



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

restore

COLLECTIVE



MOPS

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:



PRODUCED BY MOPS INTERNATIONAL © 2019 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RESTORE SMALL GROUPS

Cover photo credit

Restore Small Groups © 2019. All rights reserved. MOPS mentors and leaders have permission to use content contained within this book for MOPS meetings and discussion including reproducing content specifically for use during a MOPS meeting, but all rights to this content are retained by Restore Small Groups. This content may not be used by MOPS mentors or leaders for purposes outside of a MOPS meeting or an affiliated gathering without express written permission from Restore Small Groups.

In the *Restore Collective*, you'll get to embark on a journey of self-examination that will lead to greater personal and spiritual freedom! Your willingness to be vulnerable and open will help you get the most out of this growth opportunity.

Visit **collectives.mops.org/products/restore** to access training videos and other resources to accompany you in your journey to freedom.

MOPS INTERNATIONAL
2370 S TRENTON WAY
DENVER, CO 80231

MOPS.ORG

M | COLLECTIVES

MOPS.ORG



In 2000, Restore Ministries was founded by Scott Reall in the YMCA of Middle Tennessee. He formed Restore out of a desire to meet the spiritual and mental needs of the community. As group attendance grew, and more YMCA centers began offering small groups, Restore Ministries built a unique methodology to affect a life-changing small group process. In 2015, Restore Ministries formed its own independent nonprofit, Restore Small Groups, to accommodate the demand from organizations worldwide that wanted to adopt this powerful small group process. Restore's mission is to equip people to create an intimate group process founded on the principle that change is always possible.

Restore Small Group's foundational curriculum is the 8-week group, *Journey to Freedom*. They also offer four supplemental curriculums, *Journey to a New Beginning After Loss*, *Journey to a Life of Significance*, *Journey to Living with Courage* and *Journey to Healthy Living*. These supplemental curriculums help group participants focus on specific areas of personal growth that they may have already identified or that they identified while in *Journey to Freedom*.

To find out more about Restore Small Groups and how to partner with them to learn their full small group process, please restoresmallgroups.org. To purchase books, please visit their online store. They would love to help you spread hope and healing in your community!



Table of Contents

Week 1: Introduction	5
Week 2: Finding Hope	17
Week 3: Embracing Powerlessness	23
Week 4: The Power of Connectedness	29
Week 5: Hope Restored	35
Week 6: Overcoming Obstacles	41
Week 7: Finishing Strong	49
Week 8: A Personal Plan for Change	53



Week 1: Introduction

AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

Group Guidelines

How This Workbook Is Designed

What Can You Expect From This Journey?

The Process of Transformation:

- Embracing Our Stories
- How We Change
- Review The Process of Transformation Diagram

Introduce Feelings Chart

Gentle Disclosure

Serenity Prayer



THE HUMAN CONDITION:

This is where we all begin.

**We are born into the world
with a desire to be loved,
known and to belong.**



GROUP GUIDELINES

These guidelines are meant to keep our group sharing safe. Please read the guidelines aloud as a group and discuss.

1. Please keep what is said in the group—in the group.
2. Please use “I” statements when giving feedback about your experience of another participant. Keep your sharing focused on your own thoughts and feelings.
3. Participants are not required to talk, but are encouraged to do so.
4. Please limit sharing time to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share.
5. Please respect each other and do not judge or correct other participants.
6. Please do not give advice, fix or rescue other participants.
7. Please do not cross-talk, for example, talking while others are talking or talking to one other person and not sharing with the whole group.
8. Please try to arrive on time and minimize distractions from electronic devices.
9. Please bring a personal journal to each meeting and use it to take notes and answer the weekly questions included in this Collective.

I AGREE TO UPHOLD AND ABIDE BY THESE GROUP GUIDELINES.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Introduction

Being with someone, listening without a clock and without anticipation of results, teaches us about love. The success of love is in the loving—it is not the result of loving. Of course, it is natural in love to want the best for the other person, but whether it turns out that way or not does not determine the value of what we have done. The more we can remove this priority for results, the more we can learn about the contemplative element of love. - MOTHER TERESA, A SIMPLE PATH, 95

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT ON THIS JOURNEY?

THE MISSION AND HISTORY

Journey to Freedom was birthed in 2000 in the YMCA of Middle Tennessee by Scott Reall, founder of Restore Small Groups and author of *Journey to Freedom* and *Journey Series*. His mission was to provide a space for community to complete the Spirit, Mind, Body mission of the YMCA.

Out of that purpose, this group experience has grown and evolved over the last 20 years. Our hope for everyone who experiences this process is to find courage and healing in the universal struggles of the human condition.

People come to our groups in every season of life. They come from different backgrounds, experiences and beliefs. Yet, everyone can find hope in sharing their struggles and joys together in a safe, caring environment. Together, we can seek and find healthier ways to respond to the challenges of this life and move toward our best selves.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM THIS GROUP?

In small groups, we have four key goals:

- EXAMINE the condition of our human life and all the aspects of it: emotions, thoughts, experiences, relationships and purpose.
- SEEK repair for what has been lost: connectedness, self-compassion, empathy, wholeness, dreams and expectations.
- GIVE God space to transform our perspectives, values and characters through grace and the love of supportive, safe community.
- PLAN how to move toward change in our lives with achievable steps.

HOW THIS GUIDEBOOK IS DESIGNED

Starting in Week 2 of the *Restore Collective*, we have simplified the material from the original *Journey to Freedom* curriculum into four Key Concepts. Each of these concepts are both crucial in making any life change and interconnected within our emotional and spiritual lives.

Each Key Concept is followed by:

- an explanation
- a Journey Reflection (an excerpt from the *Journey to Freedom* book, including the page numbers for the excerpt)
- introspective discussion questions to guide the journey

The group will review as many of the Key Concepts as time allows. Please create space to reflect and explore the remaining Key Concepts on your own before the group's next meeting. Please bring a personal journal to each meeting and use it to take notes and answer the weekly questions included with each Key Concept.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

UNDERSTANDING OUR STORIES

In **childhood**, we **DESIRE** to be loved. We develop a sense of self and healthy or unhealthy responses to our environment and emotions. If we do not come from a family that honors our emotional life, gives us freedom to be ourselves, and teaches us how to cope with the world, then we may have experienced toxic shame that has damaged our self-worth and self-image. Toxic shame is the basic belief that we are not worthy (of love, of care, of success, of having needs, etc.) or enough (good enough, smart enough, beautiful enough, capable enough, etc.).

In **adulthood**, we **LONG** for fulfillment. But we internalize toxic beliefs; seek approval, perform, escape from pain, create patterns, habits and false selves. It is in adulthood we may find that the coping mechanisms developed in childhood no longer serve us well in life; we may find ourselves stuck with habits, emotions and life circumstances that we struggle to understand and address.

In the **present**, we have the opportunity for **GRACE and TRANSFORMATION**. In community, we are invited to come out of isolation, feel known, challenge our perspectives, experience intimacy, hope and acceptance.

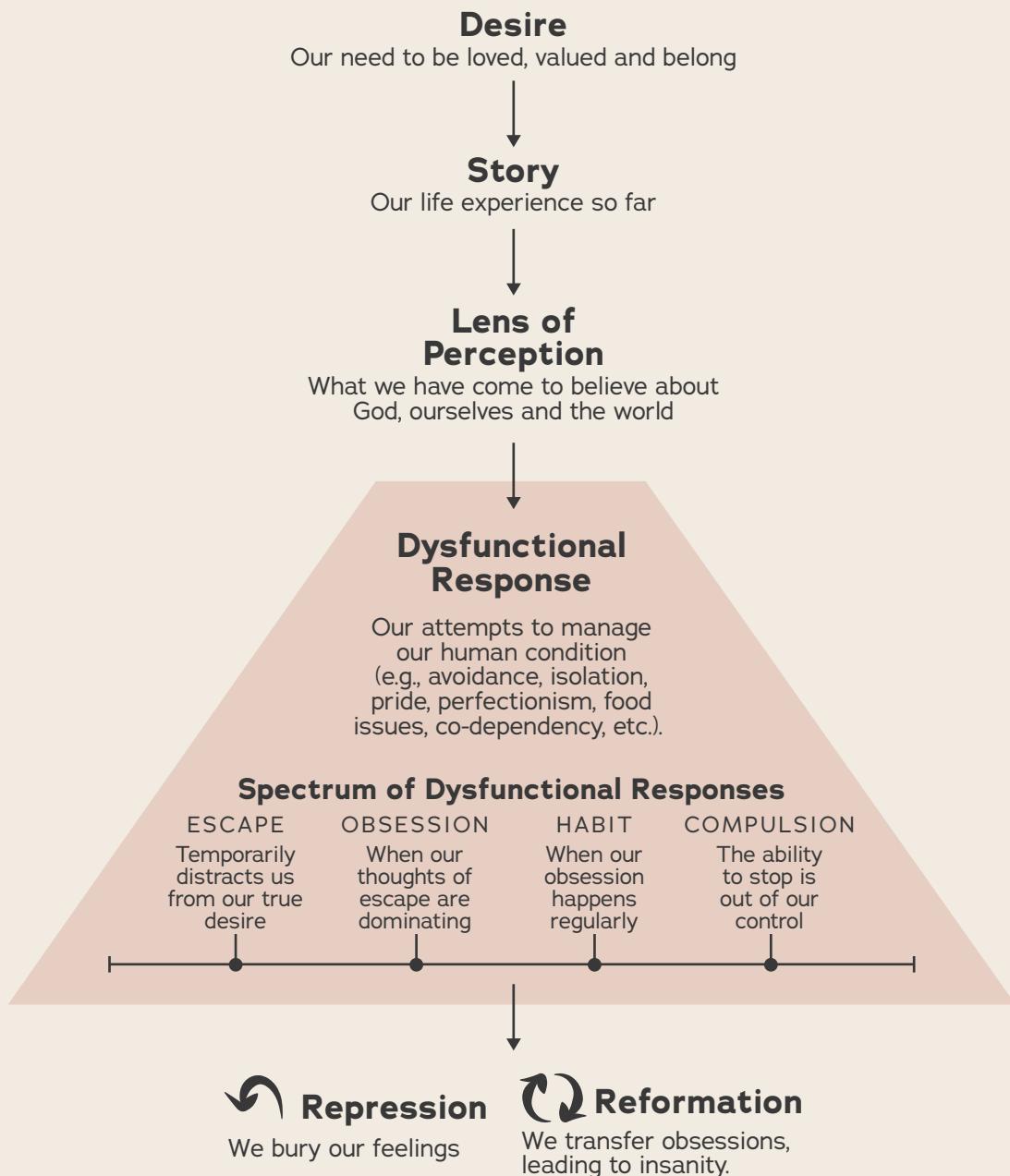
EMBRACING OUR STORIES

We encounter our human condition every day: ups and downs, challenges and victories, emotions, relationships and a desire for purpose. All of our stories are important. Why? Because our life story informs who we are; how we have developed, and how we react to the world. Our story intertwines and affects others' stories. As parents, our story spills over into the lives of our children. If we cannot understand ourselves well, it is difficult to give our children the space and attention to discover who they are. It is important to discover our truths for our own health and for the sake of our relationships with others.

HOW DO WE CHANGE?

It is no small thing to change our lives. Some of us might come to this experience having tried to change certain patterns and habits before without success. We believe that there is a method to change, and there is hope for those who feel it may never happen. Dr. James Prochaska, well-known clinical psychologist and researcher, shows that there are stages to any life change, and that we must go through each one to reach a permanent, sustainable change. On the next few pages, we will talk about the steps of change and how those are important to group.

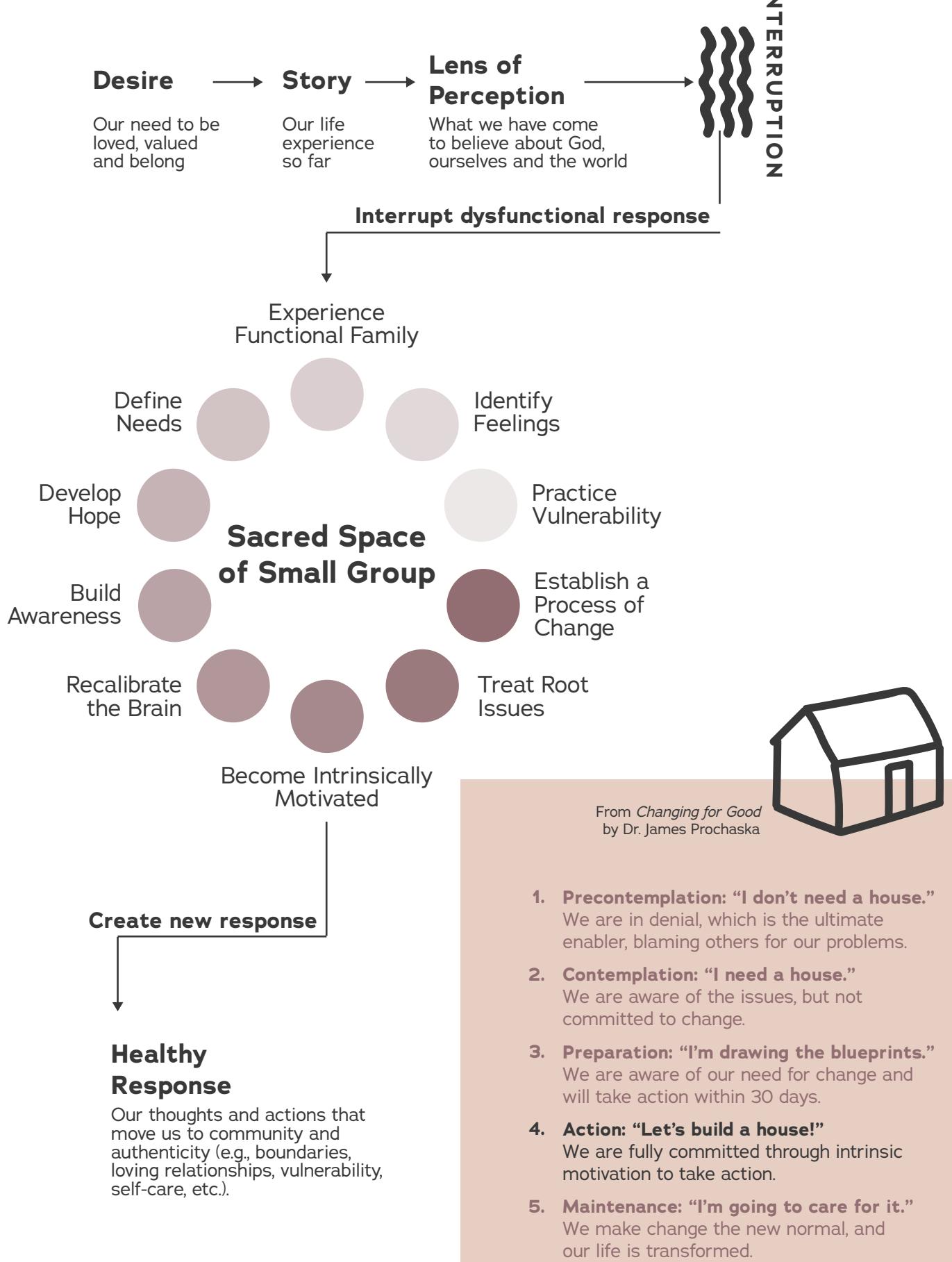
THE HUMAN CONDITION



WHAT TO EXPECT

1. **Examine** our life story with God and others.
2. **Seek** restoration from the pain of our human condition.
3. **Give** God space to transform our perception.
4. **Plan** for a new future, a new vision and a new hope.

PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION



The Human Condition: This is where we all begin. We are born into the world with a **desire** to be loved, known and to belong.

But often, through our life **story**, that need does not get met. We encounter the pain of being human, of rejection, of toxic shame. We encounter that pain in various places, sometimes at home or school or performance-based activities. As children, we only have our own experience to rely on and so we survive and cope as best we can.

Our experiences (our story) create a **lens** through which we see the world, God and others. If we come from a healthy family with good emotional and spiritual boundaries, where we are valued and heard, where our emotional needs are met and where the adults know themselves well, then we probably have a lens that is more flexible, more joyful, more trusting. If we come from a more unhealthy family, we may have a lens that is more limited, more fearful, more skeptical.

Because of our lens, we often turn to habits and behaviors to ease our pain and fears that are not helpful and perpetuate our struggle. These **responses** can range from occasional escape to compulsive behavior.

Repression/Reformation: Common behavior patterns in our lives are repression or reformation. If we are stuck in unhealthy responses to life, we may try to repress our urges (out of sight, out of mind) or reform our urges (using only our willpower to change). Repression only works temporarily and then our urges resurface. Reformation can work for a while, but often we end up substituting one habit for another. Then we find ourselves still in the same pattern, just with a different habit.

The Process of Transformation: We want to engage in another way besides Repression or Reformation. We want to consider Transformation. In the diagram, you can see that desire, our story, our lens are all still there. But we interrupt our dysfunctional responses by entering into a group process.

The group process gives us time to examine our lives and experience the 10 benefits listed around the circle. From there, we can form a new, healthier response to our lives by allowing God into the space with us. That is why we say group creates “sacred space.”

The Stages of Change: *Journey to Freedom* incorporates Dr. James Prochaska's transtheoretical model of change. That is, we must encounter all the stages of change in order to sustain it.

1. **Precontemplation** is denial. In denial, we believe our problems lie outside ourselves. Leaving denial is a choice that each individual must make internally.
2. **Contemplation** is the understanding that we all have ways we can grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Contemplation is where most begin a group journey. We may not know exactly why we have come to group or what our needs are, but we do sense an opportunity for growth.
3. **Preparation** means we are getting ready to take action within 30 days and have prepared a plan to do so. We hope to move from contemplation to preparation within the time of group.
4. **Action** means committing to change and moving forward with actual steps.
5. **Maintenance** is maintaining our changes over time.

Many people get discouraged with change by moving to action without proper time to contemplate or prepare. This is the important work we do in group. Knowing the stages of change can be very encouraging. We begin to realize that change is possible, and that we may have skipped some of the necessary steps in the past.

Prochaska does not believe in "failure" to change. He believes that we all "recycle" while trying to change. Every attempt at change creates more awareness of ourselves and our behavior. So, we are actually changing, even when it feels like we are not. The most important thing is to keep moving forward and not give up. (*Changing for Good*, Dr. James Prochaska, 38-49)

Benefit	Feeling	Impairment
Names woundedness and begins healing	HURT	Resentment
Values and honors what is present or missed	SADNESS	Self-pity
Allows us to ask for help and reach out for relationship	LONELINESS	Apathy
Helps us practice and prepare; beginning of faith and wisdom	FEAR	Anxiety or Rage
Helps us tell the truth, dares to hope and arouses desire	ANGER	Depression or Perfectionism
Awakens us to humility	SHAME	Toxic Shame, Self-Rejection, Pride or Rage
Allows us to seek forgiveness	GUILT	Pride or Toxic Shame
Shows the fullness and richness of life	GLADNESS	Happiness or Entertainment

Taken from the book *The Voice of the Heart* by Chip Dodd
Used with permission

THE BENEFIT OF FEELINGS

The feelings chart is a tool that we use to help identify our emotions at the start of each group. Why is this important?

- It moves us toward mindfulness and self-awareness.
- Mindfulness and self-awareness create self-compassion.
- Self-compassion leads us to wisdom, emotional intelligence, better coping, intrinsic motivation and empathy.

It is amazing what this simple exercise can do for our lives!

OUR CHALLENGE TO YOU

Our challenge to you over the next 8 weeks is to come to experience all of the emotions as good.

Many of us respond to our emotions by either ignoring them, pushing them away, trying to control them, or reacting to them. Our challenge now is to take a step back and observe our emotional life.

Think of emotions like a knee-jerk reflex. Just as the doctor hits our knee and it jumps, life circumstances trigger our emotions to “jump.” It happens so quickly and subconsciously that we cannot stop them. But what then? What do we do with our emotions once we become aware of them?

Dr. Chip Dodd explains that if we allow ourselves to feel fully, we can experience the benefit of our emotions, the way they were intended. For example, if I feel hurt by someone’s words or actions, and I acknowledge the hurt to myself and to him, we have a chance for reconciliation and healing. That is the “Benefit” of hurt. If I do not allow myself to feel hurt and either ignore it, push it away or pretend it doesn’t matter, then I will develop resentment toward the person who hurt me. That is the “Impairment” of hurt.

Quite often, if we are having trouble identifying our current emotions, we can read the impairment side of the chart and work our way backward. For example, we may easily identify anxiety or depression. By recognizing these, we can also recognize that somewhere we have unexpressed fear or anger. We can work backward and find the root of our emotion. Where did we not acknowledge or express our fear or anger? How can we do that in a healthy way?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is the Feelings Chart?

A: The Feelings Chart is from Dr. Chip Dodd’s book, *The Voice of the Heart*. He believes that while we may experience hundreds of emotional “states” or “conditions” on a daily basis: frustrated, tired, disappointed, excited, relaxed, stressed, entertained, annoyed, etc., these all stem from one of eight core feelings within the human experience. (Learn more about the chart and how it works on the training videos at collectives.mops.org/products/restore.)

Q: Why do we use the Feelings Chart?

A: It provides an opportunity to learn how to recognize and voice our true feelings, as we may not have been given permission to do in the past. By naming our feelings in group, we learn how to make voicing our feelings an everyday practice.

Q: What's the difference in Shame and Guilt?

A: Shame is the understanding that I am human; I make mistakes, and I need the help of God and others. Guilt is acknowledging that I have hurt someone else and am in need of reconciliation.

Q: Why do seven of the feelings seem negative while only one is positive?

A: Though we may have come to associate certain feelings with bad outcomes, the eight feelings themselves are neither good nor bad. They simply are. This means that we are allowed to feel them to their fullest. God built into us a full emotional life to alert us to what is going on inside—like an indicator light on the dashboard of your car. The oil light means your car is out of oil, and you need to make a change before any damage occurs. The oil light itself is not bad; it serves a vital purpose. It’s what we decide to do after we see the light that is important. Our actions in response to our emotions can either be positive or negative, destructive or productive, helpful or harmful.

Q: Why is Gladness on the list?

A: Dr. Dodd writes that Gladness occurs when we feel all seven other feelings fully and in abundance. Other terms for gladness might be contentment, joy or peace.

FIRST FEELINGS CHECK-IN

In group, we will begin each week by naming our emotions. We use the Feelings Chart in a way that creates a common language within group. Let's go around the circle once and name all the emotions we are having now or that we primarily experienced in the last week. If you are experiencing all eight, please name them instead of simply saying, "I'm having all the emotions."

Take a moment to Check-in, saying: "**My name is _____, and I'm feeling _____.**" No justifications, no excuses, no elaboration, just your name and your feelings. After everyone has checked-in, we will open the group for anyone to elaborate on her feelings.

GENTLE DISCLOSURE

1. Share a joyful moment of your life that really impacted you.
2. Share why you felt called to be part of this group. What would you like to personally get out of these eight weeks?
3. What is one aspect of your life right now that brings you great joy?
4. What is one aspect of your life right now that you wish were better, different or more?

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.



Week 2: Finding Hope

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- Hope: A fundamental part of change
- Vision: Finding new solutions for our lives
- Choosing Wellness: Do we want to be made well?
- Reframing Success: Transforming failure into learning

Serenity Prayer

Week 2: Finding Hope

We develop a hopeful mind-set when we understand that some worthy endeavors will be difficult and time consuming and not enjoyable at all. Hope also requires us to understand that just because the process of reaching a goal happens to be fun, fast and easy doesn't mean that it has less value than a difficult goal. If we want to cultivate hopefulness, we have to be willing to be flexible and demonstrate perseverance. Not every goal will look and feel the same. Tolerance for disappointment, determination and a belief in self are the heart of hope. - BRENE BROWN, *THE GIFTS OF IMPERFECTION*, 66

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Where do you find yourself at this moment in time? Are there parts of your life that you wish were different? Do you want to continue to grow spiritually, mentally and emotionally?

Whether you desire small changes or total transformation, there are key elements of change we need to spend time examining. We may find ourselves wandering and wondering what direction to take. If we seek, we will find the answers.

This week, let's talk about four key elements of change:

- Hope
- Vision
- Choosing Wellness
- Reframing Success

KEY CONCEPTS

HOPE: A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF CHANGE

We begin here ... with true hope. It is the seed from which our life-view and choices grow. What does true hope mean to you? This is such an important question to answer for our lives. Hope is a fundamental part of change. Think about that for a moment. Without hope, we have nothing to move toward, no reason to make anything different, or belief anything can be different. We have no motivation.

Additionally, much of what we view as hope is really wishes for a particular outcome. Henri Nouwen writes, "Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes. Therefore, hope is always open-ended." (*Seeds of Hope*, 160) Hope believes in spite of circumstances. Hope is open to change. It is not dedicated to doing the same things over and over again with the same old results. Hope thinks new thoughts. Read the story below and reflect on the questions about hope.

Journey Reflection: In the beginning of basketball, hanging peach baskets were used to catch the ball. When someone scored a goal, the janitor climbed the ladder, retrieved the ball from the basket, and threw it to a player. Then they carted the ladder off the court. But as the accuracy of the players increased, so did the number of times that the janitors had to retrieve the ball. Then someone got the ingenious idea of cutting the bottoms out of the peach baskets. This revolutionized the game. They tried something different in hopes of making the game more efficient. It's the moment when we cut the bottom out of our peach baskets problems that make way for a revolution in our lives. (11-13)

Reflection Questions:

How would you define hope?

In what areas of your life are you looking for new solutions?

VISION: FINDING NEW SOLUTIONS FOR OUR LIVES

True hope leads us to creative vision for our lives. Once we let go of our expectations and need for certain outcomes, we open ourselves to new possibilities. Read the reflections below and answer the questions about vision for your life.

Journey Reflection: Charles Steinmetz was an electrical engineer genius who worked for General Electric in the early part of the twentieth century. After his retirement, they called him in because the other engineers were baffled about the breakdown of a complex of machines. They asked Steinmetz to pinpoint the problem. He walked around the machines for a while, then took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and made a big cross mark on one particular machine. When the engineers disassembled that part of the machine, it turned out to be the precise location of the breakdown. A few days later, the engineers received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000—a staggering sum in those days. They asked him to itemize it, and he returned the bill with a note that read: Making one cross mark: \$1.00. Knowing where to put it: \$9,999.00. Changing our lives always starts with putting the cross mark on the right spot. (14)

Reflection Question:

If you had to put an 'X' on a spot of your life that needs improvement, where would you put the 'X'? (The power is in being specific.)

CHOOSING WELLNESS: DO WE WANT TO BE MADE WELL?

Change comes through choice. We must open ourselves to change in order to experience it. Change can be exciting, and it can also be uncomfortable and uncertain. We often cling to the known because we fear the unknown. Can we let go of what we know? Reflect on the story from the Gospel of John in the Bible, and how it applies to your life right now.

Journey Reflection: We must consider whether we want to take concrete steps toward change. Christ asked the same question of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda.

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda[a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] [b] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:1-6,7)

Reflection Questions:

Why did Jesus, who had the ability to heal, ask the man if he "wants to get well?"

What would change for this man if he answers "yes" (both positively and negatively)?

How would you answer this same question, "Do you want to be made well?"

What would be different about your life?

REFRAMING SUCCESS: TRANSFORMING FAILURE INTO LEARNING

Hope and vision are parts of the larger picture of change. But what happens when we begin to put vision into action? Often we define our circumstances in absolutes; we are either succeeding at our goals or failing. Below is a reflection on the concept of “training” rather than “trying” when we are trying to improve or change a habit or behavior. We can begin to view life as a journey on which we progressively experience and learn new things.

Journey Reflection: Willpower is an element of change, but it is not the deciding factor. The way we overcome the self-defeating behavior of giving up is to train, not to try. Training versus trying is the key to success. John Ortberg writes, “Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely ... There is an immense difference between training to do something and trying to do something.” When we try to change and do not succeed, we tend to give up after a few attempts. But when we train to do something, we set our minds on learning. No matter how many times we fail, we see ourselves as being one step closer to succeeding. An Olympic athlete doesn’t just show up and try really hard on the day of an event. She trains her spirit, mind and body long before the Olympics even begin. Trying is the raw use of willpower, nothing more. Training is learning the life skills needed for long-term change. (26)

Reflection Questions:

Can you give an example of a goal in your life you need to train for rather than try?

If you have set a goal before and believed that you fell short, what did you learn about yourself in that experience?

Can you give an example of something in your life that you HAVE trained for?

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

*God grant me the serenity to accept the
things I cannot change, the courage to
change the things that I can, and the
wisdom to know the difference.*

JOURNAL



Week 3: Embracing Powerlessness

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- Revealing Our True Selves
- Powerlessness
- Facing Our Struggle
- Silencing the Inner Critic

Serenity Prayer

Week 3: Embracing Powerlessness

WELCOME, FEELINGS CHECK & REVIEW

We must acknowledge and confess that we are incapable of overcoming our difficulties, especially our spiritual ones, through our own power. Instead, we are entirely dependent on the Lord's power to heal us.

Like the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus, fully realizing that she could not remove her daughter's demon with her own strength, so too must we approach the Lord fully realizing that our deliverance can only come from him. - BECCA STEVENS, FINDING BALANCE, 98

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Last week, we learned four of the fundamental elements of change: hope, vision, choosing wellness and reframing success.

This week, we continue to build on this foundation by examining the internal forces at work in each of us:

- Our desire to self-protect
- Our limitations
- Our struggles
- Our inner critic

These forces have the ability to move us toward or away from change. Take this opportunity to explore who you are. Where have you been? Where are you going? What do you believe about yourself, the world and God? Where did those beliefs originate? Let's spend some time exploring these ideas together.

KEY CONCEPTS

REVEALING OUR TRUE SELVES

At some point in life, we may have lost the belief that we are free to be our true selves. Perhaps our family dynamics forced us into a certain role, and we began to play that role rather than reveal our true needs, thoughts and feelings. We may have discovered in school that being our true self was not safe, or we assumed a social role. Perhaps college, work or adult relationships became the places where we started to limit our true self.

Protecting our true selves from pain is a natural response. There may be instances where protecting ourselves is actually the healthy thing to do. But what helps shield us can become a limitation the further we go in life, if we are never in a position to be fully authentic. We find it harder and harder to know others and to be known. We rob ourselves of true connection. We limit our creativity and true passions. Read the story below and reflect on your authentic self.

Journey Reflection: In the book, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis introduces a character named Eustace—a disagreeable boy who seems to delight in being a nuisance. He travels to Narnia, a fantasy world, and finds himself in a dragon's cave filled with treasure. Eustace falls asleep on the dragon's hoard and wakes up to find he has turned into a dragon. Eustace wants to be himself again. However, he is at a loss as to how he can get rid of the dragon shell. Eustace attempts three times to peel off his scaly skin, but each time he is just as rough and wrinkled as before. He realizes that he must let Aslan, the lion, take his skin off, but he is afraid that the lion's claws will hurt. However, Eustace's desire to change outweighs the fear of the pain. Eustace describes the way that Aslan tore off the dragon skin: "The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right to my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off ... And there I was as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me—I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on—and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that, it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found all the pain had gone." (47-48)

Reflection Questions:

What are the “tender” parts of yourself that you have covered with a “thick skin” so they do not get hurt?

In what ways and in what places do you present your covered or false self to the world and why?

What fears do you have around revealing your true self?

POWERLESSNESS: THE BEAUTY OF LETTING GO

If we have found it difficult to be our true self, we do not get to experience the freedom of who God made us to be. Because we cannot be authentic, we find ourselves coping with life in many different, and sometimes unhealthy, ways. The way to overcome our false self is powerlessness. Powerlessness is not helplessness. Helplessness means that we cannot do anything; we are victims of our circumstances.

Powerlessness is the opposite; it is freedom. Powerlessness is our admittance that only God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When we admit our limitations, we can also lay down our heavy burdens. We can admit: we are human; we are limited; we make mistakes; we can be wounded; we need the help of God and others. We can stop trying to control and using the people, things, activities, goals, ideas around us to keep up the illusion of control. Admitting powerlessness is a crucial step in change. Read and do the exercise below to take that step now.

Journey Reflection: One day I was talking to a friend who was going through a tough bout of depression. His life was in turmoil. He was sitting there, talking and gazing around the room, when his eyes stopped. He had fixated on the list of Beatitudes that I have hanging on my office wall, and he remarked, “I guess ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ means you’re blessed when all you have to hope in is God.” I think that is one of the greatest definitions of what Jesus meant in that Beatitude. When we have come to the end of ourselves and our self-sufficiency has failed, we arrive at a place of defeat. When all I can do is throw up my hands and say, “I surrender. God, I need you,” this is the beginning of real hope and the beginning of God’s transformation in my life. (78)

Reflection Questions:

Extending grace and mercy to yourself, try to admit out loud what patterns, habits, attachments, ideas/ideals, relationships, outcomes, goals, etc. that you are powerless over.

What are the things that you are trying to control but need to let God and others help you with? (e.g., I am powerless over my need to appear perfect and like I have it “all together;” I am powerless over my sister’s behavior and my need to “fix” her; I am powerless over my job and my need to achieve; I am powerless over using sugar as a comfort when I am stressed .. and I need the help of God and others.)

What is the experience of admitting powerlessness like for you?

FACING OUR STRUGGLE

Wherever we desire growth, we face a choice about making change. Sometimes that change can seem fairly easy. But sometimes we know the changes we face will take courage and perseverance. They might require sacrifice. They might be emotionally painful. We may have to tear something down and build again. Read the reflection below and contemplate where and why you might be avoiding change.

Journey Reflection: Think of the iceberg that sank the Titanic. If you look at an iceberg, you only see the small portion of ice that is above the surface of the water—the vast majority of the iceberg is underneath. In an effort to avoid a head-on collision, the Titanic turned, sideswiping the iceberg beneath the surface and ripping open the hull. Some believe that if the Titanic had hit the iceberg head-on, there would have been tremendous damage, but the ship might not have sunk. We have to deal with our problems head-on. Every problem has the possibility to

sink us if we try to sidestep it rather than hit it head-on. If we don't deal with our underlying, deep rooted issues, more trouble will be ahead of us. Avoiding problems will not do you any good. Tackle them. Expose them. Dealing with deep underlying issues is a necessary step in the process of change. Long ago, mapmakers sketched dragons on maps as a sign to sailors that they would be entering unknown territory at their own risk. Some sailors would not sail into these unknown waters, while others saw the dragons as a sign of opportunity, a possibility to discover new territory. Each of us has mental and emotional maps with dragons designating certain areas of our lives. We are not sure what is there. We are afraid to venture out, afraid to look beneath the surface of the dragon. But dragons need to be slain. Icebergs need to be hit head-on. (108, 110)

Reflection Questions:

Is there an area or issue in your life right now that you are afraid to approach head-on? How might this be an opportunity of growth for you?

What is one, small thing you might do to start approaching this issue?

SILENCING THE INNER CRITIC

What else might be holding us back from growing and moving forward? We have talked about our false selves, about letting go of control and about finding courage. But we also need to silence our inner critic. How do we recognize the inner critic?

Do you ever have an inner voice that shows up in times of stress and vulnerability and says things like, "You cannot do this; you are not capable; you don't deserve to be happy; you are unlovable; you are hopeless; you'll never change; you'll never get it right; you always mess things up."

These are just some of the negative messages that can live inside of us. These voices are unforgiving. They are the opposite of powerlessness. They use words like never and always. They are not grace-filled. They tear us down and speak hopelessness into our lives. We must start taking away their power to influence our decisions. Read the reflection below and discuss the role of the inner critic in your life.

Journey Reflection: Inside each of us, there is an inner critic who reminds us of our frailty and faults. Some of the inner criticism stems from something in our past. We devalue ourselves and place ourselves in the discount bin. We personify the inner critic, making it the spokeswoman for the way the world sees us. It nags and deceives. It uses comparison to devalue us. No matter how we perform, it likes to tell us what we "should" have done, not allowing us to enjoy any success. It makes us feel deeply inadequate. Eventually, we begin to believe these negative messages. Change takes place when we learn not to listen to the inner critic but instead listen to God. It is also essential to have people in our lives who can affirm and love us. (69-73)

Reflection Questions:

When your inner critic speaks, what does it tell you? (e.g., I am not enough; I am not smart; I am not responsible; I can't handle my life; I am stupid; I should be a better mother, wife, sister, daughter; I should have it all together; I should be a better person, etc.)

Right now, say something back to your inner critic that disproves this belief. (e.g., I make good decisions; I am a good mother; I give to others, etc.)

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

JOURNAL



Week 4: The Power of Connectedness

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- The Gift of Feelings
- Universality
- True Connection
- Creating Urgency

Serenity Prayer

Week 4: The Power of Connectedness

WELCOME, FEELINGS CHECK & REVIEW

Love bears all things like a roof bears the wind and the rain, like a roof that bears the burden of lashing storms, brutal heat. Like a bucket poured right out that could make a roof over your head to absorb storms, that gives itself as a container to carry the burden of others. Real love is a roof. Real love makes you into a shelter, real love makes you into a safe place. Real love makes you safe.

- ANN VOSKAMP, *THE BROKEN WAY*, 105

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Last week, we took the important step of understanding ourselves better and admitting that we need the help of God and others. This week, we explore the crucial roles of:

- Recognizing feelings
- Universality
- Healthy relationships
- Using well the time we are given

KEY CONCEPTS

THE GIFT OF FEELINGS

Chip Dodd says in his book, *The Voice of the Heart*, “I could not be who I was made to be until I was living fully out of my heart, and my feelings are the first step. And when I began to use feelings as they were intended, as a tool to build relationship, I could not help but begin to have abundant life. I found that vulnerability took the place of control; faith and trust replaced dread; surrender replaced self-will; grace replaced law; compassion replaced apathy; and hope replaced resignation. God gave each of us feelings to love us to these places.” (Intro) Read below the reflection on feelings.

Journey Reflection: We all struggle with our feelings on a daily basis. Most of us are afraid to feel our feelings because of what we think it means or what might happen. We also have been taught that some feelings are bad, and we shouldn't feel them. Feelings are not bad; it is the actions that sometimes result when we experience a feeling that can push us to anxiety, depression, isolation, confusion and self-destructive outlets. Our journey to freedom must take us through our feelings. Our feelings must be embraced and be processed if we are to find freedom and fullness of life. When we avoid our feelings, we are going to stay stuck. (34- 35)

Reflection Questions:

Looking at the Feelings Chart, what is one emotion (or several) that is hard for you to acknowledge or express? Is there a reason for this?

What do you think about the idea that feelings are a tool to build relationships?

UNIVERSALITY: WE ARE NOT ALONE

Have you ever shared with another person your thoughts, feelings and experiences and found that they had thought, felt or experienced something similar? In those moments, we feel relief by the connection of being human together. As Curt Thompson, a prominent psychiatrist writes, "From the beginning of life, no one's mind functions completely independently from the minds of others." (*Anatomy of the Soul*, 30) Reflect on this idea that not only are we connected, but our brains are not meant to function alone. We are meant for relationship.

Journey Reflection: Universality is always better. It creates one of the greatest dynamics in healing—a place of safety and compassion. When I come out of isolation and connect with a community of people who have struggled that same way that I have, who have felt the same things that I have felt, and who want the same things that I want, this is the journey to freedom. This is grace. Mercy is what we find in universality. We can't make it alone. We need relationships.

Universality is also the beginning of forgiving ourselves. Healing takes place as we extend to ourselves the compassion of forgiveness, which can be difficult. Sometimes we want to keep punishing ourselves. We beat ourselves up. But this can make us hopeless, bitter and even more isolated. We need to deal with our problems first by becoming aware of them, and then by moving to a level of self-forgiveness. We all need a place of safety where we can discover healing. Don't stop until you find universality. You're not alone. (91-93)

Reflection Questions:

Is it hard to share your struggles with others? Why?

Has sharing in this group helped? In what ways?

TRUE CONNECTION

We are meant for relationship, but that does not always mean that relationships are easy. The way that we relate to others forms early in life, and sometimes it becomes hard for us to see whether our relationships are functioning well or not. Often, we do not notice our relationship patterns until we are in crisis. Evaluate where you are in your relationships right now by taking inventory of the relationships that are life giving and those that are not.

Journey Reflection: We need to realize that we may need to change some of our current relationships. We may need to change any relationships that lead back to our destructive habits. Relationships are challenging—and they may be one of the most decisive factors in our process of change. Our recovery, our healing, our future may very well come down to whom we associate with and how we relate to our loved ones. There are those who will lead us upward toward our new life, toward the changes that we are trying to bring about in our lives. Find new companions who are on a path to a lifetime of hope, health and happiness. We need their support. We need their encouragement. We need their accountability. (96-98)

Reflection Questions:

What relationships in your life are the most challenging? Why?

Which relationships are nourishing and life giving for you?

CREATING URGENCY

One of the juxtapositions of life is time. It moves fast and slow simultaneously. We can try each day to live in the present, knowing time is limited, and yet still have days of wondering how long we will be here on earth. It can be challenging to feel the urgency of making a change when we don't know what lies ahead. Read the passage below and reflect on your sense of urgency.

Journey Reflection: If you look at a tombstone, you will see the year that the deceased was born and the year that he died. In between those dates is a dash, representing all the years between birth and death. It is possible to lose the urgency of the dash. We have to believe that the dash is worth living. However, the dash requires effort. Most accomplishments come through tremendous perseverance. The Bible says that life is like running a race. None of us know when the dash will end. There is no better time for change than now. We need to maintain our vision. It's never too early to start, and it's never too late to change. When we stop growing, we stop living. Start living your dash today! Now is the right time and this is the right place. (120-122)

Reflection Questions:

Do you have dreams, ideas, activities, relationships that you want to pursue or rekindle in your life?

What is holding you back?

If you are currently managing a lot of things in your life, what is one small thing you can do to move toward a dream, idea, activity or relationship?

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

JOURNAL



Week 5: Hope Restored

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- Overcoming Toxic Shame
- Discovering God
- Finding Our Identity
- Transformation

Serenity Prayer

Week 5: Hope Restored

WELCOME, FEELINGS CHECK & REVIEW

So the challenge I face with children is the redemption of adulthood. We must make it evident that maturity is the fulfillment of childhood and adolescence, not a diminishing; that it is an affirmation of life, not a denial; that it is entering fully into our essential selves.

- MADELEINE L'ENGLE, *A CIRCLE OF QUIET*, 106

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Last week, we discussed the importance of expressing our feelings, being in community and staying connected with one another. This week, we turn ourselves toward God and away from the inner beliefs that are holding us back. Who were you made to be? How is God working in your life? What more do you wish for in your relationship with God? Let's walk further toward the hope of transformation, a lifelong process that happens in the intimate relationship between ourselves and God. Together let's look at:

- Overcoming toxic shame
- Discovering God
- Finding our Identity
- Transformation

KEY CONCEPTS

OVERCOMING TOXIC SHAME

John Bradshaw, author and psychologist, writes, "When we are whole and fully self-accepting, we have the freedom to see and hear what we see and hear, rather than what we should or should not see and hear; the freedom to think and express what we think, rather than what we should or should not express; the freedom to feel what we feel, rather than what we should or should not feel; the freedom to love (choose and want) what we want, rather than what we should or should not love; the freedom to imagine what we imagine, rather than what we should or should not imagine. When we are loved unconditionally, i.e., accepted just as we are, we can then accept ourselves just as we are." (*Healing the Shame That Binds You*, 154) Reflect on the places, times and relationships in your life that may have created or expanded a sense of toxic shame in you.

Journey Reflection: It is impossible to have intimacy without being vulnerable. I can't be honest with God or with someone else if I don't risk vulnerability. I will continue to hide behind the false self—never risking and never knowing intimacy. We can isolate ourselves from God even in church. We can be at a Bible study, but be very distant from God. But authenticity and vulnerability matter to God. (136)

Reflection Questions:

At this moment in your life, do you feel free to express your feelings, perspective, ideas, love and creativity in the way that is most authentic for you? Why or why not?

DISCOVERING GOD

Our view of God and his role in our lives is formed by many things. It is important to move past our ideas/images of God, whether they are our own or they were told to us, into a relationship that truly connects us to him. This connection allows God to tell us, firsthand, what he is like and how he sees us. Connecting with God, experiencing his love, opens us up to a whole new perspective.

Journey Reflection: Discovering God can be a confusing subject because our ideas about God can keep us from trusting him. A faulty view will keep us from having a relationship with God. It will keep us from becoming who we were meant to be—children of God. We can discover our true self by having a relationship with God. And as we get to know him more, his life bleeds into ours, the way it does when we fall in love with another human being. There's more to it than just believing in a higher power. It's a relationship. We accept his love, and he becomes not just an idea. I let him teach me and guide me. This is intimacy with God, and all of us crave it. But it is impossible to have intimacy without being vulnerable and honest. We can discover that we are valued and loved by God, even when we may feel unlovable. (133-135)

Reflection Questions:

How do you imagine God to be?

Is that an image that attracts you to God?

What do you believe God expects of you?

Where does that idea come from?

FINDING OUR IDENTITY

We have each been made unique, with a combination of gifts and personality that exists in no one else except us. We each have a unique path to discover. Reflect on the hopefulness in this idea. Think about who you were as a child. Who are you at your core?

Journey Reflection: Identity is at the heart of changing our life. Identifying the future, identifying true friends, identifying our weaknesses, and identifying our true selves are all important factors. Who am I? Most of us define ourselves by the world's standards. But our true identity is stamped on our souls from within. We have to do the work of discovering our true selves—the person that God created us to be. (140)

Reflection Questions:

Think about yourself as a child. What were you like?

What were some of your favorite things to do? What were your dreams?

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is like getting into an inner tube, pushing off from shore and floating down a river. Sometimes the water is calm and floating along, untethered feels liberating. Sometimes the water gets choppy and you are bracing yourself for the ride. But you do not sink. Transformation allows you to keep moving, unattached to the things around you. God keeps you afloat. It takes trust and the willingness to just be along for the ride, wherever God takes you. But you are free. Reflect on the passage below about transformation.

Journey Reflection: Transformation makes all things new. It's a break from a habit without replacing it with a substitute. We dispose of a destructive habit and replace it with the Spirit of Christ. We build a relationship with him and allow him to fill the empty spot by asking him into this void. Don't settle for a mere swapping of one habit for another. Fill the emptiness left by the removal of that habit with God. We can leave the past behind. (158, 161)

Reflection Questions:

Have you ever left one habit or pattern just to replace it with another?

Reflecting back on the idea of powerlessness in Week 3, remind yourself of what you need to let go of at this moment.

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

JOURNAL



Week 6: Overcoming Obstacles

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- Developing Self-Care
- Progress Not Perfection
- Reclaiming Integrity
- Making Space for Change

Serenity Prayer

Week 6: Overcoming Obstacles

WELCOME, FEELINGS CHECK & REVIEW

Growth is an erratic forward movement: two steps forward, one step back. Remember that and be very gentle with yourself. - JULIA CAMERON, *THE ARTIST'S WAY*, 74

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Last week, we focused on our relationship with God and seeing our true selves as he made us to be. Realizing our true selves is a fundamental step on the journey to transformation. This week, we focus on actual steps toward change. How can we best care for ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually so that we live with self-respect, self-compassion and peace? This week let's talk about:

- Developing self-care
- Giving ourselves grace to seek progress and not perfection
- Holding onto our integrity
- Making space for change

KEY CONCEPTS

DEVELOPING SELF-CARE

Maintaining self-care as a parent is a hard, but necessary, thing to do. We need to find ways to rest and recharge. Eating right, exercise, sleep, downtime are all life-giving. As mothers, we often feel guilt around not being able to do these things well or consistently. We need to give ourselves grace. Striking this balance as a parent is challenging. It is important to find the small ways to self-care without comparing ourselves to others or setting standards that we cannot meet. Self-care is about valuing who we are. Let's focus on what gives each of us life.

Journey Reflection: When I go for an hour-long hike on the trails at Radnor Lake State Park near my home, my mind is free to listen to the sounds of the breeze through the leaves—the birds singing, the feeling of my feet on the earth, the sensation of the wind against my skin. Sometimes as I hike near the end of the day, the sky changes into beautiful reds and shades of purple. As I come to the peak of a hill, I occasionally see a turtle, a chipmunk, or a deer or I hear the sound of an owl. I am young again. The changes in nature awaken a sense of change in me. Peace replaces the frantic feelings of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of work and life. I need this refuge. I need this restoration. Exercise creates relaxation of the mind and body. We awaken to the profound sense of wonder of the miracle of life, of our bodies, our minds, our spirits. (166-167)

Reflection Questions:

What is an activity that you loved as a kid? Why?

What activity now would bring you that same joy?

If you were to pick just one restorative behavior to focus on right now (sleep, rest, quiet time, meditation, prayer, exercise, etc), what would it be?

PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

We are always on the journey. We never arrive. It is important to remember that we are not going to achieve perfection in this life, and that is OK. It is more important to focus on what we are learning through our relationship with God than to try to live up to some standard of perfection. We will make mistakes because we are human. Focus on what you are learning in every circumstance. Ask yourself that question often, especially in circumstances that you do not understand. What am I supposed to learn here? What am I being shown?

Journey Reflection: Making progress in our plan of change will require that we show up, do our part, and trust God with the results. If we focus on progress and not perfection, it gives us the determination to stay the course. Most of the time, what we can expect in change is two steps forward and one step back. We are a work in progress, not yet perfect. There's a saying that high expectations lead to low serenity, and low expectations lead to high serenity. Apart from God, we can try to reform our behavior and try to white-knuckle our way through change, but when we do that, our focus is totally on performance, not on progress. Progress is a path of small transformations that take place each day. (182-183)

Reflection Questions:

What is your reaction when you make a mistake, forget something or miss a goal or standard? What might you say to yourself in those instances to extend self-compassion?

What is your reaction when you make a mistake, forget something, or miss a goal or standard?

RECLAIMING INTEGRITY

Self-care and self-respect go hand in hand. If we do not value ourselves, it is hard to create time and space to attend to our physical, emotional and spiritual selves. We are worth the time because we are of value to God. Read below about our motivations and the need to hold onto our integrity.

Journey Reflection: Some of us get extrinsically motivated to change. Outward negative consequences will motivate us, but they fail to sustain change over time. Motivation has to be sustained, and we do this by being intrinsically motivated. When someone is intrinsically motivated, it's not about making anyone happy or trying to avoid a consequence. It's an internal desire to work together with God from a perspective of "I want to be different." It's about respecting ourselves enough to do the hard work of change. Having self-respect begins when we accept ourselves as God sees us. When we accept ourselves, we understand that we may have to work on our faults. Having self-respect means being ourselves in every situation. We stand in our own shoes. We speak from our own heart. When we slip up, we get back up and continue our courageous battle to become true to ourselves. Having self-respect means living a life of humility. We understand and accept our limitations. We become something different and something better. (185, 188-192)

Reflection Question:

When looking at behaviors, habits or thinking that you want to change, evaluate honestly where your motivation lies. Is it coming from an extrinsic (external) source like other people or others' standards/beliefs? Is it coming from an intrinsic (internal) need? Is it a combination of both?

MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE

It may be hard to know, all at once, what vision to have for our lives moving forward. We may have quick glimpses but not a fully formed vision of a new path. We may see obstacles and think, “I don’t have the energy to deal with that right now.” God knows that and knows exactly how to tailor our paths to honor who we are. He knows us that well. Vision comes from willingness not willfulness. We simply have to say, “I am willing.”

Journey Reflection: When we live by vision, we are not stuck in the past. We learn from our mistakes and move on. Our focus is on what we are going to become instead of what we have been. No longer can we use the old as a reference point for the future. It is gone! How can my old life tell my new life what it should be? Thinking about changing, we often say, “I’m not going to be like that anymore,” but that is faulty thinking. When we make that statement, we’re not defining what we should become. Wherever there is great vision, there is great passion. When I start living my life out of vision, the vision ignites my purpose for living and drives my change. Now I experience the power of the Spirit moving me along toward the future that God desires for me. (178-179)

Reflection Questions:

What is the “clutter” in your life right now that needs to be cleared away to make room for your best self? What is wasting your time?

If you could clear away the clutter, what new vision/passion/energy for your life would emerge?

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

JOURNAL



Week 7: Finishing Strong

AGENDA

Welcome, Feelings Check & Review

Walking the Journey

Explore Key Concepts:

- Grieving the Past
- Taking a Risk
- Perseverance
- Plans and Affirmations

Serenity Prayer

Week 7: Finishing Strong

WELCOME, FEELINGS CHECK & REVIEW

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. - MAYA ANGELOU

WALKING THE JOURNEY

Last week, we talked about the importance of making space within our daily lives to care for ourselves and make the changes we want to see. This week, we cover some of the most important steps on the journey:

- Work to let go of the past by honoring what we have lost
- Take some risks to leave the old and embrace the new
- Allow ourselves the hope of a new beginning

KEY CONCEPTS

GRIEVING THE PAST

"Unresolved grief is almost always about things we wish we'd said or done differently, better, or more." (*The Grief Recovery Handbook*, 3) We can add that it is also that which we wish were better, different or more. It is so important for us to search our past and present for this unresolved grief, no matter how "unimportant" we think it is.

Our minds often put grief aside in order to keep moving. It's normal, but it doesn't mean the grief isn't important. We grieve for many things: changes in seasons of life, including death (person or pet), divorce, changes in finances, job loss or retirement, illness, empty nest, loss of dreams/expectations, becoming a parent, etc. If we do not acknowledge the grief and work through it, we will stay stuck with it.

Journey Reflection: We need to rescue our hearts from the past. We do this by expressing grief. We work through our grief by feeling the pain. We usually think of experiencing a loss as when someone dies, but the loss of dreams can also trigger a time of mourning. But at the end of lost hopes and dreams is God; that's the good news! He gives us a new beginning. We may not be able to relive the past, but we can begin again as we grieve the past and let it go. A friend once told me that early in our lives we only know how to get things—but we don't learn how to let go. As we move through our journey to freedom, many of us need to look into our lives and move through the process of grief as we let go. Then we will be able to dream new dreams and begin to embrace the wonderful promise: *With God all things are possible*. The best part of life can start now. The new beginning will grow from the fertile ashes of past destruction. In this soil, God's power is made possible because we realize that our strength is ashes and only God has the ability to take our past destruction and use it for good. (202-204)

Reflection Questions:

Where in your life do you have unresolved or unacknowledged grief?

Are you experiencing grief right now?

Communicate how that grief has affected your life.

TAKING A RISK

Taking a risk can happen in big and small ways, but it always challenges us to grow. Initiating a new friendship, ending a relationship that isn't working, being creative, trying a new activity, learning a new skill, starting a new job, allowing yourself to be vulnerable. Becoming a parent. These are all risks. Yet, it is in risk where we discover our true capabilities, strength and courage.

Journey Reflection: It was sometime after midnight when Jesus sent his disciples across the lake. Jesus needed time alone with the Father. Reluctant to leave him, the disciples pushed their boats into the water. Later a storm began to brew in the far corner of the lake; then a light storm became a squall. The wind flapped the sails; the choppy water smacked the hull. And then, a strange thing happened: it seemed as if there was a ghost approaching them, walking on the water. As Jesus approached the boat, he could see they were frightened. But he said, "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." Most of us would have been relieved and invited him into the boat. But Peter wanted to walk on the water too. He called to Jesus, "Lord, if it is really you, then command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." So, Peter stepped out. The first step is always the hardest. It's the bravest too. Notice that Peter stepped toward Jesus. Peter needed his power and strength. Courage empowers us as we trust the One toward whom we are stepping. (206-207)

Reflection Questions:

What is keeping you from taking that first step?

What are your fears?

PERSEVERANCE

Parenting is perseverance. As a parent, you already know what this means. It is already shaping your patience and tenacity. There is no better soil for perseverance than nurturing another human being. This same perseverance applies to your own life. Be patient with yourself. Nurture yourself. You are a child of God, still growing and learning.

Journey Reflection: Patience is the main ingredient for perseverance. Anything worth achieving, any struggle or challenge, requires patience. We don't plant a garden, and then expect a crop overnight. We give the invisible time to become visible. We can plant healthy habits, but we must not expect instant results. Persevere with patience, knowing that in due time your new healthy habits will produce a crop of rewards. (213)

Reflection Question:

In what ways can you be more patient with yourself?

PREPARING FOR WEEK 8

The Week 8 meeting will take longer, about 2 hours, so plan accordingly.

CREATING PLANS AND AFFIRMATIONS

During this next week, it'll be the time to design a personal plan of change. You will read your Plan of Change out loud in group during the Week 8 gathering. (This meeting will last about two hours so please plan accordingly.)

Set goals in three areas of change: spirit, mind and body. After defining these goals, write out the steps that it will take to achieve these goals. Finally, put together your support network which consists of key people who will walk with you along the journey to freedom. They will provide direction, support, encouragement, inspiration and accountability to help you accomplish your plan of change. Focus on making your plan manageable and realistic. Take baby steps into change, focusing on one step at a time.

Giving affirmations to other participants and receiving affirmation for yourself is a special time of group. It is a moment to recognize the true self in others and for others to help you see your authentic self. Take time to thoughtfully write an affirmation for each of your fellow participants on an index card so you can share it with them.

You can write a word that describes them or a few sentences about their character or what they have meant to you in group. Avoid giving advice and focus only on affirming. You'll read these aloud during the Week 8 meeting.

Remember the keys to success as you move forward and create your plan of change.

- Stay tuned into humility and honesty.
- Focus on one day at a time.
- Treat yourself with compassion.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Avoid isolation.
- Be patient with yourself. Change is a process that takes time.
- Consistency and time equal change.
- Rest in God's strength.

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

JOURNAL

MY PERSONAL PLAN OF CHANGE

Between Week 7 and Week 8, answer these questions in your personal journal. You will share your personal plan aloud with the group during the Week 8 meeting.

STEP ONE: Write out a brief personal assessment of where you are in mind, body and spirit.

STEP TWO: Write out your goals for your mind, body and spirit.

STEP THREE: Write out specific steps to meet your goals for your mind, body and spirit.

STEP FOUR: Write out who will be your support team to help achieve these goals.

STEP FIVE: Write a brief description of what your life will be like when you start achieving these goals.

STEP SIX: Write out a daily prayer that expresses your deepest needs and desires to use as you walk the journey to freedom.

AFFIRMATIONS

Write an affirmation for each participant on an index card or notecard that you can give to other participants. You will share aloud your affirmations with the group.

Week 8: A Personal Plan for Change

AGENDA

Welcome

Walking the Journey

Share Plans and Affirmations

Serenity Prayer

Week 8: A Personal Plan for Change

WALKING THE JOURNEY

This week is for celebration! You have had the courage to walk this path, examine yourself and do the work of change. Wherever you are in life, this is an opportunity to continue to grow and transform. God is forever with you on this journey.

As you go forward, remember these words of comfort Jesus gave to his disciples: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* (John 16: 33)

In this journey, we have learned how the change process works, how motivation must be intrinsic to produce change, and that the power to overcome rests in a loving relationship with God. We have learned that we cannot make it alone. We need others on the journey. We contemplated how God has a plan for each step of the way, loving us, strengthening us, encouraging us, and doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. (227-228)

Thank you for being a part of this process and for giving others the blessing of community. We encourage you to continue your journey to freedom!

SHARE PLANS AND AFFIRMATIONS

CLOSE: SERENITY PRAYER

*God grant me
the serenity to
accept the things
I cannot change,
the courage to
change the things
that I can, and the
wisdom to know
the difference.*



MOPS