [blank].
- I will keep important documents and keys at [blank].
- I will check with [blank] to know who will let me stay with them.
- I will review my safety plan every (time frame) with [blank].
- I will rehearse the escape plan and practice it with my children.
- I will consult with a family advocate to ensure I am not breaking any custody laws during the separation.
- If I need to return home for belongings and feel unsafe, I am aware I can ask for a police escort.

A separation may result in your being in the home and the abusive/addicted person leaving, or you renting your own place to stay because of the lack of cooperation and need for a mid-term living environment for you and your children. If a lack of cooperation resulted in a prolonged separation, this would require additional considerations.

- I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- I can install a security system
- I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when someone approaches my home.
- I will teach my children how to use the phone to make collect calls to me and to (friend, family, minister) if my partner tried to take them.
- I will tell the people who care for my children who has permission to pick up my children. My partner is not allowed to. Inform the following people (school, day care, babysitter, church leaders, etc...)
- I can tell the following people that my partner no longer lives with me and that they should call the police if he is near my residence (neighbors, church leaders, friends, etc...)

If the degree of threat escalated during the separation or was predatory prior to the separation, then a protection order may be warranted. When considering a protection order, it is wise to:

1. Speak with the police department in the city or county in which you hold residence.
2. Ask them to explain the process and evidence necessary to secure a protection order.
3. Clarify what actions on your part would nullify the restraining order.
4. Write down the name of the preferred individual/office to notify if the restraining order is violated.

It is important to understand the precise legal protections provided and limitations created by a restraining order. If you choose to get a protection order, then it is wise to consider.

- I will keep the protection order here (location). Always keep it with you.
- I will give a copy of my protection order to police departments in the areas that I visit my friends, family, where I live, and where I work.
- I will tell my employer, church leader, friends, family and others that I have a protection order.
- If my protection order gets destroyed, I can go to the County Courthouse and get another copy.
- If my partner violates the protection order, I will call the police and report it. I will call my lawyer, advocate, counselor, and/ or tell the courts about the violation.

**Note:** A more extensive safety plan template can be found in Appendix 2 of Justin and Lindsey Holcomb’s book *Is It My Fault?* (pages 187-197) if needed.



## Appendix B

### How to Conduct an Effective Intervention

If you are reading this, you are hurting because someone you love is destroying their life with drugs and alcohol. You likely feel angry that they cannot see what they are doing to themselves and others. You feel frustrated that previous conversations have not been heard. Part of you wants to give up and part of you refuses to do so. Often we come to the idea of conducting an intervention as a "last ditch effort" to get through to someone that we love.

This appendix is meant to help you take this step strategically rather than desperately.

Sometimes we are prone to think that interventions are a modern invention, but intentional, tough love conversations in the context of people who know the spiraling individual best have always been part of God's design.

"Curiously, intervention is hailed as one of the most significant advances in drug treatment. Yet church discipline is the original and intervention the imitator (p. 96)." Ed Welch in *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*

If you read Matthew 18:15-20, the primary biblical passage for outlining the process of church discipline, you see an intentional order: personal conversation, small group conversation, and large group conversation. This raises an important question as you consider conducting an intervention: have you had a direct personal conversation that addresses your concerns?

A group intervention should not be the first attempt to address an addiction. We need to model the courage it will take to acknowledge an addiction in the way we address the addiction. We need to have the courage to say, "I am concerned about you and I can't be your friend and be silent. I think you have a problem with [substance]. Can we talk about it?"

Nobody with a substance abuse problem ever wants to hear the phrase, "You have a problem." In fact, most addicts don't think they have a problem at all. Those who do are apt to deny it – strongly. But the reality is that hearing a friend or loved one utter those four simple words may save someone's life.

A group intervention is most effective when it's the culmination and echo of these loving, personal interventions. With that said, let's look at how to conduct an effective group intervention in three phases.

#### **Phase One: Before the Intervention**

An effective intervention is not a spontaneous event. It requires planning and preparation. Each of the factors below is an important part of preparing for an effective intervention.

- **Pray:** What you desire as the outcome for the intervention is more than you are able to accomplish even if you do everything in your power as well as you possibly can. You can't force your friend's eyes open to the destructiveness of their choices. You want humility to replace defensiveness. You want acknowledgement to replace denial. Those are not things we can manufacture. Those are realities only God can create in the heart of your friend.

When we fail to recognize this we either become controlling or codependent; we either try to force change or blame ourselves if our friend doesn't begin to pursue recovery. In this sense, we need to pray (protecting our own heart) as much as our friend needs to be prayed for (that God would soften their heart).

- **Decide Who:** Three questions should determine who participates in the intervention. An ideal number for an intervention is 5-10 people. Preferably these people would represent different spheres of the individual's life (i.e., family, work, church, friends, etc...).
  - *Who has the quality of relationship to allow their voice will be heard?* It should be obvious why each person present has a vested interest in the individual acknowledging their addiction.
  - *Who has the concrete information that is most irrefutable?* More will be said on being concrete in a latter point.
  - *Who has sufficient self-control so that their presence will not be a distraction?* These meetings are often emotionally intense; immature or short-tempered members of the intervention team can easily become a distraction from the intent of the meeting.

- **Decide When and Where:** There is no such thing as a perfect moment, however, giving thought to when and where an intervention takes place can increase the meeting’s opportunity to be successful. An intervention should not occur in a public place (i.e., restaurant, work office, etc...). Embarrassment would distract from the content of the meeting.

Most often interventions are staged events; meaning the individual being confronted is unaware the meeting will occur. Usually this involves having the intervention team present at the individual’s home or apartment at a time when he/she will be predictably arriving (i.e., after work or class).

- **Decide How:** An intervention should not be a long meeting; its effectiveness is not found in the abundance of words. The meeting needs to stay on message; unless you prepare and rehearse for the meeting, that is unlikely to occur. It is recommended that you have a written agenda for the meeting. It should be simple enough that those on the intervention team don’t need to have it in their hand. A sample meeting plan might look like this:

Note: Each person who speaks should begin by expressing their love for the individual and saying that their goal is to see them restored to health; not to punish or shame them. If needed, the leader may call on each person when it is that person’s turn to speak.

- **Leader:** Express love for the person, explain reason for meeting, ask for cooperation with the process of the meeting
  - Reason for the meeting: We believe you have a problem and cannot in good conscience remain silent.
  - Process for the meeting: We want you to hear us and, after that, we’re committed to hearing you.
- **Participant One:** Express love for the person and sites most concrete examples of risk taking behaviors (i.e., drinking and driving, having to pay back threatening drug dealer, etc...)
- **Participant Two:** Express love for the person and sites most concrete examples of health deterioration (i.e., see chapter two material)
- **Participant Three:** Express love for the person and sites most concrete examples of neglecting relationships that the individual is known to value (i.e., lack of time with children, neglecting friends, etc...)
- **Participant Four:** Express love for the person and sites most concrete examples of financial deterioration (i.e., borrowing money, being behind on bills, etc...)
- **Participant Five:** Express love for the person and sites most concrete examples of neglecting school or work (i.e., negative performance evaluations, examples of being fired, dropping grades, etc...)
  - [Each person present should speak to an aspect of how the individual’s addiction is destroying their quality of life. Only the most irrefutable areas of life and examples should be used.]
- **Leader:** In light of these concerns and our love for you, we believe you need to seek help for your addiction. We have several options we believe are viable and effective. We are asking that you consider these.
- **Listen:** We know what we’ve said cannot be easy to hear, but we want to know what you think and what you think would be wise for you to do in light of the concerns we’ve raised.
- [If the intervention is rejected, meaning the individual is unwilling to acknowledge the addiction and seek help, then the meeting would conclude with a list of consequences the group is willing to mutually enforce for the individual’s good.]
- [If the intervention is embraced, then the group becomes a support network for the individual as he/she begins to enact the steps agreed upon and work on a more comprehensive plan of recovery.]
- **Be Concrete:** Every example you use should be factual and irrefutable. Expect that the weakest example you verbalize in the intervention will be the focal point for the individual’s response. Do not provide a weak example that could be used to discredit the other concerns. Step two of this material will help you think through the most concrete examples.

“If you create a rule about something that you can’t monitor, you are creating opportunities for more lies and deception (p. 125).” Ed Welch in *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*

- **Repent Personally:** It is easy for the level of frustration and hurt amongst the intervention team to overpower their sense of empathy. When this happens, the intervention will feel harsh and unloving. Amongst each other, the intervention team should spend some time acknowledging their personal need for the same grace that they want their friend to embrace.

This exercise generates a better appreciation for the degree of vulnerability that the group is asking their friend to display. While this exercise is unlikely to change the content of what is shared or asked (nor should it), it is very likely to impact the tone of the meeting and increase the tangibility of the group’s love for the person being confronted.

- **Rehearse:** If the time from initiating the meeting to listening is going to be less than 30 minutes (which is ideal), then each person will need to think through what they are going to say and practice saying it. Just like it takes longer to write a short e-mail than a long one, it takes a bit of work to concisely say important things.

As the intervention team rehearses the meeting, several questions need to be asked about each segment of the meeting:

- Is it clear that love for the individual is more important than the pain they've caused or damage they've done?
- Are any examples used that sound weak or could be easily debunked?
- Is language used that begins to make excuses for or explains away the addictive behavior?

At the end of rehearsing the meeting, it is wise to role play how the individual might respond, so that the group can think through how to end the meeting in each instance. Possible responses to prepare for would include:

- Active Resistance: “You’re all wrong. I don’t have a problem.”
- Being Personally Offended: “I can’t believe you would all team up and attack me this way.”
- Debating Details: “I can explain why every example you’ve given isn’t as bad as you say.”
- Changing Whose on Trial: “How can you say this about me when you [blank]?”
- Passive Compliance: “You’ve given me some things I need to think about and I will.”
- Getting Lost in Sorrow: “[Sobbing] I can’t believe I’ve as bad as you say. I’m a horrible person/friend.”
- Active Repentance: “I do have a problem. I need to address it. [Blank] option seems like the best start.”
- Other: You know your friend. What other responses seem likely? \_\_\_\_\_

- **Research Options:** The ultimate goal of an intervention is not acknowledgement but action; acknowledgement is merely a means to an end. The team needs to have tangible, actionable follow up steps that begin the process of recovery available to engage immediately following the meeting.
  - If the substance abused and degree of abuse warrant detox, then the intervention team needs to know the local detox centers and entry process. This can be determined by calling the local hospitals.
  - Knowing the days and times of local recovery group meetings or ministries. Timing the intervention to occur just before one of these meetings would be ideal.
  - Knowing the intake process for viable residential programs if this is a potential good fit for your friend.
  - Having a list of local counselors who specialize in addiction assessment and counseling. If this seems like it is likely to be the most agreeable next step, ask the counselor if you can scholarship a session immediately following the intervention.
    - Note: The individual would have to make the appointment and complete the necessary paperwork. But having a scheduled, paid-for assessment session already in place can help remove barriers from taking immediate action.
  - Having a list of individuals who are willing to serve the role of accountability friends and a schedule for when these meetings could occur.

Remember, don’t offer options that aren’t a good fit. The type of resources in your community or the type of addiction your friend struggles with may make some of these recommendations a bad fit. Providing bad follow up options is a good way to undermine an otherwise well-run intervention.

You’ll notice an effective intervention is preceded by many phone calls and, potentially, some financial investment. It is worth it. In an intervention, you are likely risking your last remaining social capital. The work leading into an intervention helps make sure this risk is a good investment.

From this research you will be able to use names when referencing options (i.e., “When we spoke to Dr. Smith at the detox center, she said... And counselor Davis indicated his initial assessment helps individuals determine....”). Being able to talk this concretely helps make everything you say seem more immediately actionable and reasonable.

## **Phase Two: During the Intervention**

Once you get to the intervention, the only surprises should be whether your friend shows up and how he/she responds at the end. If you prepare well, everything in the middle should be well established. Here are some suggestions for the intervention.

- **Remember the Objective:** Your goal is to prompt your loved one to engage the recovery process. When you begin to think your goal is to “save your loved one” the dynamics of the meeting will become much more emotionally intense. Review the meeting objective with the intervention team prior to the meeting.
- **Never Meet Resistance Head On:** If the intervention becomes an argument or debate, you lose; the likelihood your friend will begin to engage recovery will diminish significantly. The following points are meant to help you “roll with resistance” that is likely in the intervention without delving into debate or conceding to your friend’s perspective.
  - *Stay emotionally even keeled.* When you display anger or exasperation you are becoming a distraction to your point. Your friend can focus on how your talking instead of what you’re saying. Being at peace with the idea that you can’t change anyone and that your responsibility is to speak the truth in love (i.e., the most receivable manner under the circumstances) will help you remain even keeled.
  - *Evidence good listening.* At the beginning of the meeting you said you would listen. So, listen. If your friend begins to talk for a long time and doesn’t want to be interrupted, ask if you can take notes because what they’re saying is important to you. Begin what you say, when it’s your turn to speak, with a summary of what they’ve said; not a rebuttal. Represent the tone and content of their words fairly when you summarize.
  - *Raise discrepancies as friendly questions.* After you summarize, there will doubtless be discrepancies in what they’ve said. It is okay to point these out. Be sure you begin with the most central and solid examples. Be sure you raise the discrepancy with respect.

You might say, “You say you want to be a good husband and father, but your wife says you are usually home for less than an hour before you start drinking each evening. How does that fit with your desire to have a strong family?” or, “You say your career is important to you, but your last three performance reviews have marked you down for inability to focus at work because of sleepiness and excessive sick days when you’re hung over. We have a hard time understanding how your lifestyle is fitting with your life goals.” After a statement like this, listen again.

“If there is going to be a battle, you want it to be between the person and God, not between the person and yourself (p. 94)... If love rather than anger is clearly expressed during the intervention, addicts typically appreciate what was done after they are sober (p. 110).” Ed Welch in *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*

- *Ask how they would like the concern raised.* If raising discrepancies meets resistance, don’t meet that resistance head on either. You might say something like this, “We know these things are hard to hear. We love you too much to be silent. Can you tell us how to raise these concerns in a way that is more receivable? We have tried as individuals but we didn’t feel heard. We are open to anything that is truly for your good.” Then, listen.
- *Respect their right to choose.* The choice of your friend will be the end of the meeting; for better or worse. Either the meeting will end with your friend pursuing recovery, or the meeting will end with your friend rejecting the concerns raised. The team needs to be prepared for either outcomes and should resist looping the meeting back to the beginning when the desired outcome is not met. If your friend chooses to dismiss the concerns raised, then the next point becomes relevant.
- **Provide Consequences:** Consequences are not the same as punishments. Punishments seek to inflict unpleasant experiences to coerce or motivate change. Consequences, in this context, are a way for those near an addict to opt out of supporting or enabling the addictive lifestyle.

“Families often give enough financial and personal support for the Precontemplator to avoid the harshest of consequences of their addiction. In effect, these families neutralize the educational effects of negative consequences (p. 123).” Carlo DiClemente in *Addictions and Change*

Consequences might include:

- Cutting off or restricting access to the money necessary to support the addiction
- Reporting an instance of suspected DUI activity to law enforcement
- Having a set time at which doors will be locked and access to the home will be unavailable until the morning
- Limiting access to children to supervised times when sobriety can be verified
  - Note: this step would require some legal intervention to be enforceable if they are uncooperative
- Asking them to move out of the home and force them to bear the responsibilities of living independently
- Refusing to rescue the individual from the consequences (direct or indirect) related to their addictive lifestyle

### **Phase Three: After the Intervention**

The most important post-intervention note is to follow through on whatever is decided at the intervention. If your friend is cooperative, follow through on the support roles you indicated you would play. If your friend is uncooperative, follow through on the consequences you indicated you would enforce.

In many ways this is the hardest part of the intervention. This difficulty is why the group intervention is good for each member of the intervention team. The group provides accountability for each member of the group; whether it is to fulfill supportive roles or to avoid lightening consequences. When there is cooperation, the group also allows the supportive roles to be divided amongst more people so that the level of support can be sustained over an extended period of time, because recovery is usually an extended process.

If you or one of the intervention team members struggle to consistently follow through on the outcomes arrived at in the intervention (support in recovery or consequences for resisting recovery), then it is recommended you utilize the resource at [www.bradhambrick.com/codependency](http://www.bradhambrick.com/codependency) to enhance the aftercare aspect of the intervention.

## Appendix C

### Emotional Clarity:

# Would Shame by Any Other Name Hide Just as Fiercely?

Why ask a question like, "Would a rose by any other name smell just as sweet?" What could we hope to get from this deliberation that would be of value? Doesn't everything "flowery" smell good? I remember when I learned that the answer is a definitive no.

Our trash can was beginning to smell. I was sure that I had an ingenious double solution that would win the admiration of my wife: potpourri roach spray. With one thorough application any odor from the trash can would be gone and any potential bug problem would be eliminated. When my wife arrived from the other room, I was informed that a roach spray by any other name smells just as foul. To this day I still think it should have worked.

What about with our emotions? If we mislabel an emotion, does that impact our ability to respond to a situation biblically? The clear answer is yes. This is because emotions are not passive. Emotions are not inconsequential fluctuations in our heart that "just happen to us." Emotions are (among other things) a call to specific actions. One of the ways that our emotions reveal our hearts is that they call us to do something about the events around us. Consider the following list of examples:

- Guilt is a call to acknowledge wrongdoing, repent, and make restoration.
- Shame is a call to hide or make up for a deficiency.
- Anger is a call to aggressively correct an injustice.
- Joy is a call to celebrate a significant, good event.
- Anxiety is a call to eliminate a threat or to plan for protection.
- Peace is a call to rest.
- Frustration is a call to solve a recurring problem.
- Annoyance is a call to quiet a relatively insignificant interference.
- Depression is a call to give up in the face of hopelessness.
- Offendedness is a call to defend rules of decency and respect.
- Passion is a call to deliver a significant message or carry out an important vision.
- Confusion is a call to look for answers.

What happens if we mislabel confusion (lack of clarity about how to resolve a situation) as guilt (a sense that we should take responsibility and repent)? What happens if we confuse anxiety (a timid, defensive planning to protect) with offendedness (a bold, righteous defense of decency)? What happens if we call hurt (let down from a reasonable expectation) anger (the desire to aggressively defend what should have been mine)?

What happens is we *feel like* we are responding appropriately, but the mislabeling of our emotions is leading us into sincere foolishness!<sup>1</sup> This happens in the lives of many people for at least two reasons.

First, emotions are confused because emotions are subjective. My guilt (irritated sense of failure) may feel different from your guilt (blushing desire to hide). My joy (satisfying sense of accomplishment) may feel different from your joy (cheery celebration with friends). These are natural differences that have to do with personality, temperament, family history, personal values, and a myriad of other factors. The differences we experience at this level are neutral and, therefore, should be sought to be understood rather than debated for uniformity.

Like most parts of life, we will vary in the amount of effort we must put into understanding our own emotions and the emotions of others. Part of our emotional maturity (which has implications for our spiritual maturity) is gaining a self-awareness of how we experience and express particular emotions.

Second, emotions are confused because emotions are easily manipulated. From our earliest days, parenting (to some degree) sought to shape, define, and train our emotions. "You hit your brother. You should feel bad." "You hit the ball. You should be

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<sup>1</sup> This calls our attention to an important cultural shift. We live in a culture where sincerity, genuineness, and authenticity have replaced righteousness, purity, and holiness as the highest virtues. It has become more important to be "true to yourself" than it is to "do the right thing." We want to know there is grace for any mistake we sincerely make, but we want to process our emotional and relationships in a way that allows us make as few of these mistakes as possible.

proud.” “You did not obey Mama. Wait until your father gets home (worry).” In a context where parents exercise this responsibility biblically (although none do so perfectly), this shaping is a means of God’s grace. However, as we go through life, we will undoubtedly get strong mixed messages about our emotions. “You should not feel that way.” “Do not let anyone judge your emotions. Just be true to how you feel.” “Emotions don’t matter.” Then there are the mixed evaluations about whether a given action was good, bad, over-the-top, harsh, lenient, rushed, passive, or just right. All of this exists in a normal human life and creates confusion. How should I feel about [blank]?

What about the person who spends an extended period of time in an abusive, neglectful, or otherwise unhealthy environment? Responsibility, fairness, appropriateness, decency, proportionality, and care (foundational variables in identifying appropriate emotions) all become distorted. One may learn to take responsibility and fix whatever goes wrong (guilt) because no one else will. Unpredictable events automatically may become labeled as threats (anxiety) because it takes so little to get a large reaction. Minor shortcomings may become major points of emphasis (shame) because you might not get spoken to for days. It does not matter what I do (apathy or callousness) because my actions are not going to change the negativity of my environment.

As you read these misfiring calls to action above, it can seem like there is no hope. How do we get back on track when our emotions get mislabeled? If emotions are relatively subjective, how do you evaluate them objectively enough to ever rightly label them again? The solution lies not in the experience of the emotion, but in the call to action of the emotion.<sup>2</sup> Initially we are not able to change the experience of the emotion (heart rate, feeling in our stomach, blushing, tense muscle, racing and random thoughts etc.). What we can evaluate and change in light of God’s character (the true and accurate standard from which all emotions emerge and take their definition) is the call to action.

What follows is a step-by-step plan for understanding, evaluating, and changing (if necessary) how you feel about or in the midst of an event. Because this article is not working through a particular emotion (shame, anxiety, depression, etc...) or a particular experience (conflict, rape, failure, etc...), there will not be a large number of biblical references. The goal of this article is not to give you the right answers, but to help you to ask the right questions. Until we ask good questions we will not get good answers. The goal is to help you understand emotional confusion within a biblical world-view so that the relevance of biblical teaching in your area of struggle will be clearer and, thereby, your motivation for implementing God’s Word higher. It is highly recommended that you work through this material with a pastor, counselor, or mature Christian friend.

At the end of the article a diagram and journaling tool will be provided to assist you in walking through these steps with the various emotional situations you face.

### **STEP 1: Identify What You Naturally Feel**

For this step, consider the following questions.

- What words do you naturally use to describe what you are feeling?
- Before anyone else responded to what happened, how did you complete the sentence, “Because of what happened, I felt [blank]?”

Your goal here is not to guess at what the “right answer” will be. We will not be able to make progress towards a healthy response until we know where we are starting. At this point, the goal is not a destination, but progress. Your goal is just to get an accurate read on what your first response was so that we can use that information to determine what type of changes (if any) need to occur in a given circumstance.

### **STEP 2: Identify the Natural Call to Action**

As you take this step, ask yourself:

- What did your emotions cause you to want to do?
- What are the things that you would normally do after a situation like this?
- What would your friends who know you well expect of you in a similar circumstance?

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<sup>2</sup> While we can find situations that parallel many of our experiences, the Bible is not meant to be a catalog or encyclopedia. Furthermore, just because we find a similar experience to our own in the Bible, this does not mean that the biblical character’s response (unless it is Jesus) is normative for how we should respond. The breadth of experiences found in the Bible should comfort us that God is not caught off guard or unprepared for our circumstance. Rather the Bible—through instruction, example, encouragement, and poetry—teaches us how to respond to life. It is in this framework (the story of redemption) that we work backwards from appropriate response to appropriate emotion(s).

The goal at this step is to identify where your emotions take you. You will not be able to directly change your emotions, even if you determine that they were mislabeled in step one. What you can do is change the actions that you currently believe are “natural” in these types of situations. As you discipline yourself to act in accord with biblical wisdom (step 5), then healthier emotions – those that are situationally-fitting and represent God’s agenda for the setting – will emerge.<sup>3</sup>

### **STEP 3: Evaluate the Situation**

The first two steps are purely experiential. There is no standard being applied. Step three now provides the raw material needed to begin to move towards a redemptive response. Consider the following questions. Not every question will be relevant for every situation. But if you are used to responding primarily on the basis of your emotions, these questions should give you the tools to begin to evaluate situations differently.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- In what order did the events happen?
- What led into the events?
- At what points were biblical commands or priorities violated?
- What commands or priorities were violated?
- Who violated them?
- What was done during the event to try to steer it in a better direction?
- In the midst of the situation, what did you think about most?
- What was most important to you?
- What was your desired outcome?
- What was the desired outcome of the other person(s)?
- How effective was the resolution, reconciliation, or problem solving afterwards?

### **STEP 4: Identify Themes of the Situation**

There is one more assessment you need to do in order to best equip yourself to understand and train your emotions. You need to identify the aspects of the situation that triggered a confused or unbiblical response and call to action.

- What were the aspects that you identified in step three that were most rattling, confusing, hurtful, or anger provoking?
- How would you summarize the theme of those events in a single sentence?
- In what similar situations do those same themes emerge?

Taking the time to make these evaluations prepares you to know when to expect to apply what you are learning about yourself and God’s character. You will know what type of situations to pray about and the type of preparations you need to make. You will not always be able to prepare for these circumstances, but even in your spontaneous temptations, you will be able to recognize them earlier and more clearly identify the characteristic patterns of the temptation.

### **STEP 5: Identify the Biblical Calls to Action**

Now that you have defined the situation, you can ask better response questions. As you seek to answer the questions listed below you may have to consult with a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor. It is better to be humbly confused than blindly confident. Pausing to ask a new question is often the first step towards wise living.

- What would a biblical call to action to this situation look like?
- What would most reflect God’s character and purpose in the beginning, middle, and end of this situation?
- How would these changes have been implemented?
- Now that the situation has ended, what would most reflect God’s character and purpose in your life and the life of the others involved?

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<sup>3</sup> Often this type of statement can be very frustrating for people. “How right do I have to act before I get some emotional relief?” we think. This is a fair question. There is no promised time table for the relief. But God is faithful. The challenge at this stage is to desire God’s character as much as (eventually more than) you desire God’s blessing (peace). The temptation to center our efforts on our reward is a common pitfall that discourages us into giving up. When that temptation arises cling to the truth that “God is faithful.”



A right evaluation of a situation precedes a right emotional response to that situation. Unfortunately, our hearts often feel before they evaluate. This is why we identified our natural response in step one. Now your responsibility is to biblically evaluate your response to the situation so that whether you responded righteously or sinfully (probably a mixture) that you will learn from the situation. This is what it means to be a good steward of the events of our lives.

### STEP 6: Identify the Corresponding Emotions

Look at the biblical calls to action you listed in step five.

- What emotions are required to motivate those actions?

If this is difficult for you, use the list of emotions below.

- Ask yourself, “Would this emotion aid or detract from my efforts to do what I identified that I need to do?”

The list that you are creating should become one tangible way to measure how your spiritual maturity is penetrating your emotional/relational life. How much are your emotions in these types of situations (step 4) calling you to wise, biblical actions (step 5) instead of the actions that were previously natural to you (step 2)?

### STEP 7: Walk Through this Process with Mature Christian Friends

If emotional clarity is a struggle for you, I am sure you have already asked yourself the question, “How am I supposed to be able to answer these questions accurately if I am this confused?” It is a very fair and good question. By God’s grace and the illumination of His Word it is possible, but there is another key resource God provides for this area of growth – His people.

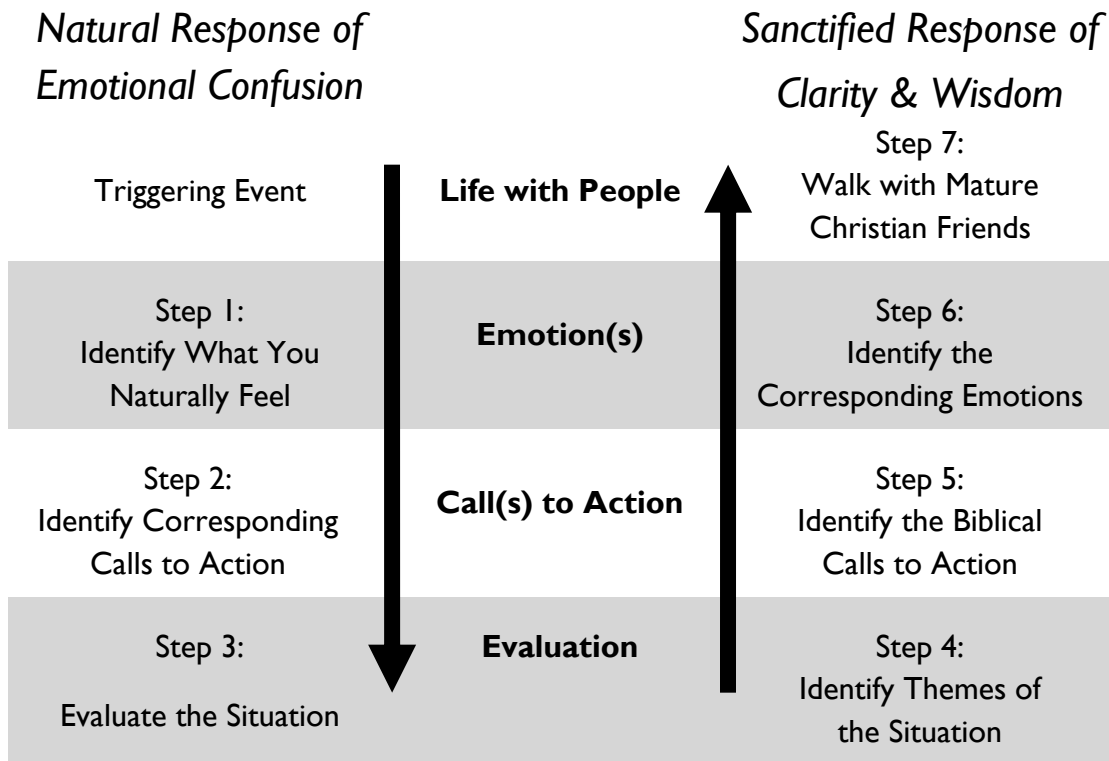
Walking through this type of evaluative process with our brothers and sisters in Christ should be a regular part of every believer’s life. This is what it means to carry one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2). It is through this process that we (both the confused and the clarifier) become more convinced and encouraged that God’s Word is living and active, able to penetrate the complexities of life (Heb. 4:12-13). This is what it means to be an active part of one another’s lives as the New Testament calls us to (Heb 3:13-14).

#### List of Common Emotions

abandoned	callous	deserted	embarrassed	guilty
accused	cautious	disappointed	enthusiastic	happy
aggressive	cheerful	disapproving	ecstatic	hateful
alienated	cheated	disbelieving	enraged	helpless
agonized	compassion	disconcerted	envious	hopeless
aloof	confident	discouraged	evasive	hopeful
angry	confused	disgusted	excited	horrified
annoyed	content	dishonest	excluded	hostile
apathetic	crushed	dismayed	exuberant	humiliated
apologetic	curious	disoriented	flustered	hurt
arrogant	deceived	distant	fearful	hysterical
ashamed	defiant	distasteful	frantic	ignored
baffled	deficient	distracted	frightened	inadequate
belittled	deflated	distraught	frustrated	indifferent
bewildered	dejected	distressed	furios	indignant
bitter	depressed	downcast	gloomy	innocent
bored	despairing	downtrodden	grieving	insecure
burdened	despondent	elated	guarded	isolated

insulted	mournful	provoked	shy	thrilled
intense	negligent	puzzled	silly	tranquil
jealous	optimistic	regretful	smug	trapped
jubilant	outraged	relieved	spiteful	uncomposed
livid	paranoid	remorseful	stubborn	undecided
lonely	peaceful	resentful	sure	underestimated
loved	perplexed	sad	surprised	uneasy
mean	pessimistic	satisfied	sympathetic	unwanted
melancholy	pleased	self-pitying	suspicious	upset
mischievous	protective	sheepish	thankful	uplifted
miserable	proud	shocked	thoughtful	weak

In concluding this article, I want to provide you with two tools to assist you in implementing what you have been taught. One is a diagram that illustrates the process you will be going through each time you walk through these seven steps. The second is a journaling tool that is designed to help you record, reflect on, and compare your notes on the various incidences of emotional confusion you may face.



## Emotional Clarity Journaling Tool

### STEP 1: Identify What You Naturally Feel

What words do you use to naturally describe how you feel in this situation? In parentheses beside each emotion rank on a scale of 1 to 10 how intensely you feel that emotion.

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### STEP 2: Identify the Call to Action

To what responses or solutions do these emotions naturally lead you? What is it that you naturally wanted to do in this situation?

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### STEP 3: Evaluate the Situation

Summarize what happened in this situation. Use the back if necessary.

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### STEP 4: Identify Themes of the Situation

What were the key aspects of this situation that triggered your natural responses listed in step two?

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### STEP 5: Identify the Biblical Calls to Action

What responses would have most reflected God’s character and purpose in this situation?

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### STEP 6: Identify the Corresponding Emotions

What emotions would motivate the type of actions you listed in step 5?

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### STEP 7: Walk Through this Process with Mature Christian Friends

What mature Christian friends or mentors would be most helpful to you in this situation?

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## Appendix D

### What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

[www.bradhambrick.com/codependency](http://www.bradhambrick.com/codependency)  
[www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow](http://www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow)

#### Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

#### Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

#### Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

#### As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.