Final Edit: 2009

RESTORING THE SOUL: OVERCOMING SEXUAL ABUSE THROUGH CHRIST
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Using This Book
This curriculum is for use in small group ministries to survivors of sexual abuse and covers a wide variety of topics. Each topic can usually be covered in one group meeting. However, if more time is required to cover a particular topic the facilitator should feel free to extend the topic for an extra week. The structure of the curriculum is 13 sessions. Once-weekly group meetings are recommended, though a week might be skipped for special circumstances.

The ministry should be based on prayer from the very beginning. Before and/or during group facilitator training and during the ongoing small group sessions, weekly prayer meetings are strongly recommended. This ministry is based on the trust that God desires to heal the lives of these hurting people and that He will respond to our petitions for His power to be released within them as we progress week by week. We believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is true that he came that “they might have life and that more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Pray especially for wisdom, compassion and sensitivity in yourselves and pray that the Holy Spirit will bring to your group the people He has chosen. Then pray for them, both the ones you know are coming and the one’s who you do not yet know about. Pray that God will rebuke the enemy whose every intent is to keep them in bondage.

Sessions
Each session is designed to discuss a specific area of Concern. For example, one of these areas that requires healing is from the experience of childhood incest and abuse. Here, the Word of God helps us understand the impact of a
sexually abusive father and a mother who was threatened by and jealous of the attraction the father had for his daughter, all within the context of God’s love for each of us and his desire for us to be whole.

Participants should read the material and look up the Bible verses outlined in the written material. They will briefly write their own understanding of how these scriptures apply to their lives. A brief repetition of the material for the week will be presented at the beginning of each session, with discussion following.

Many group members will have come from families where incest has been a problem, each with their own unique experiences. Topics, such as the betrayal of those who were supposed to protect them, and other issues to help people identify the intense feelings and dysfunctional perceptions and behaviors that result, will be addressed. Once these feelings and behaviors have been identified, participants will be brought to Jesus, Who is prayerfully asked to be Lord over their lives. There will be times of repentance for dysfunctional behaviors, times to ask God for discernment and healing, and times to forgive those who have abused them. All of this is a process that takes time. We will ask Him to help the group to overcome, to forgive, and to change.

**Things to Remember**
From time to time, a group member will discuss a sin with which they are currently struggling. The Word of God says “confess your faults (sins) one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16 KJV).

Two things are critically important to keep in mind when this happens. First, we must keep the environment of the group such that people feel safe to expose themselves—and their sins—and know that they will neither be rejected nor their confessions revealed to anyone outside the group. Second, we must NEVER condone sin. In love, we should help the person face the sin as sin, hate the sin—without hating the sinner—and confess and repent before the Lord.

**Group Leaders**
It is often desirable that group facilitators have some personal experience with sexual abuse and the healing that God offers, provided that they are currently stable and mature in their faith walk even though they may have issues
that still linger. Other persons who may have no experience of sexual abuse but have empathetic and compassionate Christian maturity may also do well. Personal daily bible study and prayer life are the foundation for facilitators. Attendance in a biblically sound church is equally critical.

Facilitators would do best to meet weekly for mutual support and concerns while the groups are underway. This could be done on a separate day from the group meeting or perhaps gathering for at least a half hour before the meeting.

Weekly group prayer meetings should be made available to group members who are in crisis, and a commitment to attend weekly must be made by facilitators. If attendance at two weekly meetings is difficult to maintain, a designated time of about 45 minutes at the end of each two hour session can be done. It is good for all group members to remain and to participate in this time of prayer ministry. If this ministry time is included in the regular group meeting, it may be necessary to extend the basic 13 week format.

Facilitators also need to be willing to reach out to those who may be struggling in attendance at groups is required. Facilitators should fast and pray to be sure they are called to serve in this capacity. They generally feel totally inadequate to do this work, and truth is, they are. However, He is not. God is the healer, and the Holy Spirit will bless the faithfulness and commitment of the ministry when each person seeks Him with their whole heart.

Facilitators should, if possible, go through the group as a participant before leading a group. The most important ministry skills used to lead the groups are reflective listening and open-ended questioning. These skills are easily learned. Living Free Ministries offers a video training series for facilitators as a helpful resource.

Those who think they can do it themselves because they are trained professionals, need to spend more time seeking God before they begin this work. God can guide the humble in His ways when they get out of His way so that He can.

**Participants**  
Attendees are asked to keep a journal and make entries at least three times weekly. Entries should be related to the
healing process. Later, as they look back at how the Lord has worked in their lives during the ministry, this will encourage them to press on. Church attendance is an important aspect of the healing process. Worship and praise are fellowship time with God.

Finally, the weekly prayer meetings are helpful in the healing process. They offer a time when individuals can get extra support and encouragement. During prayer, special private needs can be lifted up in agreement with one of the prayer warriors of the ministry. They are also taught intercessory prayer for those children who are in abusive homes for God to move on those who are abusing children to bring them to repentance, accountability, and healing.

**Setting up the Restoring the Soul Group:**

Groups usually contain five or six people each. More than 8 or 9 may inhibit the group process. The best way to begin the groups is to offer a seminar that provides possible participants with an overview of the group content and helps them to prepare for participation in the group. This seminar would best be conducted by one of the facilitators, and would be a single session of about an hour, plus some time for Q and A. It might be announced in the church bulletin as an open session for all interested people, not just those who have experienced sexual abuse. In this way people who are afraid of stigma would not be singled out. For this reason, in some churches it might be best to hold the actual group sessions in an off-site location.

We recommend that those individuals who are going to go through the Restoring the Soul groups have already received Jesus as their Savior, and have at least basic New Believers’ classes prior to coming into the ministry. This way, they will be able to come to the Lord for their healing and trust that He is the source of all true healing.

**Some Additional Ground Rules for Restoring the Soul Groups:**

**Restoring the Soul groups are structured in the following ways:**

The group leader informs group members that only one person talks at a time. This rule offers a structure that protects every member from being interrupted when they are discussing something very important. Often others in the group will
relate to what the person talking is saying, and they will want to talk about that even though the current speaker is not finished.

If someone else offers a comment or question while another group member is talking about their experiences, the group leader will encourage the one who is interrupting to bring that up when they are discussing their feelings and experiences.

The groups are not a time for testimonies. Normally, testimonies can be encouraging. However, within the Restoring the Soul groups, when someone shares a testimony it can sometimes get in the way of the healing process for the person to whom they are addressing the testimony, possibly making them feel invalidated, or that God did not love them enough to do for them what the testifier is describing as having happened for them. It also often interrupts the precious time they have to share and takes away from the importance of what they have said. Just being able to open up and talk about their past experiences is a miracle for many people.

Testimonies and other comments are also a way for the person(testifier) to calm their own anxious feelings associated with the topics being discussed. It is better to help them discuss their anxious feelings at the next opportunity than to allow them to stuff their feelings by using their testimony as a way to 'escape' these feelings with which they are struggling.

The Facilitator needs to be aware that if testimony in this vein comes forth, he or she needs to interrupt and gently clarify that the focus needs to be on the other person at this time. This is not to say that brief testimonies, such as, “I know what you mean. I often have the same feelings, and God seems to help me when I stop what I’m doing and read Psalm 108,” should not be allowed.

We mentioned before that it is important for people to feel safe in the groups. Two basic assurances must be respected:

1. **First confidentiality must be absolute.** This means that everything discussed in the group must remain in the group. Even if you are able to have a professional counselor provide clinical supervision for the facilitators, the information that is shared about a situation should be
protected. No names or identifying information should be given outside of the group about the person whose difficulties are being discussed. The Facilitator might consider having group members sign a commitment paper promising confidentiality.

When processing group experiences, it is also important to avoid attaching evaluative statements to things discussed in the group. That helps us to avoid being critical about the person going through the spiritual process.

2. We have to keep the group safe by helping participants manage overwhelming emotions without getting rewounded. For example:

We recommend that you start with helping the participant who seems to be overwhelmed by emotions to focus on their breathing and to breathe deeply. Deep breathing brings them back to the 'here and now'. It is important for us to maintain self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. This means that though we may not have chosen not to be in control, we have the power in us, and therefore the responsibility, of self-control. As we control ourselves, God takes care of the external things we cannot control or change.

As participants are restored to self-control we offer prayer. It helps to ask the Lord to guide us as we pray. Also, ask the person if they would like to go on talking or start up again next week. Usually they will prefer to wait until the next session to talk more about their issues.

Never pressure someone to talk about something when they are uncomfortable doing so. Instead, ask them what it is about the topic or subject that makes it hard for them to discuss it. Help them to develop some coping skills (e.g., deep breathing, reminding themselves that they are here with sisters or brothers in Christ who are praying for them and care about them, not back in the frightening abusive situation of the past) so that they can better handle the information they are sharing.

Finally, prayer is an integral part of the group process. Two areas are particularly important. As the groups proceed, you will hear people talk about things that went on in their family and in their parents' families. Where there is an indication that these conditions have been going on for many
generations, we need to pray with the participant (either pray for them or lead them in prayer as the Lord leads you).

When you hear these issues being discussed, pray that God will intervene and pray against the years of violence and pain that the participant’s family may have experienced over several generations and break the bondage holding the participant and his/her family members. Ask God to remove the damage and teach new ways to deal with life that glorify God and to not continue the negative behaviors of the past. Ask God to give renewed thinking that reflects His word and His wisdom.

Pray that God would take away any ungodly soul ties and blood ties. God is able to break these strongholds, but 'we have not because we ask not'.

Another area of need for prayer is in the area of anger. People who grow up in violent situations may have developed a root of bitterness, and we have to help them pray and repent and forgive so that they can be set free.

When encouraging people in the group to feel free to share, there must always be a reminder that it is God we trust to help us as we go through this process of healing. He is able to carry out to completion that good work which he has begun in us until the day of Christ Jesus.

We discuss these things because right now they have control over the group. They are hidden in the darkness. They are being brought out into the light where God is when we discuss them in the group. While they are hidden, they interfere with our relationship with God and with others by presenting imposing walls and barriers which Satan would have us believe protect us from pain. We know that these walls do not protect us, they keep us prisoners. They keep others out, but they also keep us in. As we open up and discuss the past, we hurt for the moment, but as we empty out the pain, God fills the space that is left behind with his healing love. The result is freedom - those who are free in Christ are free indeed.
SESSION ONE
HOW DO WE PUT THE PAST BEHIND US?

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER:

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.
Isaiah 60:18

Blessed Heavenly Father, we praise you for Your Grace to Heal and for bringing together those in need of healing from sexual abuse. Be our strength as we face the pain of the past. Anoint each person here for healing, Lord, and help the group leader(s) to set ourselves aside so that You can work through us. As we begin this journey toward a deeper relationship with you and with others, we confess our fears and the desire to turn and run the other way. We ask you to help us trust you as we have never trusted you before and to allow you to bring us out of the darkness of the past and into your glorious light in freedom. Forgive us for the things we have done in the past that have fallen short of your will for our lives. Help us Lord, one day at a time, to walk in the center of your will. In Jesus Name I pray.

SHARING QUESTION:

R: The purpose of this question is to help people identify that they belong in this group.

As we begin to look at the topic of sexual abuse, we can use the following questions to help us decide if we need to address this problem. Are there any of the symptoms at the end of this chapter that you identify as problems for you? Do you feel ashamed a lot of the time, but not know exactly why? Do you get angry, but aren’t sure what it is that is making so angry? Have you ever had a ‘flashback’ to something that happened in the past that scared you?
SELF-AWARENESS:
The goal of this course is to help participants develop a greater ability to enter into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ and with others close to us. To be able to accomplish that goal, the course will help us to identify the distorted perceptions, emotional barriers, and destructive behaviors that have developed as a result of traumatic experience(s) related to past sexual abuse experiences. In these sessions we will discuss aspects of the trauma of (usually childhood) sexual abuse that we have experienced and the healing power of our Lord Jesus Christ as He works in our lives to bring about wholeness.

As we discuss sexual abuse, let us look at several definitions so that we all agree about what we are discussing. Kubetin (1992, p.3) broadly defines it as "any sexual activity, verbal, visual or physical, engaged in without consent, which may be emotionally or physically harmful and which exploits a person in order to meet another person's sexual or emotional needs. The person does not consent if he or she cannot reasonably choose to consent or refuse because of age, circumstances, level of understanding, and dependency or relationship to the offender."

Dan Allender (1990, p.30) says that "sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person".

All inappropriate sexual contact is damaging and soul-distorting. There are many levels of sexual abuse that range on a continuum from sexualized interactions to intercourse. Those events that most closely resemble intercourse are the most severe, but all forms of abuse affect the innocent child upon whom they are forced.

This continuum ranges from Verbal Sexual Abuse to Visual Sexual Abuse to innuendo to Physical Sexual Abuse. Another aspect that contributes to severity is the relationship between the child victim and the perpetrator. This might range from a complete stranger to beloved parent, The close the relationship and the more the abuser is someone that the victim depends on for their protection.
the greater the degree of damage to the victim’s ability to trust and integrity of personal boundaries.

With all other factors being equal, damage will be in direct proportion to the degree that it disrupts the protection and nurturing of the parental bond.

R: Allow only brief sharing at this point.

Now that we have defined sexual abuse, let us look at restoration. What is our definition of restoration?

Restoration involves an honest look at the past, a recognition of how the past is holding us back from the fullness of relationship with Christ Jesus and with the Father, and the freedom that comes with turning to God fully and completely for healing in specific areas of our life which have been brought to our attention by the Holy Spirit.

We all know some of what happened to us. We are all too aware of the pain we experience and the memories that haunt us. We feel the shame, fear, guilt, anger, and grief brought about by the painful events of the past. What we often do not know is how these experiences are holding us captive today.

How do these past abuse experiences impact our lives today? First, these experiences make us unable to sustain the risk of being vulnerable and transparent with God and with each other. Secondly, we have perceptions (distorted by our past trauma) of what others are thinking, what they mean when they speak with us, and what their motives are. These perceptions cause us to respond to others inappropriately, in ways that damage those relationships, hurt others, and hurt ourselves.

Finally, we are likely to have several of the symptoms listed at the end of this chapter. These symptoms or behaviors are damaging to us and to others. Addiction, suicidal thoughts, ungodly sexual activity, depression and anxiety are only a few that come to mind. These symptoms will not just ‘go away’. They require our involvement and the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives to heal our wounded and broken hearts.
To be set free from the past, we will begin by discussing what our experiences have been. In our small group(s) we carefully bring out into the open, often for the first time ever, the events that refuse to go away, refuse to be forgiven and forgotten.

Because the Body of Christ is present in the groups in the form of leaders who will minister to the deeply wounded we can risk facing the past. God's way often includes wounded healers (those with similar backgrounds who have experienced significant healing) who help others who have had similar events in their lives to overcome the devastation and painful consequences of the past. The healing process is so much easier to accomplish when you know that the person with whom you speak has a frame of reference to help them understand what you are saying.

Just the process of talking about the events of the past and the feelings attached to them, brings them out into the open where the light of the Word of God is able to dispel the lies and heal the pain. We can see that with God helping us through this process, we become free of the fears attached to the process. We don’t fall apart. We can stop crying.

We are not creating negative emotions. The negative emotions are already there. They are controlling us because we do not want to allow them out for fear of the pain attached to them. By bringing them out into the light, we remove the power they have over us, and we are set free from their binding effect.

The Holy Spirit works to expose our faulty perceptions and responses that continue to make us turn to self-protective negative behaviors and responses. When we take these perceptions, responses and other behaviors to the Lord in repentance he heals us and teaches us new ways to walk safely in the light. In 1 John 1:9 He tells us that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we incorporate these difficult events into our present so they no longer have control over us and we can put them behind us. We begin to identify perceptions that trigger behavioral and spiritual responses we have learned to use to protect ourselves. As
we bring these behaviors to the Lord, we ask him to show us how to change and we invite him to work in our lives to conform us to His likeness.

R: Ask group members if they have any thoughts about this? Your role is to help the group members clarify their understanding of the process. The purpose of asking the group for feedback is to be sure they understand what to expect from the group.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD IN:
Does God heal? Is he willing to heal our wounded hearts? What does 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 say to encourage us about healing?

R: God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS:
R: Welcome everyone to Restoration Ministry for victims of sexual abuse. If you have a large group of people of both genders you will want to separate men and women into different rooms after you have presented the introduction. Form groups of no more than seven or eight participants and have each member introduce him/herself. Ask each to briefly define their reasons for coming to the group and what they hope to get out of this experience.

Since this session is designed to help us understand the healing process we want to look at what God's Word says about it. For example, what does Matthew 11:30, tell us about turning over our burdens to Jesus and replacing our heavy yoke with His light one?

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

How does that apply to the healing process?

R: It tells us that Jesus knows and cares about the heavy burdens of life, including sexual abuse, and that by yielding our lives to him the heaviness in our hearts will lift and we will find rest and peace.
What does 1 John 1:3 tell us about bringing these experiences out into the open and talking about them?

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, (the Gospel of Freedom in Christ Jesus) so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

What other scriptures offer us encouragement that the Lord has healing for us (e.g., Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13) and what do they say about the part that forgiveness plays in the healing process?

God wants us to cast our cares on him and forgive those who have hurt us.

How can we apply Proverbs 3:5 to specific aspects of healing (e.g., how to overcome distorted perceptions)?

R: We must learn to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding. As we acknowledge him, he will make our paths straight.

What assurance do we have in Matthew 7:7-8 that Jesus will respond to our request for healing?

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

LIFE APPLICATION:
Below are characteristics which have been identified (Kubiten & Mallory, 1992, p.7-9) as related to the trauma of sexual abuse in children, women and men:

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHILDREN (Toddlers, Preschool and School-age Children, and
Teenagers)
Nightmares
Withdrawal
Pseudo-maturity
Violent play
Low self-esteem
Fear of undressing
Stomach pain/headaches
Running away from home
Outbursts of anger
Early sexual promiscuity
Fear of being alone
Unprovoked crying spells
Sexually transmitted disease
Pregnancy or fear of pregnancy
Clinging to significant adult
Excessive bathing or brushing of teeth
Loss of appetite/increase in appetite
Refusal to go to school/leaving school
Fear of specific person(s), situation(s) or stranger(s)
Vaginal discharge/unusual odor in genital area
Seductive or sexual behavior with peers or adults
Bleeding, bruises, or problems walking or sitting
Pain, itching, redness on genitalia, vaginal, and anal area
Increase in activity level/decrease in attention span
Behavior problems at school/change in school performance

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN FEMALE VICTIMS
SECRECY
SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, ATTEMPTS
DEPRESSION
PROMISCUOUS BEHAVIOR
INSOMNIA
DISTRUST OF AUTHORITIES OR OF EVERYONE
MEMORY BLOCKS
OVERLY CRITICAL ATTITUDE
GUILT/SHAME
LOW SELF-ESTEEM
SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
EATING DISORDERS
SEDUCTIVE BEHAVIOR
WITHDRAWAL/ISOLATION OF SELF FROM OTHERS
PERCEIVED HELPLESSNESS
HEADACHES/STOMACHACHES
INABILITY TO SAY NO
LOSS OF SELF-CONTROL
REPEATED VICTIMIZATION  
UNDERACHIEVEMENT/OVERACHIEVEMENT  
PANIC ATTACKS/ANXIETY ATTACKS  
SEXUAL DETACHMENT/SEXUAL ADDICTION  
DIFFICULTY IN SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS  
DIFFICULTY IN HANDLING SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS  
ANGER TOWARD EVERYONE/ANGER WITH CHILDREN AND SPOUSE

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN MALE VICTIMS
GUILT  
SHAME  
ANGER  
ANXIETY  
SELF-HATE  
DEPRESSION  
STOMACHACHES  
HEADACHES  
WITHDRAWAL  
NERVOUSNESS  
FEAR OF ABUSER  
SUICIDAL FEELINGS  
CONFUSION OF IDENTITY  
LOW SELF-ESTEEM  
FEELINGS OF BETRAYAL  
SECRECY/AVOIDANCE/DENIAL  
ADOPTION OF "MACHO" PERSONA  
DISCOUNTING OR MINIMIZING OF SEXUAL EXPERIENCES  
DIFFICULTY IN DISCLOSING ABUSE  
FEAR OF ADULT MEN AND/OR WOMEN  
SEXUAL OVERACTIVITY/SEXUAL UNDERACTIVITY  
SEXUAL DETACHMENT/SEXUAL ADDICTION  
DIFFICULTY IN INTERACTIONS WITH ADULT FRIENDS  
CONFUSED FEELINGS ABOUT SEX/SEX PROBLEMS  
DIFFICULTY WITH FEELINGS ABOUT SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

R: At the beginning of our session I asked you to examine this list and think about yourselves.

As we acknowledge what has happened to us, and bring it to Jesus, He will shed his light upon the past and expose the lies and distortions that cause us to feel responsible for these wounds. As we become aware of and face, with Him, the areas where we need to change and repent of those behaviors and attitudes that were survival tools for us in the past but are now barriers between God and ourselves and/or between our brothers and sisters in Christ and ourselves, let us bring each one of these behaviors to God
It is important to understand that during the healing process we will face some painful memories and some difficult experiences within ourselves. God is our greatest source of comfort. Go to him and he will comfort you by His Spirit that is living in you. If you do not know whether the Holy Spirit is living in you or you are unsure of your salvation and the reality of your relationship with Christ, you need to let the facilitator of your group know this and he/she will pray with you so that you will be able to have the assurance of salvation.

As we progress through the healing process, we ask God to make us aware of things (e.g., a root of bitterness, unforgiveness that we may be harboring, our need to control, etc.) that are holding us in bondage. We bring these issues to the group; not for the purpose of becoming angry, but because we are angry. We expose them to the light of a Christ centered environment and we are set free. As we discuss them, we bring them to Christ and pray about them. We apply the Word of God to the things that are keeping us bound. Through exposing the cause of our pain and the ways we have tried to protect ourselves, God sets us free from the damage of abuse - past, present, and future. **We must be clear that God is the healer.**

To be healed, we must first know that we are in Christ Jesus. Then we must learn who we are in Christ Jesus. Healing comes from our relationship with Jesus. As we grow, we learn to challenge our 'instincts' about life. We go to the Lord, not to our own thinking, for the wisdom, insight, and understanding we need to step outside the box and live a new, free life.

Healing takes time. You cannot hurry the process. Proverbs 19:2 tells us "it is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." Healing is a process. Let us take our time, seek the Lord, allow Him to heal our hurts and change our ways as they need to be changed to conform us to the likeness of His Son.

**What areas of your life do you know need restoration and healing?** As we close in prayer, be sure to ask God to work in these areas of your life and any others about which you may not be aware.
SESSION TWO
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY?

INTRODUCTION
OPENING PRAYER:
R: Blessed Heavenly Father, we come before you to ask for your comfort and leading as we talk about issues related to our families and the role of the family in our sexual abuse experience. We ask you Lord to guide our thinking and our discussion. Don't let us become angrier than we already are. Give us strength to talk about what we need to express and feel what we need to feel so that we can get beyond our past wounds, be set free from bitterness, anger, resentment, and other forms of malice, and understand how the past is holding our present and future in bondage. Lead us as we walk in the light, as you are in the light. We ask you Lord to help us let go of our fear of what our family will do as we speak about the things we were told to never reveal, and as we let go of the need to keep things secret and repressed that has been instilled in us. We thank you for setting us free, for those who are in the Son ARE Free Indeed! In Jesus Name We Pray!

SHARING QUESTION:
Was it hard to talk with family members about the events
related to sexual abuse in your life?

If you did not tell them, what do you think caused you to keep it a secret? What effect has keeping it a secret had on you? On your walk with Christ?

R: Group leaders can ask if shame played a role in not asking others for help to stop the abuse. Also, did anyone tell us not to talk? Or perhaps when we first shared it we were given a non-verbal message to keep quite.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM:

As we discuss the role of the family in the traumatic experience of sexual abuse, and its aftermath, we want to understand more clearly what actually happened in our homes. By understanding the situation better, we will be able to dispel the lies and shame that has accumulated because of the responsibility we have taken for the actions of our family and its members.

For most of us the sexual abuse of our past did not happen in a vacuum. As difficult as it is to believe, family patterns set the stage for our abuse and the distortion of responsibility that followed. These patterns include:

- People did not listen to us when we had something to say.

  For example, when we had a problem, or were hurt or someone did something to us and we needed protection, other members of our family did not respond in a helpful and nurturing manner. They either ignored us, they became angry with us for bothering them with our problem, or they blamed us for saying such an awful thing about a family member.

- The family was dysfunctional.

  Family members were unable to meet our needs for nurturing, communication, consistency, and loving. The message we received was, "We are not important enough for them to 'take care of'." We began to feel isolated. We felt we had nowhere to go for help, so we gave up.

- The family was not a supportive environment.
The family failed to support healthy communication and understanding among individual members. Perhaps addiction or other forms of dysfunction were present. We may have been allocated a role such as 'scapegoat', 'mascot', 'enabler', etc., and reaped the consequences of that role (e.g., scapegoats are blamed for everything bad that happens within the family). Other factors may have been present in the family environment (e.g., many families function through resentment, jealousy, and hidden agendas. Basically, we did not have anyone we could go to for protection or count on to be in our corner when we needed support or protection.

- Family members were taught patterns of avoiding embarrassment by using secrecy to control family interactions, censoring of information shared with the outside world, and external relationship patterns.

Families where incest, addiction, or other sin is present will work to keep these events a secret. The family members may want to avoid shame for the person they love or upon whom they are economically or emotionally dependent who is perpetrating the abuse. They may be afraid of what others will think of them and their family if the 'secret' is exposed. Often they come out of similar family backgrounds and are just acting out roles with which they are intimately familiar.

For whatever reason they will do anything to keep the 'secret', and will punish severely anyone who tries to expose it. Most families where sexual abuse is present function in secrecy. The message to each member is clear and we heard it. Even talking about the past now seems almost impossible because of the sanctions against it that we learned early on.

- Family Environments

Many factors created the environment within which these dysfunctional family systems developed. For example, the single-parent family is an environment within which the family head is often too tired and too unavailable to be approached for nurturing and protection.

Divorce opens the way for children to be placed at risk with incest-prone parents in unsupervised visits where the other parent is not present.
In addition, this environment invites threatening situations with non-parental romantic partners of parents in separated or divorced families who threaten the safety and security of children in the home. These partners have no parental relationship with the children, and may feel free to enter into sexual relationships with teenage children. These relationships are particularly devastating to the children because the real parent often blames the child for 'seducing' the partner and feels betrayed by the child for 'stealing' their lover. The child is victimized by both of the adults in the house and believes the lie that they are the 'perpetrator of evil'.

These 'extended' families are particularly dangerous when one or both of the adults are dysfunctional due to alcohol and drug abuse. For example, a teenage daughter at home alone with mother's alcoholic boyfriend is a classic theme that runs through the life stories of many incest survivors.

Authoritarian Family Systems

Authoritarian family systems tend to be at higher risk for creating situations where children are vulnerable to sexual abuse. In these systems, no one questions the actions of the head person (usually the father), and no one talks about things that would disturb the head person for fear of the consequences.

If a child is molested or abused by the head person or a family member who is closely aligned with that person (e.g., brother, sister, etc.) the victim would not be able to make their abuse known. If they did reveal what happened to them, they would be the target of condemnation and further abuse for which they would feel responsible because it would be sanctioned by the head person.

In a family like this, the victim is rarely close to the head. Sometimes the family head will use their 'power' to seduce their victim. The head may shower the victim with presents and separate them from other members as 'special'.

The other family members, usually siblings and occasionally the other parent, blame the victim for the lack of attention and favor that they get from the 'head'.

The victim is seen by other family members as highly favored instead of victimized, and siblings become jealous. They become enemies instead of allies and the environment for the victim is dangerous from every direction.

Either way in these situations we had no one to whom we could go for help. We felt 'different' from all of the other family members and were sure that difference was not a good thing. Consequently, we feel that there was something shameful about us, and that we should hide our abuse experiences so that no one will know how unacceptable we 'really are'.

- Other Risk Factors for Incest and Abuse

Families that move frequently are particularly vulnerable to incest and sexual abuse. In these families, the children are not able to 'put down roots' anywhere. They are unable to connect with possible outside allies to whom they can go for help if abuse occurs. They are completely at the mercy of abusive family members. If the family is also dysfunctional and not meeting the needs of its members in a healthy way, the stronger members may decide to force the weaker members to meet a distorted need created by the insecurity of the environment in which they find themselves.

What happens within these families when sexual abuse is present? First, we are sent a message that we are worthless. We have no value, because if we had value, no one would use us to do things that are so awful they cannot be talked about. If we do go to anyone in the family for help, our feelings and emotions are invalidated and we are told that severe consequences will follow if we repeat our concerns to anyone.

The conspiracy of secrecy develops within the family. We are taught that we must not talk, trust, or feel. So, how do we handle our emotions? We have a constant need for approval from the 'real people' in our families; a need that is never met. There is often no relief from abuse, so eventually helplessness and hopelessness sets in.

Finally, many survivors of sexual abuse move into a fantasy world. We may develop fantasy relationships through which we meet the need for validation and approval. Hopelessness and inability to assure safety causes us to
construct fantasy relationships in our minds. These fantasy relationships can be seen when survivors speak about the awful things that happened to them in their families. They often sound completely detached from these events.

In one breath, for example, a survivor will tell of the mean way that brothers and sisters would not allow them to join in family play, while in the next breath they will go on and on about how much help their brothers and sisters have been to them. And, when asked what kind of help they have received from brothers and sisters, they are unable to identify any examples.

Another risk factor in families where sexual abuse is present is inappropriate or absent physical nurturing. Some sexual abuse survivors grow to accept abuse as the 'only love they will ever get'. The child grows into a vulnerable adult who has difficulty showing affection. A life of promiscuity and sexual addiction may follow.

R: Does all of this ring a bell with you? Let’s continue by looking at these things from a Biblical perspective.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD IN:
What insight does 2 Samuel 13 offer to us about David's family and the deceptiveness of the family of sexual abuse?

R: Amnon used deception to bring Tamar to a place of vulnerability. He sexually abused her, and then rejected her once he was finished with her.

What were the consequences of Amnon’s acts on his life and the future of David's family?

R: Tamar was forever destroyed by the events that happened. Amnon was killed by Tamar's brother. And David was powerless to preserve his family's health and safety.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS:
What comfort did Tamar receive from her brothers? Her father?

R: Her father was furious about Amnon’s actions, but did nothing, her brother Absalom told her to be quiet - that he
would get even, and her brother Amnon rejected her and told her to leave him alone.

What hope does John 3:16 and Colossians 1:27 give to us for this kind of family?

R: God loved us so much he made a way for us to return to Him, but He also provided a way for our abuser to be saved. He is our Hope - Christ in us, our Hope in Glory.

What are we told in 1 John 4:3-4 that assures us that we will be healed of the problems related to sexual abuse?

R: 1 John 4:3-4 tells us that everyone born of God will overcome the World.

What does Philippians 3:14-16 tell us about the purpose we have for dealing with all of these family issues and the sexual abuse of our past?

R: Pressing on toward the goal to will the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus, we deal with our past, putting it behind us, and taking up Christian maturity.

And what are we told in 1 John 1:7 regarding secrecy and openness?

R: If we walk in the light, exposing the darkness that is holding us in bondage, letting out that which is hidden, we have fellowship with God, with Jesus, and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The past, and the family in which we were raised, will have no more influence over our relationship with Christ.

LIFE APPLICATION:

The healing process begins when the adult survivor reaches out for help as you are doing. As we redefine the family and sort out what was real and what was not, we are able to see our role in the abuse from a different perspective. As we see the depth and breadth of Christ's love for us, and how valuable we are to Him and to the Father, we begin the Restoration Process and are on our way to becoming an ‘Overcomer’.
God helps us deal with the areas of our heart that try to prevent us from opening up and sharing the past, and with the aftermath of sexual abuse that is revealed when we do talk about our experiences.

It is critical that we understand that by talking about the past and bringing our pain out into the light we are not betraying our family, we are beginning the process by which we will all be set free. Once our family sees what God can do in our life, they will be encouraged to come to the Lord and seek his healing as well. God will make us part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

CLOSING PRAYER:

I want to invite the group to also pray as we close. Does anyone have any prayer requests? Any Praise Reports?

R: Ask for or assign members of the group to pray for the specific prayer requests people have mentioned. The group leader should close the group in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for bringing our shame out into the open and showing us that it is not our shame, but the sin of those around us that has caused us so much pain. Truly, those who are free in the Son are free indeed. Please help us now to learn to love these individuals who have done us evil, because we know that all of us are evil and fall short of the Glory of God, yet You forgave us. As You have forgiven us, help us to forgive these others who have done evil to us. We ask that You would set us free from the evil done to us in the process. We take every spiritual force of retaliation, retribution, backlash, revenge and sabotage captive to the word of God. In Jesus Name we pray.
SESSION THREE
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE GOD AS A FATHER?

INTRODUCTION
OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, please reveal to each of us what You are telling us in 2 Corinthians 6:18: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Let Your Word be made real to us and help us to learn to depend and trust in You and in Your Word as the reality of our life - letting go of the things of the past - and clinging tightly to You and Your Word. Thank you Lord that you are faithful to all of your promises and loving toward all you have made. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
What are some of the obstacles we encounter when we try to understand how God can be a father to us? How does our past sexual abuse affect our ability to see God as Father and Mother?

R: “Do you suppose that the word “Father” has become
emotionally loaded in your mind? Does that word mean absolute trust in the loving kindness of “father,” or does it mean fear, distrust, and a desire to run?

What does it mean to us to be able to make God our father? How does this anchor us to a firm foundation in Christ as we deal with the painful events of the past?

R: If people say that they don’t know what it will mean you might say, “You’re right, this is a difficult question and finding out an answer is what this session is all about.

SELF-AWARENESS:
As the healing process unfolds, we become aware of certain feelings we have had in the past about God that keep us from experiencing a full relationship with him. We examine our feelings about "where he was when we were abused", and "how he could 'let' that happen".

For many of us, we find that it is hard for us to see God in the role of father as often our father was the person who abused us. We have many negative feelings about the word "Father". These feelings and reactions need to be addressed if we are to heal from our past abuse.

We also need to see Him as Mother. Often we have feelings toward our earthly mothers because they did not or could not protect us from the sexual abuse we experienced.

Placing God in the role of Father, Mother, Parent is a basic tenet of Christianity. (We are his adopted children through Christ Jesus.) However, I have known good Christians who love the Lord very much but wince at the thought of calling him Father. They will speak of Him as "Creator" or God or the Almighty, but they resist all attempts to get them to acknowledge him as their Father.

We must come to terms with the issues that keep us from embracing Him as Father if we are to grow as Christians. Our resistance to acknowledging the Father is a barrier to having an intimate, loving relationship with our Abba. How can we appreciate the full wonder of being a joint heir with Christ if we cannot acknowledge God as our Father from whom all blessings flow. It is important for us to face our feelings and allow the Lord to show us what a loving, nurturing Father He is.
As we face the anger, hurt, and pain caused by a "negative father figure," God is able to replace these emotions with His love. The result is healing. Allowing God to be our Father makes it possible for him to be our healer. It opens us up to forgiveness, repentance, and trust. We can enter into His rest and be comforted.

Since unforgiveness is a major obstacle to acknowledging our Father God, who do we need to forgive to bring about change? How can making God our Father lead us to repentance for those areas of our life in which we need freedom? How does making God our Father affect our ability to trust Him? What role does trust play in the healing process?

As we recognize the resentment and bitterness we have about our past, we take it to the Cross and accept the forgiveness (for ourselves and for others) that God has waiting for us there. Learning to trust God enables us to have the confidence to learn to enjoy the intimacy that comes with His love.

Part of making God our Father involves taking authority over and breaking the ungodly soul ties and blood ties that keep us in bondage to "family strongholds". These family strongholds seem to control us and other members of our family; they limit our ability to walk in the Spirit.

I am not suggesting that we should reject our family of origin; but we do not have to be in bondage to the intergenerational strongholds that come with that bloodline. As we are in Christ, we have a new bloodline – the Blood of Jesus. As we break the ties to the old and are set free in Christ Jesus, we enter into the fullness of the family of Christ. We recognize that Jesus is our brother and God is our Father. The healing and protecting blood of Jesus is our inheritance.

R: Let’s take a short time to listen to each other and try to understand what we’ve experienced and felt in our own lives.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD-IN:
What does Romans 8:29 tell us about our family in Christ Jesus? "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the
firstborn among many brothers."

R: We have important promises regarding our relationship to Jesus and to the Father. He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. If we are able to be like Jesus, then we have a choice between staying where we are and the way we are and allowing the Holy Spirit to conform us to what God wants us to be.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS:

Do we have scriptural support for accepting God as our Father, Mother, and Spouse? 2 Corinthians 6:18 tells us that “I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

R: Throughout His Word, God is always inviting us to embrace Him as Father. For example, He says that he will be a Father to me and I will be his son or daughter. He also tells us that he loves us more than a mother loves the baby at her breast (Isaiah 49:15) and that as a mother comforts her child, he will be our comforter (Isaiah 66:13). Although the Bible never describes God the Father as our Mother, remember that God is neither a man or a woman. He is our parent and he uses gender as a metaphor for a deeper message about his covenant relationship with his people, which is like a committed, faithful, tender, love relationship.”

What does He tell us in Psalm 68:5-6? (5)“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (6) God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.”

R: God promises to be our father and our defender. He knows how important a family is and sets those who are lonely in families.

How does he do this?

Through his people, by surrounding them with caring and loving people, such as our group, where there is no sinful violation of our personhood and where it is safe to learn
who and how to trust.

What does Matthew 6:9 tell us about beginning our prayers with "Our Father"?

R: Jesus tells us that this is how we should pray. We are to speak to "Our Father" who is in Heaven. Encourage the group to share what crosses their mind when they pray this prayer.

And what does Matthew 7:11 tell us we can expect from our Father, God?

R: He gives good gifts, better than any good gifts we could give. Some of these good gifts for those of us who have been sexually abused might be freedom from anxiety, overcoming negative habits, etc. . . .

In Romans 8:15 what are we told about the Spirit we have received from our Father?

R: By His Spirit that He gave us, we can call Him Abba (Daddy), Father.

How would you feel about calling the heavenly Father “Daddy?”

R: Let them express their discomfort.

What does 1 Peter 1:17 tell us about how having God as our Father affects the way we live our lives?

R: Since we can call on a Father who is impartial, we are to live lives as strangers here in reverent fear. We have been redeemed. To be redeemed means that we have been rescued from all the junk, sin, exploitation and failure in our lives when Jesus traded places with us on the cross - his perfection for the sorrow and imperfection in our families and our past.

What does Psalm 27:10 tell us about God's faithfulness to us as His children?

R: He will always receive us. Ask the group if they feel safe when they come before God in prayer. They may not, thus giving you information for the prayer time at the end
of the session.

In Isaiah 49:15-16, what are we told about the extent of His love?

R: He will never forget us, we are engraved on his hand. Our walls (that we have built to protect us from the emotions of the past that haunt us) are ever before him.

In Galatians 3:29, what are we told about our inheritance as his children?

R: If we belong to Christ, we are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. What does this mean to us? For one thing it means that we are to inherit everything that God promised to Abraham.

LIFE APPLICATION:

This session was designed to help us look at the barriers we have constructed in our minds that keep us from recognizing God as our Father. God wants to have the most intimate role in our lives. As the Lord exposes these barriers He will help us to let go of our fears and embrace Him as Father.

Let us discuss what barriers we have built to keep us from wanting to put God in the Father role. Sometimes the term "father" is associated with pain. Let us address each reason for avoiding the word "father" and allow the Lord to heal these hurts.

R: Help the group talk about the barriers they have to making God their father. Remind them that this is part of the healing process, and that it may take more than one time of thinking and praying about it, so they should include these issues in their daily prayer time with God.

CLOSING PRAYER:

[Each group member is asked to take a moment to ask God to reveal himself to them as Father and to help them to become more like Jesus and look to Him as their role model while letting go of the role models they currently embrace.]

Blessed Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a Father to
us, and we are Your children. We want that intimate relationship which You created us to have with You. Please reveal to us how we should grow and change in order to do everything we can to be available as You work in us the miracle of reconciliation and healing. In Jesus Name we pray.

FOR NEXT WEEK!!!!

As home work for the next session we are asking each participant to look through the Bible and find ten scriptural verses that tell us who we are in Christ. Write these versus out and write after at least five of them what you have learned about who you are in Christ as a result of studying this Scripture.

R: Some of your group probably will not do this work for the next session. That’s not a big problem because in the next session you will work together as a group on this assignment.

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SESSION FOUR
WHO I AM IN CHRIST JESUS?

INTRODUCTION
OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, we come to you to ask you for help. Each one of us needs to have a revelation of who we are in Christ Jesus. Lay a foundation of Christ Jesus in us. He is our hope in Glory. Help us to understand that we can hold onto and draw strength from you in the days to come as we face the past abuse we have experienced. Let this strengthening power be real for us, not just words, but The Word - that never goes out of our mouths and returns to us void, but will accomplish what You have set forth for it to do. We desire that you would work in us the purpose for which you sent Your Word to us (Isaiah 55:11)." In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
Were you able to complete your homework assignment last week? If so, has anything changed in the way you see yourself?
Are there things about the way you see yourself that conflict with what the Bible says about you? If so, who is wrong, you or God?

**SELF-AWARENESS:**

The goal of this session is to help participants lay a foundation of understanding about who we are in Christ Jesus. By doing so, we have substance from which to draw as we look at past experiences. Knowing who we are in Christ Jesus enables us to take our eyes off of [our mistaken identity and to begin the process of relearning our new nature, remembering that in coming to faith, Paul says that “whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence.” 2 Cor. 5:17] As we discover this true identity, He is able to heal us.

The experience of sexual abuse erodes confidence and self-esteem. This new self identity we learn from God’s word might well be called “Christ esteem” because it is based on his nature (He is the Word made flesh) within us not on the old “self.” It compromises the integrity of our physical body.

The abuser insidiously told us we were the one who was responsible for what happened. We begin believing what we were told; we think that anyone treated so violently and abusively must deserve it. Because sexual abuse is so traumatic and has such a deep impact on our souls, these beliefs become part of our perceptions about ourselves and the world around us. And remember, whatever was our responsibility has been covered over by the blood of Jesus and remembered no more by God.

In early childhood we learn who we are. This information comes from the messages we are sent by the words and actions of our family around us. Later, it is reinforced by early experiences with school mates and other peers. The 'self-image' information takes its place with other early childhood learning and becomes an initial screen through which all future learning and information is processed.

Why do we need to change our self appraisal? Let us look at what happens if we don't. First, we perceive life
around us from assumptions based on the information described above. Everything we experience is received and made sense of through the 'screen' of abuse.

For example, we respond to others based on our perceptions. If life has been unsafe, we are likely to be suspicious of others. This is especially likely to be the case if those responsible for our basic security are the most dangerous people in our lives. Our responses to others are then not just the product of what actually happened, but the results of our interpretation of what happened as influenced and shaped by our past abuse.

Defensive behavior, which often comes across to others as contemptuous, arrogant, punitive, and off-putting, usually comes from a fear that others will put us down and we will not be able to stand the pain that follows. If we expect to be disrespected, abused, blamed, shamed, etc., we develop ways to protect ourselves. Our responses to that expectation will be defensive and self-protective no matter what is really happening around us or how good others' intentions may be.

Consequently, we often completely misread the intentions of others. We think that kind people are evil and evil people are being kind. We do this because of our distorted perceptions. So, when good, kind people approach us, we push them away. Meanwhile, those who would hurt us seem 'safer' to relate to since they are 'familiar'.

We need to change from self- to Christ-esteem so our responses are shaped by what God wants for us instead of by the past abuse we have experienced. God does not want us to walk around feeling we are worthless and of no value.

If we base our self-esteem on anything other than what God says about us - His love for us, His promises to us, and who we are in Christ Jesus - we will never feel good enough. Even without the experience of sexual abuse, we all fall short of the Glory of the Lord. But, in Christ we are good enough because He is good enough! And because we are in Him, so are we!

As we begin to review and think about who we are in Him we understand that our focus, where we put our eyes and our emotional emphasis, needs to be on Jesus and not on ourselves. Self-Concept and Self-Esteem becomes Christ-
Concept, Christ-Esteem. As we get self out of the way, we finally know how unique and wonderful we are. After all, He died for us, didn't He? And, He created us too. He must think we are worthwhile! He's God. He knows EVERYTHING! I believe Him and I can take His word for it!

R: Ask participants if they understand what was said, and clarify as needed so that they can begin to understand their need to challenge the way they relate to others around them. Help them to understand that they are not 'bad' because they may use these defenses. They are just wounded. But, as they change their defenses, their lives will be much richer and easier, because they will be able to develop some ‘safe’ relationships.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD IN:
What conditions does God put on His love for us in Ephesians 2:4&5 “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”

And in Romans 5:8? “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

R: He did not wait until we gave up our sins to die for us and make a way for our salvation.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS:
As home work we asked each participant to look through the Bible and find ten Scripture verses that reveal to us who we are in Christ Jesus.

R: Ask each person in the group to select one of their Scripture verses and to describe how it has been a help to them in beginning to see themselves as God sees them. Give them about four or five minutes to describe how that verse has affected their lives and their feelings.

What wonderful thing does 2 Corinthians 5:21 ["God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."] tell us that Jesus did for us? How does that change our lives forever?
R: How does this verse change the way we think about ourselves?

What does James 1:18 tell us about how God's word able to change us?

“He chose to give us life through His Word so that we might be His first fruits of all His Creation.”

R: What are the first fruits? They are the fruits that are the best the tree has to offer. These are the fruits the farmer would offer to God as a perfect sacrifice.

What does 1 Peter 2:5 tell us about how God is preparing us for the future? “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

R: What does it mean to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood? How do our abuse influenced perceptions interfere with our becoming that holy priesthood? What are those spiritual sacrifices we are to offer?

What does Ephesians 2:10 tell us about who are in Christ and what meaning and purpose he has for us?

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

R: How do the lies we were told about ourselves and the trauma-induced perceptions we have or ourselves interfere with what God has prepared in advance for us to do?

What does Romans 8:37 say we about our being victims?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

R: What do we need to do to become the men and women of God that He has created us to be?

LIFE APPLICATION:

Now that we have talked about how God sees us through his Word, we are ready for each person to have the opportunity to tell what good qualities we see in each other. We will do this in what is called a "Positive
Feedback Circle”.

Examples of feedback should come from something you have seen in that person and might include:

I see Christ in you.

You have loving eyes, and I feel the warmth of the Lord when you speak to others compassionately.

I can see that Jesus has given you a tender heart.

Examples of these observations are helpful where possible.

R: Begin with someone who says they are comfortable being on the "hot seat". The person on the hot seat should not say anything until everyone else has spoken to them. The person to their left should begin giving feedback and go around the circle until everyone has had a chance to share briefly with that person. This is a time for us to share our love one for another. After everyone has shared what they think of the first person on the "hot seat" allow that person a moment to share what they are feeling.

Then move to the next person on their right and allow the previous "hot seat" participant to begin the next feedback round. When everyone is finished, give participants a few minutes to talk about the experience and move to the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER:
R: Ask group members to spend two or three minutes meditating on what they have learned about themselves from the Word and from the group. Then move to a group prayer.

Blessed Heavenly Father, help us use this time of learning to draw strength and refreshment as we go through future groups. Give each one of us a fresh revelation of who we are in Christ Jesus and how much we owe Him for what He has done for us. Help us, Lord, to understand that You care for us, and that You want to comfort us. Help us to
remember from last session how much You want to be our Father, to give us a revelation of Your love and steadfastness. Help us remember that You sent us a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to walk with us through this journey to healing that we are undertaking and that He who has begun a good work in us will be faithful to carry it out to completion unto the Day of Christ Jesus. In Jesus Name we pray.

SESSION FIVE
WOUNDED EMOTIONS - SHAME, FEAR, GUILT, GRIEF

INTRODUCTION
OPENING PRAYER
As we open in prayer, we are reminded that God has promised us freedom from shame, and fear. (Psalm 25:3; Psalm 91:5)

Blessed Heavenly Father, reveal Yourself to us and help us to replace our negative emotions with the promises You have given us in Your Word. Send the loving anointing of Your Holy Spirit, the Counselor and Teacher, to lead us into a greater intimacy with You and to help us overcome the wounded emotions that have held us in bondage for so long. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION
What role does shame play in our self-destructive behaviors?

R: We often hurt ourselves to avoid allowing others that opportunity.

How does fear cause us to avoid intimacy with God?

R: We put up walls between us and God that keep us from having the fullness of life in Christ Jesus. These walls keep out others who might hurt us, but they also keep God out, and prevent us from having meaningful, intimate relationships with others.
SELF-AWARENESS:
R: The following discusses our emotional responses to the abuse of the past. In our small groups we will talk about how these emotions, and the influence they have on the way we interpret the world around us, have kept us in bondage. As we face the pain associated with these emotions, we are able to embrace our past, our pain, and our healing. We can then move toward freedom and forgiveness.

Each of the following emotions plays a specific role and is associated with specific behaviors that result from the trauma associated with our past abuse experience. We will look at how emotions, independently and together, tend to keep us confused, depressed, without energy, and defensive.

SHAME
While shame and embarrassment are related, shame is the more destructive emotion. Embarrassment is a feeling of humiliation over a particular incident. Shame, on the other hand, is a pervasive feeling of being inadequate as a human being. What has shame to do with sexual abuse? Individuals who have experienced sexual abuse feel ashamed because they see themselves as damaged goods, as used and weak. They believe the lies that the perpetrator and others have told them about their role in 'causing' or permitting the sexual abuse to happen, and they are constantly reminded by the way the family system operate that they are powerless against this experience and the pain that it has caused.

Shame leaves us with a strong sense of being uniquely and hopelessly different and less valuable than others. It isolates us and alienates us from others because we keep ourselves locked behind 'protective' barriers so others won't see our shame. Shame comes from experiencing abusive treatment and being taught that the reason we were abused was related to some inadequacy in us that initiated and perpetuated the abuse.

Abused children are taught that they deserved disrespectful and/or dehumanizing treatment, that parents can do anything they want and that God does not care. Children believe what their parents tell them, and as they
reach adulthood, if these perceptions and the responses we make to our perceptions remain unchallenged, they become assumptions that direct future self-image, interaction with others, decision-making, and quality of life.

As children we all bought into magical thinking. We believed we had unlimited power to cause events and that we were somehow responsible for every experience we encountered. We believed that good things only happened to good people, and bad things only happened to bad people. Our dysfunctional families reinforced this 'magical' thinking by blaming the victim, and protecting the perpetrator.

In order to survive and handle the anxiety we felt growing up in these dysfunctional families, we developed protective illusions to guard against the possibility that our parents were not 'perfectly nice' and that our environment was not safe and protected. Many of us developed fantasy relationships with those individuals who were most abusive and rejecting. In these fantasy relationships, the abusive family member was a best friend and was very good to us. We continue, today, to live in these fantasies as much as possible to avoid the anxiety produced by our real family interactions.

In some cases, shame can even lead us to engage in self-destructive behaviors that include connecting with very abusive people who reinforce our worthlessness, or even inflicting abuse upon ourselves, e.g., self mutilation, cutting, etc., to 'punish' ourselves for being worthless and bad.

How did you feel about your early family relationships and living situation? Is that in line with what was really happening in your home or are you remembering a fantasy relationship? How has that affected you today?

Shame occurs in secret and tends to isolate its victims and keep them from challenging events that reinforce the shame from a realistic perspective. Thanks be to God who has enabled us, through His Glorious Son, to enter into the Kingdom of Light. That light allows us to begin to challenge these early assumptions and the distorted perceptions and destructive decisions they have engendered.
FEAR

Next, we will discuss fear. Fear is an extremely powerful emotion that we do not know how to control. It can freeze us in place and make it hard for us to protect ourselves. It attacks our ability to trust. It compromises our ability to relax in relationships. It takes over our thought processes and we have trouble focusing and learning.

We experienced intense fear before, during and after our sexual abuse. We repressed or were unable to move beyond that fear because the fear resulting from the sexual abuse experience was too intense to be processed at one time. So we pushed it down and covered it up with other emotions like anger, depression, and anxiety (generalized feelings of uneasiness not attached to any specific event) to try to cope with it. Unfortunately, if the fear is not processed, it will not go away. We will continually have to 'defend' against its overwhelming emotional eruption.

If we grow up with fear as a major organizer of our emotional life, we have difficulty establishing trusting relationships and when we do connect with people, we will have trouble being natural and genuine within those relationships because we will be afraid of what will happen if we let go and relax.

If we do not process that fear, it will continue to distort our perceptions. We will think that relationships with individuals who are untrustworthy and irresponsible are safer than are relationships with those who are good to us. We will not be able to see the warning signs in situations, events, and relationships that would otherwise cause us to be careful because the fear will overwhelm us and distort our perceptions.

Has fear been part of your growing up? How do you handle situations when you are afraid?

GUILT

Guilt is an emotion that we take on early in life. Even though we are powerless to stop the sexual abuse that occurred, we feel responsible for what happened. We believe the lie that we wanted it, we caused it, or that we enjoyed it. Given the way families of abuse related to the
victim of abuse, the physical contact of the sexual abuse may have been the only physical contact we had, and we were told that it was related to ‘love’, be it a distorted version of love.

As Christians we are doubly blest. Not only do we have the Cross to which we can take any guilt we may feel (real or imagined). We also have a Savior who paid the price in full, and we do not have to receive condemnation for anything in the past. We will have consequences for the things we have done, but we can be set free, once and for all, from real and/or imagined guilt as we receive the wonderful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What events in your childhood make you feel guilty? What events that have gone on in adulthood or even are going on right now, make you feel guilty?

Are you ready to take that guilt to the Cross and be set free?

R: They probably need to confess their guilt, both the real and imagined type, so that they can know that they are being forgiven for exactly the things that burn in their conscience. They might be told that they don’t need to go into all the sordid details, but just enough to be sure they have truly laid before the throne of God the things that are behind their sense of shame and guilt.

Stop and pray for everyone in the group that feels guilty about their abusive situation. Ask the Lord to release His Grace in abundance to set all of us free from unjustified feelings of guilt, and to help us identify those areas where we may need to repent of thoughts or actions which may continue to be a barrier between us and the Living Christ. Praise be to God!!! Amen & Amen!!

GRIEF

We grieve for many things. We grieve about the loss of a childhood. We grieve because we did not have a safe, nurturing environment within which to grow and flourish. When we think about what we would have been if we had had a healthy, loving home we feel sad and grieve for what might have been.
Grief is a noisy emotion. We push it down and try to go on with our lives, but it keeps rearing its ugly head and reminding us of what we have lost. Eventually, if we do not deal with it, grief can be a major source of bitterness and resentment. It contributes to self-hate and self-condemnation as a way of explaining the awful things that have happened to us. Combined with the guilt, shame, and fear that sexual abuse victims often feel, grief can cause us to become suicidal. God sends His Spirit to comfort us (The Comforter). "Blessed are they that mourn."(Matthew 4:4).

How has grief affected your life? What are you grieving for?

R: Some in your group may be experiencing a true Clinical Depression, above and beyond the despair that often accompanies the victims of childhood sexual abuse. It would not be outside the scope of the group to suggest that such a person consult a psychiatrist for some possible temporary relief from antidepressant medication. This will likely be resisted, but the seed might well be planted. The group itself can probably cope with the psychological and spiritual ramifications of most Clinical Depressions, but not the biological.

Summary
We are duped by Satan to believe that if we do not acknowledge the pain, it has no control over us. Reality is exactly the opposite. It only has control over us when we try to keep it out of our awareness. Remember who is Lord of the darkness (where it is currently hidden), and who is the Lord of the Light which is where we bring these emotions when we talk about them in our small groups. In God there is no darkness at all. As we bring our past into the light, the blood of Jesus washes it away and gives us victory over the devastation it has caused in our lives. We are set free!

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD IN:
God will heal our wounded emotions. He will give us self-control during this process so that we do not expose our feelings too quickly and become overwhelmed. He will show us the way and He beckons us to follow His leading. What does 1 John 1:7 tell us is the purpose of bringing these wounded emotions, and some of the behaviors coming from
their influence out into the light?

1John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

R: As we bring things out into the light, we can see what is and is not our responsibility, then we can take the things for which we must repent to the cross for forgiveness, and let down the walls for others to be able to see us without being afraid of what they will see.

What happens if we keep these emotions to ourselves?

R: We have only limited fellowship with Him and with others.

**SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS:**

God wants us to walk in the light with Him. But to do that we have to face the pain of our wounded emotions. We face the pain so that we can process it. We process the pain by allowing ourselves to express it. We process it so that we can put it behind us through the suffering and shed blood of Jesus, done for us as a substitute for human sin, and we will be set free from the control it has over us. Let us now look at what God says about our shame, grief, fear, and guilt.

**Shame**

What does Psalm 34:5 tell us about shame and the Children of God?

R: If we truly belong to the Lord, We are to be radiant, and never ashamed.

What does our Father say about our relationship with shame in Isaiah 61:7?

R: Instead of shame we are to receive a double portion of blessings, and instead of disgrace we will rejoice in our inheritance. Everlasting joy will be ours.

What does Paul say about shame and condemnation in Romans 8:1-2?

R: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ
Jesus because the law of the Spirit of Life has set us free from condemnation that comes from the law of Sin and Death. What does it mean to be set free from the law of Sin and Death? It means that we have the Holy Spirit, the “law of the Spirit of Life”, to fight this fight on our behalf. He will give us the words with which to fight, but we must put these words in us (in our arsenal of weapons by memorizing the scriptures so that it’s there for him to remind us of. He only says what the Father and the Son have told him to say, so we have to have God’s word close at hand and available for him to bring to our remembrance in times of warfare).

The law of sin and death refers to the moral law of the Ten Commandments, which tells us that if we break them we shall pay the penalty. But the law of the Spirit of life tells us that when we become believers the Holy Spirit reveals to us that Jesus, in his death on the cross, paid the penalty that we deserve. Thus God does not even remember our sins nor does he condemn us for them. If God sees no shame in us, why should we continue carrying this burden in our hearts?

What does the writer to the Hebrews tell us about shame in Hebrews 12:2?

R: As we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, we see that He endured shame for us.

If Jesus already took care of our shame, why are we holding onto it? How do we let go of it?

R: We use God's Word to retrain our thinking and bring it into conformity with His word. To use the word, you have to both read and know the Word. Spending time studying the Bible is the way to freedom. Memorizing scriptures and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you how to apply those scriptures to real events and experiences in our lives can change us and help us to become conformed to the likeness of Christ. Without the effort, we will not be able to overcome the many mistaken beliefs we have as survivors of sexual abuse.

Fear
Psalm 34:4 encourages us regarding fear. What does this verse tell us?

R: God delivers us from all our fears.

God tells us that we have victory over fear. In 2 Timothy 1:7 what does Paul tell us about a Spirit of Fear?

R: God did not give us a Spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. We have to ‘fight back’ when Satan tells us he is winning. For example: When Satan says people are going to tell everyone that you are not worthwhile because of your experiences in childhood, you have to apply the scriptures God gave us about who we are in Christ Jesus: e.g., We are fearfully and wonderfully made, we are the first fruits of all of his creation, Jesus loved us so much he died for us, or we are not condemned because there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Satan is a liar, but we have to expose his lies to the Word of God to be set free.

What does 1 John 4:18 tell us about achieving His peace?

R: Perfect Love casts out all fear. Fear has to do with punishment, but Christ died that we would not bear condemnation and punishment.

What else does Philippians 4:6-7 tell us to do about fear?

R: In all things, with thanksgiving, we are to make our requests known to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Shame and guilt typically make prayer a very difficult activity for victims of sexual abuse. But prayer and learning to apply the Word of God are the answers to achieving peace. Help participants see what it is that blocks their prayer time and that Jesus already bore all of our shame and guilt on the cross.

What does Jesus tell us in Luke 12:5 whom we should fear?

R: We are to fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord does not mean being afraid, it means respecting the awesome power of a loving God who gave his Son on the Cross so that we could be free from guilt and shame. He welcomes us as a father, an ABBA. Come to him, let him comfort you as he has so
long desired to do.

Guilt
What are we told in 1 John 1:9 to do with the guilt we feel about things we have done or feel responsible for in our past?

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

R: We confess our sins and believe God to forgive us. We trust that Jesus died for us.

What does John tell us about how Jesus can resolve the guilt for us in 1 John 2:1-2? [1]My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. [2]He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

R: We know He is the sacrifice that fully satisfied the justice of God and sets us free.

What does 1 John 2:9 and Matthew 6:14 tell us can keep us from being forgiven?

R: By letting the love of Jesus within us flow out to our fellow believers, freely forgiving those with whom we are angry, as Jesus did from the cross.

Grief
Our Lord Jesus is familiar with suffering. He suffered more than we can ever comprehend. How does the Word describe Jesus in Isaiah 53:3?

R: He is familiar with suffering, a man of grief. His suffering and grief was due to the fact that he was carrying all of our own suffering and grief upon himself so that we can let go of it. We need only let our faith take hold of this truth and reject the condemnation that sometimes floods our souls.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 what are we told about the comfort God gives us?
R: God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all of our troubles so that we can comfort those in trouble. In other words, God may well use our years of pain so that we are a healing comfort in the lives of others, just as we are now to one another in this group.

LIFE APPLICATION
How does secrecy and shame affect us?

Look at the role Satan plays in shame. He is the accuser who continuously reminds us of how worthless we are. Let us apply God's Word to our self-beliefs to expose the false beliefs that produce and reinforce our shame.

Satan will tell us we are not worthy. Are any of us worthy?
No, all fall short of the Glory of the Lord, but Jesus loved us and died for us anyway. He showed us that whether we were worthy was not the issue. We are worth much, because He paid the supreme price for us. And if God's Son Jesus was willing to lay down His life for us, we must be very valuable indeed.

Many people grasp the atoning work of Christ but still feel condemned and ashamed, wondering why they can't shake off these self-defeating accusations of the enemy. Some key Scriptures that describe this are:

Rev. 12:10-11, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, power, kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah have come. The one accusing our brothers and sisters, the one accusing them day and night in the presence of our God, has been thrown out. They won the victory over him because of the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life so much that they refused to give it up."

R: Ask participants what the blood of the lamb did to set them free from the accusations of Satan? What was the cost of that blood. How much did Jesus love each one of us to pay that price?

Eph. 6:11-12, Put on all the armor that God supplies. In this way you can take a stand against the devil's strategies. This is not a wrestling match against a human opponent. We are wrestling with rulers, authorities, the
powers who govern this world of darkness, and spiritual
forces that control evil in the heavenly world. (Also
study the subsequent verses that describe the armor and the
role of prayer.)

R: Help participants come up with ways that they can use
this scripture to fight back against the accusations of
the enemy that they are not worthwhile.

James 4:7, So place yourselves under God's authority.
Resist the devil, and he will run away from you.

R: What does it mean to resist the devil? What role does
God’s word play in this fight?

R: These verses, with appropriate helps from facilitators
will cause a light to go on in the hearts and minds of
these oppressed, precious souls.

His Holy Spirit is constantly working in us. The Word of
God in our hearts is how the Spirit works to change us. As
He is revealed in us, we are conformed to His likeness. We
can see that the shame that has haunted us can no longer
hold us in bondage because those who are "free in the Son
are free indeed."

Remember the lies we were told? Do we have to take
responsibility for things that others have done to us?

NO!!!

R: Personal Response. We are never to take responsibility
for things done to us. We are only responsible for how we
handle our lives now that we know that there are ongoing
dysfunctional perceptions and behaviors for which we need
to repent so that His Holy Spirit can conform us to the
likeness of Christ.

What can we do to change the behaviors that continue and
reinforce our feelings of guilt, grief, fear, and shame?

R: Personal Response. Help participants practice using the
word of God to fight against these emotions, e.g., when
Satan is trying to make us feel worthless, we remind
ourselves of the value that God put on us when he gave his
son for us. When we are feeling shame, we need to remind
ourselves that therefore there is no condemnation for us,
and that no one whose hope is in the Lord will ever be put to shame (Ps. 25:3), etc.

CLOSING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, work in our lives as we bring these wounded emotions to You in prayer. We ask You for deliverance from a root of bitterness for those of us who may be holding on to resentment about the past. Teach us how to better handle these emotions and to bring them to You. Expose the lies that lead to rage and to come against the deceptions of Satan in our lives. Heal our Wounded Hearts. In Jesus Name I pray.
SESSION SIX
BELIEVING THE LIES - ACCEPTING THE BLAME

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER:
Blessed Lord, we are coming to You today because You are our only hope. We ask You to search our hearts and help us to understand what we believe about ourselves and how that lines up with Your Word and with who we are in You. We ask You to search our hidden parts, and help us to understand what You are telling us about the circumstances of our lives that have had such a heavy impact on our present perceptions and behaviors. Let Your Word expose the lies that we were told and have believed - the lies that keep us in bondage and closed to Your healing grace. Help us to be conformed to your likeness. Expose the lies of the abuse and help us to see ourselves as You see us. While in ourselves there is nothing good, in You we are the righteousness of God. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
Do you think that the abuse you went through as a child was somehow your fault?

How does believing the lies about us influence our perceptions, our lives and our Christian walk?

R: Let these be questions that we will look at more deeply later, after we have discussed the information in the session below.

SELF-AWARENESS:
If we are an adult who was sexually abused as a child we are at risk of having difficulty with perception. Frequently, after childhood sexual abuse we either have no one we can tell, or we tell someone and things get worse. We may even be punished for saying that it happened. Family members tend to band together to maintain the status quo and protect the abuser. We end up with nowhere to go for protection and we internalize all of the lies we are told because we have no support to help us fight against
These lies about our role in the abuse and the experiences we have had within our families causes our perception of the world and people around us to be distorted. We may 'give up' or fight back by engaging in actions and behaviors (e.g., addictions, doing similar sexual acts with or to others, etc.) that reinforces our negative feelings about ourselves.

Because the people responsible for our safety are not protecting us, we may begin to perceive people around us as hostile to us. We respond in a self-protective way. They receive our actions as negative instead of defensive, and they react to protect themselves. As time passes we build a history of self-destructive mistakes that reinforce our feelings of worthlessness and helplessness.

Reinforcement for these faulty perceptions comes from many sources. The abuse itself, the relationships we may have with the perpetrators, the co-perpetrators, the number of perpetrators involved, and other considerations contribute to our misinterpretations of reality. It is crucial for us as survivors of abuse to begin to explore our definition of reality and understand the origin of false beliefs that hold us in bondage.

We must begin to untangle our beliefs about life and correct these perceptions so that the resulting self-destructive effects do not continue. We must develop the skill of challenging our existing view of reality, taking every thought captive to the Word of God, and standing up to affirm who we are in Christ Jesus. We must diligently seek the help of our Lord Jesus Christ and allow the Word of God to teach us to see things as He sees them and respond as He would have us respond.

Some of the more powerful beliefs that must be dispelled are:

- Survivors of abuse often believe the lie that the abuser was not really at fault. We may have convinced ourselves that our abuser was really showing us affection. Often, the perpetrator has told us that the abuse was our idea.

- Children think in all or nothing terms, and they feel that they have 'magical' powers to cause things to
happen. We may have made those assumptions as a child and have never challenged them. Perpetrators are quick to take advantage of the opportunity to convince us that "You made me do it." "If you weren't so pretty, I would not want you so much." "I love you so much, and I just have to show you."

- We may have been told or believed on our own that if we did not let the abuse go on, we would be responsible for the abuser hurting someone else in the family (younger sisters, for example) and that we were sacrificing ourselves to protect others. Often there is some truth to this fear. Unfortunately, however, our siblings may have been abused anyway.

All of these lies influence the way see our world. We begin to construct a reality that is acceptable - a reality we can deal with, a reality that reduces our fears and anxieties.

**Stepping out for restoration**

Challenging the false beliefs means facing the pain of the past. It also means accepting feelings of vulnerability to a world that contains evil, violence, and pain. We can only do this with Christ in our lives. There is no other way that I know of to let go of the past. We must face it down with the help of our Savior and Lord. He told us that in this world we would have trouble, but that we can take heart because He has overcome this world (John 16:33).

A survivor once told me that after she had completed the Restoring the Soul groups she continued to experience flashbacks. She still saw things that happened to her during her very traumatic childhood. The difference between past and present experiences of remembering was that she was now no longer viewing these flashbacks as a child, and she was not going through them alone. Since the Lord had worked healing in her life, she was viewing the past as an adult, and the best part was that Jesus was standing beside her, holding her hand and supporting her as she faced down the fear, shame, grief, and guilt of the past. Satan may have wanted to keep her remembering, but God is greater and He has the victory.

Without this healing the sexual abuse survivor will
fight, with everything they can muster, to maintain the created explanations that they believe will protect them. We see these perceptions and behaviors as our way of remaining sane and feeling in control, protected, and safe. These perceptions stay in place throughout our lives or until they are brought out into the open and exposed to the light of God. Sharing our experiences and the beliefs we hold onto because of them within the Body of Christ, in a prayerful, loving, and safe setting enables us to put them in the past and be set free from the distortions which have so long held us in bondage.

R: Does this sound right to you, and have you experienced these things?

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD IN:

What does the Lord tell us about how we can determine lies from the truth?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

R: Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God can separate lies and truth.

How can we apply this scripture to our efforts to be healed?

R: Help them to remember our discussion of how we can fight Satan’s lies by using the word of God. For example, if we are feeling afraid that someone will see that we are ‘damaged goods’ we might say: “Satan, you are a liar. I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Or if we feel we cannot go on, we can remind ourselves: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS:

What does 2 Peter 3:16 say about distorted perceptions?

What resulted?

2 Peter 3:16: He (Paul) writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters
contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

R: Individuals were distorting Paul's writing because of their own instability and ignorance. This led to their destruction. Our unawareness of what we are doing as a response to the abuse we have experienced is causing us to do self-destructive things too. Distortions are caused by unawareness of the facts and trying to make things fit what we think they are instead of finding out what they really are. Doing this causes us to hurt ourselves.

What are we told in 1 Timothy 4:10 that can help us to enter into His truth about reality and the events of our past life.

1 Timothy 4:10: (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

What excellent advice does Paul give us in 2 Corinthians 10:5?

2 Corinthians 10:5: We can demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we can take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

R: Remembering what we discussed above, we must not yield to the thoughts that the enemy would have us to believe. Instead, we have to hold on to what God says about each situation. For example, if Satan tells us we can’t, we can simply remind ourselves that God says we can [I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.]

LIFE APPLICATION:
The healing process begins when we understand and believe that the feelings of shame, guilt, and fear were based on lies of Satan. The lack of support from those around us who were important to us for this truth in childhood is why we have such a sense of guilt. If as young survivors we were supported when we brought the abuse
out into the open, and the abuse had stopped, our worth and value would have been validated and a lifetime of suffering might have been avoided.

As we read the above scriptures several times and meditate on them, we can ask God to show us how they apply to the abuse we experienced.

In addition, we can take some active steps to bring the lies out of the darkness and into the light. Kubetin & Mallory (1992) tell us that there are four steps we can take to rid ourselves of these false beliefs as an adult:

1. IDENTIFY THE FALSE BELIEFS THAT ARE BLOCKING YOUR PATH.

2. LOOK FOR THE ROOTS OF THESE FALSE BELIEFS, THE UNDERLYING FACTORS THAT ARE CAUSING YOU TO MAINTAIN THEM.

3. RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT THESE FALSE BELIEFS AS LIES, AND TOTALLY AND FINALLY RELINQUISH THEM.

4. PRAY TO YOUR LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER THAT HE WILL WITHER AWAY YOUR FALSE BELIEFS AND REAFFIRM YOU AS OK.

The Grid on the next page will help us take these four steps.

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**DEALING WITH FALSE BELIEFS**

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CLOSING PRAYER:

Thank You Lord for showing us today that the thoughts we have about ourselves are often the product of lies and deceptions created by an enemy who is determined to destroy us. We are asking You to help us break free from the lies and allow You to make us the man or woman of God that You created us to be. Thank You that it isn't important what others try to make us believe about our worth and value. Who we are in You is all that matters and when we come to You, we can ask and You will be faithful to conform us to Your likeness. In Jesus Name we pray.

Read the following. God is telling us that we do not have to pay for what others (even our family) has done, but we will pay or receive mercy based on what we do. The past abuse we experienced does not define us. We define ourselves by our obedience or disobedience.

Ezek. 18:2-28: "What do you mean when you use this proverb about the land of Israel: 'Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and their children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, declares the Almighty LORD, you will no longer use this proverb in Israel. The life of every person belongs to me. Fathers and their children belong to me. The person who sins will die.

Suppose a righteous person does what is fair and right. He doesn't eat at the illegal mountain worship sites or look for help from the idols of the nation of Israel. He doesn't dishonor his neighbor's wife or have sexual intercourse with a woman while she is having her period. He doesn't oppress anyone. He returns what a borrower gives him as security for a loan. He doesn't rob anyone. He gives food to people who are hungry, and he gives clothes to those who are naked. He doesn't lend money for interest or make an excessive profit. He refuses to do evil things, and he judges everyone fairly. He lives by my rules and obeys my laws faithfully. This person is righteous. He will certainly live," declares the Almighty LORD.

But suppose this person has a son who robs and murders. The son does all the things that his father never did. He eats at the illegal mountain worship sites. He dishonors his neighbor's wife. He oppresses the poor and needy. He robs. He doesn't return the security for a loan. He looks to idols for help. He does disgusting things. He lends money for interest and makes excessive profits. Will this person live? He will not live. He has done all these disgusting things. So he must die, and he will be responsible for his own death.
But suppose this person has a son. The son sees all the sins that his father does. He is afraid, so he doesn't do such things. He doesn't eat at the illegal mountain worship sites or look for help from the idols of the nation of Israel. He doesn't dishonor his neighbor's wife. He doesn't oppress anyone. He doesn't keep the security for a loan. He doesn't rob anyone. He gives food to people who are hungry, and he gives clothes to those who are naked. He refuses to hurt the poor. He doesn't charge interest or make excessive profits. He obeys my rules and lives by my laws. He won't die for his father's sins. He will certainly live.

But his father has oppressed others, robbed his relative, and done what is wrong among his people. So the father will die because of his sin.

But you ask, 'Why isn't the son punished for his father's sin?' It is because the son has done what is fair and right. He obeyed my rules and followed them. He will certainly live.

The person who sins will die. A son will not be punished for his father's sins, and a father will not be punished for his son's sins. The righteousness of the righteous person will be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be his own.

But suppose a wicked person turns away from all the sins that he has done. He obeys all my laws and does what is fair and right. He will certainly live. He will not die. All the rebellious things that he did will not be remembered. He will live because of the right things that he did.

I don't want wicked people to die." declares the Almighty LORD. "I want them to turn from their evil ways and live."

But suppose a righteous person turns away from doing right and he does evil things. He does all the disgusting things that the wicked person did. Will he live? All the right things that he has done will not be remembered because of his unfaithfulness and because of his sin. He will die because of them.

But you say, 'The Lord's way is unfair. Listen, nation of Israel, isn't my way fair? Isn't it your ways that are unfair?"

When a righteous person turns away from doing right and does evil things, he will die. He will die because of the evil things he has done. When a wicked person turns away from the wicked things that he has done and does what is fair and right, he will live. He realized what he was doing and turned away from all the rebellious things that he had done. He will certainly live. He will not die.
SESSION SEVEN
BETRAYAL & DENIAL

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER:
Blessed Heavenly Father, as we come to You today, help
us to open our hearts and our minds to the things You are
teaching us. Help us to be able to discern between those
events and actions for which we are responsible and those
for which we are not. Help us to accept what has happened
to us, and let go of the emotional bondage that holds us
captive. Prepare our hearts to face the pain of the past
without being overwhelmed by it. Help us to stand, holding
Your hand, as an adult reviewing the past – rather than as
a child reliving and overwhelmed by it. We thank You,
Lord, that You are able to do this. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
Do you have any relationships that are a struggle to
sustain? Does fear of a repeat of past hurts and pains
make vulnerability hard to risk within these relationships?
Do these relationships remind you of past experiences?

Is there a need for facing the betrayal you experienced by
a person who was supposed to, but did not protect you, such
as a parent? Do we need to forgive this person? What gets
in our way when we try to forgive them?

SELF-AWARENESS:
In this session we are going to discuss Betrayal, and
Denial.

R: As a facilitator you can help people sort out
situations over which they either had or did not have
control or the power to change them. They can learn to deal
with their feelings of helplessness about those things that
they could not change.

When we talk about our past sexual abuse, our tendency
is to deny the extent of severity, damage, and devastation
that we experienced. As we look around us, we see others who may have had similar or even more devastating experiences than ours. As we think back over what happened to us we are likely to minimize and intellectualize about its impact on our lives.

What's wrong with minimizing our problems? After all, we do not want to dwell on the past. The problem with minimizing the past is this: we cannot get free from the pain of the past until we honestly look at these experiences and the impact they continue to have in our lives.

Each person's pain is their own. Until the Lord is Lord over it and shares in carrying its burden, the thought of facing it is overwhelming. The issue is not what happened to others or how much worse it was than what happened to us. Rather, each person's pain is unique to them and has consequences that must be faced and overcome by them with help from the Living God.

Overcoming is a process. It requires several steps. As we undergo this process we face the many challenges it requires. God goes through each step of this process with us.

- We must be willing to face the events of the past and accept the reality of what happened to us and believe that God will help us to deal with the pain attached to these events.
- As mentioned in the previous session, we must give responsibility to the abuser(s), and accept that we could not stop what happened. (Even later in our lives we may have willingly participated in our own abuse through patterns of selecting abusive partners, etc., which we can change, but the initial abuse we experienced, was out of our control. We have to learn how to sort out what is and is not under our control. Then, what we do from now on, we will be able to make healthier choices.)
- We must acknowledge our feelings of betrayal by important people in our lives who were supposed to protect us.

**Denial**

Denial can be both useful and harmful. As a rule, we use denial to protect ourselves from emotions we don’t
think we can handle feeling. Denial can help us control anxiety and fear, for example, as we go through painful medical treatments for a frightening disease like cancer.

The problem with denial of past traumatic experiences is that it also keeps us tied to the past by preventing us from acknowledging what happened which would enable us to process the trauma and put it behind us.

Denial prompts us to force ourselves to stuff all of our feelings out of our conscious thoughts every time they start to surface. When this occurs over a number of years, we become so full of a confusion of emotions that we either cannot feel anything, or we become volatile and explode at the slightest trigger.

We must confront denial to be set free. It is impossible to come to terms with the past when we refuse to look at the hurt and pain it contains. Neither can we change destructive patterns until we are aware of the events that trigger them and the consequences we experience as a result.

Denial teaches us to lie to ourselves. We do not just lie to ourselves capriciously. We systematically concoct a lie to keep from facing emotional shut down. Too many feelings, thoughts, emotions, happening all at once, put our mind on overload. We lose control and scary things happen to us. After all, our abuse occurred because we were out of control.

Through the Word and prayer, God will help us to face each issue, emotion, thought, and feeling slowly so we are able to process them. We do not need to look at everything at once; we could not tolerate that. As we come out of denial, the Holy Spirit will gently show us what we need to know next, and help us to be strong enough to endure the emotional response. With God at the helm in this process, we will not be overwhelmed. He will never give us more than we can bear. He promised.

This process of releasing repressed emotions associated with past trauma is called catharsis. Healthy catharsis occurs slowly, with the physical expression of the repressed emotions (e.g., crying for grief; laughter and goose bumps for fear; blushing for shame, etc.). This process has to occur slowly so that we maintain a sense of
self-control. Self-control allows us to release the emotions without being further harmed by them.

If we become over emotional, we need to stop the processing of these repressed emotions, get in touch with the here-and-now (I recommend focus on deep breathing and prayer) and begin the process at a future session when we are again in a position of self-control. God will direct the process if we allow him to guide us.

R: Let your knowledge of the person, which comes from working with them for the past weeks, guide you in your intervention regarding the processing of repressed emotions.

**The Special Case of Dissociation**

Dissociation is not denial, but it functions as a protection against being overwhelmed by the feelings of continued and intense abuse. Those who experience dissociation have a split between their real, conscious self, and the events of the past that they carry with them. They experience an emotional overload of shame, fear, guilt, anger, and grief. In extreme cases, dissociation results in "multiple personality disorder".

Dissociation usually begins during the abuse itself. The survivor can no longer take the pain of the abuse. They develop a separate reality to which they flee during times of trauma and abuse. If the abuse is frequent enough and intense enough, the constructed reality will become a 'reality' for the victim of abuse. Dissociation is the most severe and debilitating consequence of sexual abuse and must be dealt with by someone trained extensively in assisting the individual with reintegrating reality.

R: Because of the possible presence of dissociative disorder, I encourage facilitators to never push participants to talk about things they are not ready to deal with!

**Other Issues of Denial:**

Other concerns that keep sexual abuse victims in denial include outside factors, e.g., societal attitudes toward women, etc. These factors are difficult to overcome without the help of someone who can support the victim as (s)he faces them. They must be confronted one at a time.
until they have all been exposed as lies.

For the survivor of abuse, God is calling us to hold the perpetrator responsible, accept our feelings, and begin the healing process. If memories and feelings are too overwhelming, take a break from the process, and when you feel more confident again, return to the process.

Betrayal

Betrayal is another issue we must face. To betray means to lead astray, to seduce by false promise, to desert in time of need. Our relationships with the perpetrator and co-perpetrator are complicated by feelings of betrayal (Kubetin, et al; 1992).

Usually the co-perpetrator is someone close to us who intentionally or unintentionally "sets us up" for the abuse or fails to come to our aid to make the abuse stop. In some cases the mother may have used her daughter to attract or hold onto her husband or partner. The daughter did not even realize what was happening.

Survivors may have grown up in a family where a single parent feels a desperate need for help raising her family. The parent may have unintentionally used her daughter to hold on to financial and emotional support from the perpetrator.

The co-perpetrator may have had ambivalent feelings about the abuse. A mother is also a woman. She may experience feelings of competition and jealousy if she sees that her male partner is attracted to her daughter. The co-perpetrator will often reinforce the child's feelings of responsibility because of the messages she sends to the child that imply that the abused child may have seduced the abuser. Men who have experienced sexual abuse may feel that their sense of being a man has been compromised and, if this was done by a family member, they may get the message that even the males and females in their family are not 'safe'. It can make them have issues of control and question their understanding of what a man is. (Remember the discussion in Session Two about 'What is the Role of the Family?)

Our feelings of betrayal cause us to be unable to trust even God. Facing these feelings enables us to draw close to our only hope - only the Lord can heal these
SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD-IN:

In 2 Samuel 13 David is clearly a co-perpetrator, as is Absalom.

2Sa 13:14-21 But Amnon would not listen to what she said. He was stronger than she was, so he overpowered her and raped her. Then Amnon hated her even more than he had loved her before. So he told her, "Get up and get out!"

She said, "Don't send me away! That would be worse than what you have already done." But Amnon would not listen. He called in his servant and said, "Throw this woman out and lock the door!"

The servant made her leave, and he locked the door behind her. The king's unmarried daughters used to wear long robes with sleeves. Tamar tore the robe she was wearing and put ashes on her head. Then she covered her face with her hands and cried loudly as she walked away.

Tamar's brother Absalom said to her, "How could Amnon have done such a terrible thing to you! But since he's your brother, don't tell anyone what happened. Just try not to think about it." Tamar soon moved into Absalom's house, but she was always sad and lonely.

When David heard what had happened to Tamar, he was very angry. But Amnon was his oldest son and also his favorite, and David would not do anything to make Amnon unhappy.

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS:

What does God's Word in Matthew 25:41-46 say about hurting others or allowing them to be hurt? How does this apply to the responsibility of a parent to protect their child from harm?

R: Those who did not feed the hungry or give drink to the thirsty, not only deprive them of basic needs, they are doing evil to the Father and will be sent to eternal punishment. As our perpetrator hurt us, he hurt God, too. And God holds him accountable.

What about denial? If we walk in darkness what happens? What are we told about denial in 1 John 1:6?

R: If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

What is the answer to denial in 1 John 1:7?

R: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we
have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

LIFE APPLICATION:
0 We must learn to attribute responsibility to the abuser.
0 We have to accept the things we cannot change. For example, others we trusted who were responsible for our safety failed us.
0 We cannot deny what happened.
0 With God's help we can face our past abuse, the fact that someone else had power over us; that we could not stop them for doing what they did; and that the people who were supposed to be responsible for protecting us fell down on the job.
0 We need to know God and His Son, Jesus. As we learn about Him, we see that He can protect us and keep us. Then we can let go and stop trying to protect ourselves by controlling everything around us. We can learn to control ourselves as God has given us responsibility to do, and allow Him to protect us.
0 We must express the thoughts and feelings we have about our abuse experience.
0 As we understand how God loves us and has forgiven us the many things we have done that fall short of His will for our lives, we begin to have compassion and forgiveness for those who have hurt us. As we forgive them, we are set free.

Confronting the Abuser:
Are we to rush to the perpetrator and/or co-perpetrator to confront them regarding their sin? In this area, I caution you to move very carefully. Too many painful consequences can occur in confronting perpetrators and co-perpetrators. I do not recommend confronting the perpetrators, but if you do, there are several factors that must be in place:
-R The only Godly reason for confrontation of the perpetrators is to bring them to repentance and salvation. Any other motivation will probably cause an eruption of conflict that will result in hurtful feelings, and will not bring about a satisfactory outcome.
- If you do decide to confront the perpetrators, do so prayerfully.
- Have friends praying with you before, during and
after the confrontation.
- Confront in a public place where the perpetrator is least likely to act out violently.
- Do not expect the perpetrator to welcome the confrontation. They will probably be defensive and will deny the abuse. If they acknowledge the abuse, they will probably accuse you of wanting to participate.

Pray for the perpetrator that they will be able to come to a position of repentance before God. The best resolution for confrontation is to have the perpetrator come to you to ask for forgiveness. God is able to do all things. His arms are not too short.

While you are waiting and praying for the right time for confrontation or for the perpetrator to come to you in repentance, I recommend that you sit down and write letters to the (co-)perpetrators describing your feelings and the consequences of their abuse. Write as many letters as you need to write, until you have nothing else to say to them. **DO NOT MAIL THESE LETTERS!!!** You can keep them or shred them. The important result of writing the letters is that you are being set free from the emotional aftermath of the abuse.

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Blessed Heavenly Father, thank You so much for being with us today - closer than a brother. Thanks for the wonderful comfort of Your Holy Spirit. Thanks for the wise counsel Your Spirit has given us and continues to impart to us. Help us Lord to put these gifts to good use and to grow stronger in our faith and love for You. Work forgiveness in us so that we can let go of resentment and bitterness we feel toward those who used and abused us. In Jesus Name we pray.
SESSION EIGHT
LONELINESS AND FEAR

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Heavenly Father, help us to understand how You will meet us where we are and work healing in our lives. You know our fears and our longing for relationship. You offer us companionship, comfort, and fellowship which we have not yet been able to enjoy to the fullest. Help us, Lord, to seek You out rather than following the desires of our natural mind. Help us, Lord, to allow You to fill our need and longing. Give us strength to stand, and understanding that we are not alone and do not need to isolate ourselves to be safe and free from harm. Lord we thank you that "perfect love casts out all fear". In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:

Are you hesitant to enter into relationships for fear of being hurt?

Do you have trouble discerning what kind of person might be able to offer you a healthy and nurturing relationship?

SELF-AWARENESS:

As we look at loneliness and fear we see more and more how our past experiences of sexual abuse have shaped and influenced our thinking, perceptions, and emotions. One of the most devastating aspects of sexual abuse is the way it undermines our ability to feel comfortable around others. As we discussed in a previous session, most of us had perpetrators who were close enough to us to leave us with feelings of betrayal as well as violation.

These real and valid emotions can prevent us from feeling relaxed in relation to others. The closer and more intimate that relationship becomes, the more intense our fears and anxiety are likely to become. To protect ourselves from being overwhelmed by these emotions, we
often avoid relationships with others. We may not even be aware that we are avoiding others or recognize the ways we isolate ourselves. We develop ways to distance ourselves from the anxiety and fear which tend to put barriers between us and others with whom we might be able to have meaningful relationships. If we are even aware of our actions, we think of our behaviors as 'protective'; we do not see how they may limit us.

There are many unhealthy ways that we may distance ourselves from others for our protection:
- We may try to do everything for everyone so that no one can criticize us or challenge our fragile sense of self-worth.
- We could choose anger as a shield to protect ourselves from experiencing the reality of our fears.
- Control is another mechanism to defend against fear.
- Some people turn to daredevil acts to 'prove' themselves.
- Eating, drinking, endless shopping, withdrawing and isolating, religiosity, over commitment, addiction, obsessive and compulsive behaviors, rituals, and repetitive acts are still other protective behaviors.
- We may use ritual (e.g., endless organizing and ordering of clothes, shoes, or other items) when our feeling of vulnerability is most intense.

We mentioned several things above. Do any of them sound familiar to you?

Unfortunately, all of our efforts to protect ourselves have to be brought to our awareness and challenged if we are to be able to overcome the hold they have on our lives. Once we are aware of how we are sabotaging God's blessings of fellowship and relationship, we can bring these behaviors to the Cross. We can ask the Lord to forgive us for trying to do His job of protecting us. We ask him to help us get ourselves out of the way so that He can bless us and protect us.

Sometimes our anxiety about relationships stems from our feelings of shame and guilt. We have discussed how sexual abuse 'sets us up' for shame and guilt. As a consequence we may build protective walls around ourselves
so that people cannot see how wretched we think we are. We are not responsible for what happened to us, but we may have a residue of guilt and shame related to the lies we were told during the abuse. A trip to the Cross can set us free from any shame or guilt (real or imagined) that we may feel. Then, the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to a deeper, more real relationship with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we begin the journey from isolation to freedom, we come to Jesus and ask him to teach us how we can learn to let go of the fear that controls us so that we can freely open our hearts to others.

God can teach us to find everything we need in his Word. He has told us that he will never leave us or forsake us. He promises he will contend with those who contend with us. He said that he would work all things for our good. He told us we are more than conquerors and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And, even though, in this world we will have trouble, we can take heart because He has overcome the world. We are not at the mercy of this world. As we learn to keep our eyes upon Jesus we begin to see the power of God working in our lives.

These are not cliches with no meaning or power. This is the Word of God and God is not a liar. He is faithful to all of his promises and loving toward all he has made. His Word never leaves his mouth and returns to him without accomplishing what he set out for it to do. For the sake of His name he will fulfill these promises.

As long as we focus on Jesus we will not fail. Remember that Peter did not fall into the water until he started looking at high waves and rough sea (the circumstances) instead of keeping his focus on Jesus.

**SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD-IN**

What does Romans 8:15-16 and Ps. 91:9-10 say about these events and the fears associated with them.

**Romans 8:15 & 16 provides us with a picture of what God is promising to us. We are told that we have not received a**
spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of son-ship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Psalm 91:9-10 offers us the power to believe God as we make his Word a part of our thinking and behaving. “If you make the Most High your dwelling— even the Lord who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.”

R: We are in Christ Jesus now, and we do not need to be fearful. Help the participants think about what we can do, e.g., remind ourselves of the above scripture, to help us overcome the feelings of fear and panic that try to overtake us.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS:
Our feelings of loneliness and fear are trying to make us focus on self-protection. God's Word offers us another choice. We can provide love and compassion to others, and he will protect us from the scary things around us. He will comfort us and heal us from loneliness and fear. Let us look at what he has told us of his love, faithfulness and commitment.

John 10: 28 gives us a promise that is for all of us as we follow Christ. What is the promise God gives as a consequence of his assurance that He will never leave or forsake us?

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

R: How can this promise help us as we deal with the fears around us?

1 Corinthians 13 helps us to understand love from God’s viewpoint. For example, in verses 1 through the scripture tells us that unless we do things in love, no matter how much we sacrifice and give, it does not mean anything. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describes the characteristics of love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not
self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

**R:** Ask participants to discuss how this description of love is different from the 'walls' we construct to protect ourselves? What do we do that leaves us alone? How can this different approach to life change that? Which actions are more likely to produce the fruit we want? How can this scripture help us to let go of our fears?

Matthew 11:28 points us in the right direction. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

**R:** We are told that as we come to him we will find rest for our souls. We won’t feel as lonely when we know that he is with us all the time. We won’t be as afraid when we know that he is watching over us.

**LIFE APPLICATION:**

It is in His rest that we find what we are looking for. He can fill the 'holes' that were left by the absence of love, consistency, nurture, and protection in our lives. He will expose the lies, set the captive free, and give us consistent love and validation.

As we begin to understand how our fears are controlling us we can challenge the choices we make. We can go to the Lord and ask Him for direction. We can ask him what he would have us do.

We can also ask him to help us to be able to handle the anxious feelings we get when we let down the walls that isolate us and keep us from intimate relationships with others.

- He will help us to overcome the overwhelming anxiety that can accompany stepping out from behind our own protection.
- We will begin to understand that He is more able to protect us than we are able to protect ourselves.
- He will help us to relax and be comfortable with others, and trust that He will not give us more than
we can stand.
- He tells us over and over to cast our cares upon Him.

We must ask the Lord how this applies to our lives.

We can ask him to show us what events of our past interfere with our letting go and allowing God to conform us to the likeness of His Son. He is faithful and he will show us.

CLOSING PRAYER:
Blessed Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that You do not just leave us where we are, that You draw us closer to You and conform us to Your likeness. We thank You that we are dearly loved children, that we are joint heirs with Christ Jesus. We are not alone because You will never leave us or forsake us. You will not abandon or abuse us as others may have done. Help us to let down the walls we have had to build to protect ourselves from being hurt again. Replace them, Lord, with boundaries that You will protect. Help us, Lord, to have a revelation of Your love for us and of Your faithfulness to us. Set us free from the bondage of the past. In Jesus Name we pray.

SESSION NINE
TRUST AND CONTROL
INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER
As we come to You Heavenly Father, and meditate on Your Word, help us to grasp the meaning of Your promises for direction, protection, and victory. We ask You for a revelation of Your word in Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Help us Lord, to apply this wonderful principle of allowing You to be in charge of the circumstances while Your Holy Spirit works out in our own lives the fruit of self-control. Let us seek after the wisdom that comes from heaven which is pure, peace-loving, impartial sincere, compassionate, full of mercy and good fruit, instead of letting our natural self guide and direct us. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
How would our lives be different if we stopped trying to second guess God, with the vain thought that we thereby can control Him? Might our lives and relationships then actually work better? For example, do we act as if we believe that Satan is more able to destroy us than God is to preserve us?

R: Personal Response

SELF-AWARENESS:
We are not the first people to be deeply wounded, nor are we the first to feel that this world is out of control. Like everyone else, we find it difficult to let go of our fears and put our trust in God. As survivors of abuse, we often become anxious when we feel that our lives are out of our control and unpredictable. The past abuse and our 'natural' reactions to it have made us focus on controlling every move, action and situation going on around us. In the meantime, we are out of control ourselves.

We are sometimes immobilized by fears, especially when a major area of our lives seems to be out of our control. Change is, at best, uncomfortable, but to us it is intolerable. We prefer to remain in destructive relationships, continue with non-productive and meaningless jobs, and sustain destructive behaviors rather than face the ambiguity and discomfort that comes with trying
something new.

Sexual abuse compromised our personal integrity, the integrity of our body, and left us unable to feel safe and confident. The trauma of having our body invaded by force has made us feel that when we are not in control terrible things happen. Our present experiences often reinforce these fears. In our dysfunction, we are unable to establish safety and comfort for ourselves and for those who depend on us, and we fail to see that we often set ourselves up to be hurt.

We try to maintain safety by being 'perfect', and by being very directive and controlling of our husband, wife, children, parents, friends, etc. Our fear of being out of control drives us to become increasingly rigid.

When we were going through the traumas of our past abuse control meant safety, security, and survival. During the abuse, someone else took control of our person by force and did to us as they pleased. Their actions compromised our sense of safety.

Now we equate control with survival. We unconsciously associate even the most minor of challenges to that control as a possible repeat of the events that caused us to become traumatized. When this happens we get a sick feeling in the pit of our stomachs; we panic and become disoriented until we can get things back under control.

During attacks of fear we can think of nothing but the rush of feelings that is driving us to regain control of the situation. We will do almost anything -- often self or other destructive -- to accomplish that goal.

In addition to all we have going on within our own minds; we have an enemy - Satan - who uses our need to control against us. Satan feeds us with thoughts of possible catastrophes and then encourages us as we walk head-on into destructive situations which reinforce our worst fears.

Can you think of a time when you’ve done this?”

R: Help group members explore ways in which they might choose people that are like those who have hurt them in the past (predators, unbelievers or uncommitted people who say
they are believers, etc.) who may feel comfortable because they are familiar, but are really just as dangerous as those individuals who hurt as in the past. With a godly relationship, one may feel vulnerable, uncertain, in unfamiliar territory, and flee from such a relationship due to not knowing how to control it.

While we continue to make unsafe choices, our loving Father is trying to bring healing to us, but we are so frantic that we cannot let him. We 'shoot ourselves in the foot' trying to get away from the fear, instead of opening our arms to a loving God who is more than able to work out what concerns us if we let him.

If we do not deal with this need to control, eventually we are face-to-face with that which frightens us most, uncertainty. Change and uncertainty is the one thing of which we can always be sure, and it challenges the very heart of our need for control.

God wants to deliver us from this bondage -- this terror we are feeling. He wants to help us overcome the need to have so much control, and he will do this by giving us self-control and providing us with His protection to control the situations and circumstances around us.

What is the difference between self-control and the need to control? The need to control comes from a compulsion to protect ourselves by controlling other people, circumstances and relationships. It is the subconscious belief that we can do a better job of protecting ourselves than God can.

Self-control comes from God. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is based on faith in God's ability to protect us, and the knowledge that we either have self-control or someone else (Satan) will control us. God does not control us, but He makes it possible for us to control ourselves. If we do not walk in self-control, we cannot have the fullness of Christ in our lives. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit; it keeps us from sin. The need for control of everything around us comes from our fear of what will happen; it leads to sin.

R: Ask participants how we return to self-control when we start to feel anxious or panicky? Do you remember some of the coping skills we have used when we start talking about
the intense emotions we feel, (e.g., deep breathing, coming back to the here and now instead of allowing ourselves to remain in the past memory that is so intense). Another tool is to stop and pray when we feel out of control.

Our Father God has promised to control the circumstances around us. He will shape our responses to these circumstances. As He shows us how to approach the world around us, we are able to enter into His rest and walk in His protection. We are to bring everything to Him. We can discuss with Him our anxious thoughts and fears as well, so that He can comfort us and give us peace.

Satan is very subtle in his efforts to undermine our faith in God's protection. He will remind us that God did not prevent the abuse of the past. He will also point out all of the things that have happened to us since that time. But God's Word promises us that He will protect us, and we need to hold on tight to His promises.

We often do not even know that we believe what Satan says over what God promises us. For example, we are all standing on something - the floor, the ground, etc. We don't question whether that floor or ground is going to be there. Yet, an earthquake or a terrorist attack could immediately and completely destroy the floor and put us in extreme danger.

We find it easier to believe in the floor than we do to believe God, yet God will never let us down. We must keep our eyes on Him and stay under His shadow to be safe. He told us (Psalm 91:9-10) that if we take refuge in Him, no harm would befall us and no disaster would come near our dwelling. He is even Lord over the earthquakes and the terrorist attacks.

When we give over to the Lord the world around us, He lovingly leads us in His ways which are life. He teaches us, by His Spirit, to have self-control and to trust Him for everything else. We learn to take every thought captive to what His Word says, and we are set free from the influence of the enemy. He gives us the peace that surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

How do we know that we trust God?
To truly trust God we must believe Him. That means that we have to stand on His Word. We must believe, for example, that He is more faithful to His word, more able to be trusted, more able to make all things work for good, than Satan is to destroy us. Holding on to our anxiety and fear gives Satan power. Walking in peace means Victory! We can help group members learn to apply God’s Word to their situations by practicing with them ways to apply it to specific situations. What do we do if we find that we don’t trust God about a particular situation? Help participants learn to apply the word of God to things that cause them to be afraid, e.g., God said he will never leave me or forsake me, etc.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD-IN

Where do we begin to deal with our need to be so controlling? In Romans 8:6,8 what directions are we given?

R: The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Ask group members to discuss specific situations where they have seen the difference between being controlled by the Spirit or the sinful nature in their own or others’ lives.

R: Stop and have group pray to be filled with the Spirit.
In Luke 11:13 there is a promise that the group could together reach for: “As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks.” Look at what Romans 8 tells us about the issue of the spirit-filled life and it’s importance to an overcoming life.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS:

We must take an active, aggressive approach to the fight for our peace if we are to be able to trust and overcome the need to control. No matter how strong the need to protect ourselves feels we will never be able to take better care of ourselves than God can. However, when we move God out of that position of responsibility He cannot protect us. We get in the way and tell Him with our actions that we think we are more capable than He is of doing that job.

No wonder we keep getting hurt. We are fighting Satan
on His terms. Let us take up our swords of the Spirit and stand as warriors in the Army of the Living God!

To fight this fight, we must first know our enemies. What does 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 tell us about how we can overcome the fears that mount within us? What are we told about our enemies and the weapons with which we can fight them?

R: We are to cast down vain imaginations (fantasies, etc.) and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (e.g., what Satan tells us about reality), we are to bring into captivity every thought that does not agree with God's Word. Our weapons are not the weapons of this world, but the Double-Edged Sword of God's Word which has divine power to demolish Satan and his strongholds.

Ask participants to share how they have fought against these forces before, and how they might do it differently with the Sword of the Spirit?

What does Hebrews 4:12 tell us about how His word demolishes these strongholds?

R: The Word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any double-edged sword, and it penetrates between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Can anything hide from God? Hebrews 4:13 tells us no.

R: Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

What does Peter tell us (1 Peter 5:9) to do so that we can win the war for our lives and souls?

R: Resist him (the devil), standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

In Jeremiah 29:11 what does God tell us about His plan for us?
R: He wants to provide for our welfare, and give us a future and hope. He wants to give us things that will be good for us.

Can we draw strength from Him? How does Isaiah 40:29 help us to understand God's involvement in our lives?

R: He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Can we count on Him even when we cannot count on ourselves? He tells us in Psalm 139:17-18 that he is always with us.

R: His thoughts about us are precious and vast. He is with us when we sleep and when we awake.

Does He want to protect us? What does Psalm 91 say about His protection?

R: He promises to protect us in every situation; He will command His angels concerning us. He will honor us, deliver us, protect us, and satisfy us with long life.

LIFE APPLICATION:
- As we learn to allow the Lord to fight our battles for us He gives us peace.
- As we apply His love in response to those around us He gives us joy.
- As we seek a revelation of God's knowledge of all things, presence everywhere at all times and sovereign power over all things, He makes His Word flesh in our lives. He conforms us to the likeness of His Son.

R: Discuss how these three actions can help us to get free from the bondage of fear in our lives. For example, how do we stand back and let God fight the battle when we feel threatened? How can we show love to someone we are afraid of? How can we know he is always present?

As we deal with our pain, we will feel angry and resentful. We must go to the Lord each time and ask him to heal these emotions and forgive us if we have acted on
them. He will give us forgiveness for others and ourselves as well. The process takes many trips to the foot of the Cross, but God is faithful and he will be there for us each time we come.

As we learn to let God be Lord over the things of this World, and we face our responsibility to manage our own lives with His help, we will be able to trust God and live in peace without the need to control everything and everyone around us.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Blessed Heavenly Father, Your Word tells us that You know all, and that You are everywhere. We ask You to help us to trust You in our hearts. We know You will never let us down, but we seem unable, in our strength, to put all of our trust in You. Help us to trust You and rest in You. Teach us to walk in self-control and to let You take care of the rest. We thank You for freedom in Jesus, and we welcome Your leading and guidance. In Jesus Name I pray.
SESSION TEN
WOUNDED EMOTIONS II - ANGER

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, we come to You for healing of the anger we harbor because of our experience of sexual abuse. Sometimes we do not even feel the anger, but we see ourselves doing 'angry' things to others, and we do not want to continue to do that. We are reminded that You, Father God, have promised us freedom through Your son. We ask You to reveal yourself to us and help us to replace the rage within us with Your love. Send the loving anointing of Your Holy Spirit, the Counselor and Teacher, to lead us into a greater intimacy with Christ. Help us get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger and resentment that keeps us in bondage. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION
In what ways is anger healthy?
When is it sin?

R: Personal Response. Help people think of ways that they have used anger and evaluate whether those actions were helpful or harmful to themselves or others.

SELF-AWARENESS
While each of the emotions we have discussed before has specific origins in our traumatic experiences, anger is often a secondary emotion (a ‘defense mechanism’) that we use to help us avoid feeling the other four emotional responses. We are genuinely angry about what happened to us, but we have also found that we can use anger to keep from having to feel the other emotions that have developed as a result of the abuse we have experienced - e.g., shame, fear, grief, and guilt, - that overwhelm and immobilize us when they start to surface. Two areas of major concern follow:
We use anger - in the form of contempt - to defend ourselves against shame. We expect others to judge us, reject us, and demean because we feel like damaged goods, so we will often make a contemptuous remark (toward ourselves or others) which serves to distance us from others and protect us from what we expect them to do.

We use anger to keep from being afraid. Anger gives us a facade that makes people back off and leave us alone. Their response reinforces our use of anger as a defense against a world which has been dangerous and frightening for us.

In this session we will talk about anger, its role in our healing process and how it increases and decreases dependent upon the healing of other emotions.

Dr. Mark Cosgrove (Cosgrove, ), in Counseling for Anger describes the effects of anger and the healing process. He says that anger is a God-given emotional response that we all experience on occasion. Surrendered to God and under self-control, anger is a normal emotional response; uncontrolled it can have tragic consequences.

Might a person not think that her anger about past abuse is always sin? For example, anger against the sin, and injustice in the world at large, is godly anger. It is only when the anger is against the one who committed the sin, one for whom Christ died even if they reject Him, that the abused person needs to separate the sin from the sinner and forgive the sinner but be angry at the sin.

Victims of trauma (sexual abuse, family violence, etc.) have many repressed intense emotions. A seemingly unrelated and harmless event can trigger an emotional explosion of anger because of its association with the past trauma. For example, we smell something, taste something, hear something or see something that triggers a memory of past events. Our response is completely out of context with what is happening around us. The response is related to the memory of the past event, not to the event in the present. We get very angry to stop feeling the fear or shame. In order to avoid feeling over-whelmed we use anger to protect ourselves and an inappropriate response follows.

Anger expressed to cover surfacing feelings of shame,
fear, grief and guilt carries with it the full force of the emotions we are trying to keep from feeling plus the level of intensity of anger necessary to keep us from having to feel those emotions. The more intense the other emotions, the stronger the anger required to keep them from being felt. To avoid being under the control of our anger, we must get in touch with and acknowledge the emotion which we are unconsciously using anger to repress. Then, with God's help, we can face the events of the past and accept the feelings, and the events with which those feelings are associated that we are trying so hard not to remember. Through this process, we can gain control over that experience and the emotions attached to it. As we face down these dreaded feelings we are set free from their effects and are no longer at its mercy of our defensive angry responses.

When anger is mixed with unforgiveness it becomes what we know in Biblical terms as a "root of bitterness". The root of bitterness causes us to believe that the world will treat us poorly. The angry response becomes the response of choice to every interaction we have with others. We complain about everything and are sure everyone is against us. We maintain a constant state of expectation and preparation for being attacked. Eventually, even facial expression will become winced and drawn because of the bitterness within.

God wants to give us more effective ways to process our angry feelings. We can go to God with our feelings, no matter what they are. He will show us the way to freedom. That process will include many of the following:

- We must honestly acknowledge what we feel.

- We must ask the Lord to forgive us for any sin that is within us. **We do not repent for what happened to us because that was not our fault!**

- As we acknowledge any evil thoughts we may have against ourselves or others, we must repent of them.

- We must repent of all bitterness, rage, and anger, along with any form of malice.

- We must learn to trust God so that we will be
able to endure the process of facing the memories and associated feelings from which the anger has served as protection.

- We must allow ourselves to open up and talk about the things that are holding us in bondage to shame, guilt, fear, and grief.

- We must forgive those we need to forgive.

R: People often equate forgiveness with the thought that “Oh, it’s all right. I forgive you,” while underneath the words knowing that the sin was not all right. This leaves a person with a feeling of hypocritical forgiveness, producing even more shame. Discuss the difference between loving the sin and loving the sinner.

- We must accept who we are in Christ Jesus, His beloved child in whom He dwells, having cleansed the temple of our body with His own precious blood.

R: What makes it difficult to accept who we are in Christ Jesus?

- We must believe that we can receive the healing the Lord has for us.

Remember that healing is a process that may require many trips to the foot of the Cross, but God is able, more than able, to accomplish what he plans for us. His arms are not too short!

As we seek God for healing, we should ask Him where all the anger and hurt comes from. He will show us the reason we try to avoid feeling the pain and will help us to develop the strength to face what we need to feel in order to be able to let go of the pain, the past, and the anger that is keeping our other emotions "safely" tucked away in our subconscious.

R: It would help participants to take a few minutes to ask God what is keeping them feeling so angry. Particularly, encourage participants to ask God if our feelings of shame, fear, grief and guilt are fueling the angry feelings we get when something reminds us of our past experience of abuse.
We are duped by Satan to believe that if we do not acknowledge the pain, it has no control over us. Reality is exactly the opposite. The pain can only control us when we try to keep it out of our awareness. Remember who is Lord of the darkness where it is currently hidden, and who is the Lord of the Light. In Him there is no darkness at all. As we bring our past into the light, the Lord helps us to accept the unacceptable and the blood of Jesus washes away the bondage which gives it power. We are set free!

**SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD-IN:**

God wants us to be free from anger. He especially wants to set us free from explosive anger that can be hurtful to ourselves and others. A fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control. By His Spirit He shows us the way and beckons us to follow.

In 1 John 1:6-7 John encourages us to expose everything within us to God's wondrous light. What happens if we keep these angry feelings to ourselves?

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.”

While John is telling us that God wants us to live transparently before him, and not try to hide things from Him, from that we can also gather that he does not want us to put up walls to hide our feelings and experiences we have from him either. He wants us to talk in the light so that he can help us with the difficult and complicated feelings we have about our past abuse and how that affects us. He knows we have put up walls that keep Him out and us locked in. He wants to set us free.

In Psalm 146:7 he tells us that “He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free,” and that’s not just prisoners in jail, it applies to us as prisoners of our past traumatic abuse.

2 Co 3:17 tells us that “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”
R: Ask participants if they have experienced the freedom that comes from bringing things out into the light and talking about them before. What was that like?

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS
First we must discern God's will in relation to anger in every situation. What does God say about anger, rage, bitterness and resentment in Ephesians 4:31?

Facilitator: We are to get rid of it.

What does Ephesians 4:26-27 say about how we are to handle anger?

R: We are not let the sun go down on our anger. We are to be angry but sin not. We are not to give the devil an opportunity to cause us to sin because of anger. Ask participants to talk about how that might apply to anger that comes from their experiences with sexual abuse.

What can we learn from the 'role model' that God gives in Psalm 30:5 and Psalm 103:8?

R: God is our role model. He shows us how to deal with anger by how He handles it. We have to remember that His anger is always righteous, and distinguishes between the sin and the sinner. How can we be sure we are hating the sin and not the sinner? What do we need to be aware of, to avoid saying we have forgiven when we have actually just denied how we really feel?

His word says that His anger only lasts a moment. When He is angry with us we may weep for a night, but we will rejoice in the morning. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. His anger is righteous while ours is often not. His anger is really more like disappointment and disappears almost instantly in a cloud of love. Ps 103:10 better represents his righteous anger, since it says that He doesn’t do ‘paybacks.’ “he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”
How does mismanaging anger affect our Walk with God as described in Matthew 5:22?

R: We need to be really careful how we handle anger. We are responsible for how we relate to others and what we think as well as what we say about them. Again, anger over sin is righteous, but anger and retaliation against the sinner becomes our own sin.

LIFE APPLICATION

What destructive ways do we use to deal with anger in our lives?

How do we handle hurt and anger? What are the feelings that our anger is covering up?

As we take the hurts of the past to God in prayer, He will set us free from the rage, bitterness, and resentment that accompany them. We need to spend time in prayer asking God to show us what is under our anger. As He shows us the feelings that we cover over with anger we can ask Him for healing for our souls in each of these instances. That healing will set us free from much of the anger we experience.

One of the hardest things to do is to deal with the anger we feel toward God. We know that He did not want these things to happen to us, but where was He? Why didn’t He make these things stop? These questions are hard to answer, but we know that God gave us His son to pay the price for our sins and to redeem us from the enemy. Jesus stretched out His arms and died for each one of us. And God gave us free will so we could choose to follow or not follow Him. We have a choice whether to sin or not, others also had the same choice.

The ability to choose God’s ways comes from the indwelling Spirit. Apart from that, it is as Paul writes in Rom. 7:14-15; “I know that God's standards are spiritual, but I have a corrupt nature, sold as a slave to sin. I don't realize what I'm doing. I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate.”
R: Are there times when we choose not to sin and then do so anyway? This dynamic is one of the most critical in all of sanctification.

Just as we have fallen short of God’s will for our lives, so have others. God is with us now, watching over us and bringing healing to us. He did not want us to be wounded, but he definitely wants us to be healed.

How do we handle the anger we feel toward ourselves?

R: We lay the responsibility for the past abusive experiences on those who had the power to make things different when we didn't. We hold Satan accountable for his role in the events that happened to us. We recognize that those experiences do not shape us; we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. We do not need to be ashamed.

We learn to forgive others for what they have done to us as we learn to accept and rejoice in the forgiveness God has given us. We learn to accept what has happened to us and allow the Lord to make it work for good in our lives and in the lives of others.

CLOSING PRAYER
R: Let each of us take a few moments to ask the Lord what emotions and memories are hiding behind our anger. Ask Him to show you how to let Him into your heart so that He can help you to let down the wall of rage that protects you from feeling what you do not want to feel or what you are afraid you will feel.

Blessed Heavenly Father, we bring these wounded emotions to You in prayer. Show each of us what is 'under' our anger and how we can be healed of the causes of our rage and bitterness. Deliver us from any root of bitterness and forgive us for holding onto resentment. Teach us how to better handle being angry and sinning not. Expose the lies that lead to rage and come against the deceptions of Satan in our lives. In Jesus Name we pray.
SESSION ELEVEN
BOUNDARIES

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, we come to You today to invite You to be at the center of everything we do and to be Lord over all that we discuss. Guide our thoughts and our discussion. As we talk about boundaries, help us to understand what is healthy and Godly, and what is selfish and not in conformity with Your will for our lives. Show us what Jesus would do in the various situations we encounter and help us to follow His wonderful example. Teach us to love others and still be healthy, functioning servants of the living God. Teach us when and how to say no appropriately. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION:
Why is it important to discuss boundaries?

R: When boundaries are fuzzy, we can hurt ourselves and others. It is important to know the difference between boundaries and walls – walls restrict us, boundaries allow us to separate ourselves from the conflict others are experiencing without separating ourselves from healthy relationship with others. Boundaries allow us to know experience the pain of others or feel responsible to ‘take care’ of others, while we can still be of assistance to them and help them.

What is it about setting boundaries that is difficult and confusing for us?

R: Personal Response. We often confuse ourselves by responding one way but feeling another. For example, we might say yes to someone’s request because we think we have to if we want to continue to be friends, but inside we know that we do not want to do what they requested. Resentment often follows.
Is it possible to do the Lord's work but not be doing the Lord's will? For example, we can be working in the usher ministry when God is calling us to participate in the New Believers’ classes.

**SELF-AWARENESS:**

The major concerns we have with boundaries come from our experiences with sexual abuse. Since the integrity of the physical boundaries of our body was invaded during the sexual abuse experience(s), we have trouble knowing where we end and others begin. The following describe our quandary with boundaries:

1. Knowing where I end and you begin - not becoming enmeshed in you and losing myself. Sometimes we feel so helpless because not only do we feel our own feelings about situations and events, we also feel what others are going through as if we were the one in pain. We cannot discern where we stop and they start. God wants us to be able to help others, but He is the one who will take on their yoke and lift up their burden. Without boundaries, we will get in the way and interfere with His healing process.

2. Letting you feel what you feel without my feeling it too - allowing you to feel what you feel without my having to "fix it"; not losing empathy but gaining objectivity.

3. Being able to say no to others and yes to what is good for me in a way that is loving but firm.

4. Learning not to let others define who I am. To stand against the pressure others may put on us to be what they want us to be; we have to know who we are in Christ Jesus and what God is calling us to do.

5. Learning to set a limit, make choices that are healthy for me, want the best for others, but not hurt myself to please them.

6. Improved decision-making; being more able to allow God to guide and director our lives.

Boundaries are lines that say this is where I end and
you begin - they are not barriers that keep you out or walls that keep me in - but they do enable me to retain my own uniqueness and integrity.

R: Have any of you had experience with some of these things?

What happens if we do not have clear boundaries?

Difficulty with Perception
   If we do not know where we end and others begin we are overwhelmed by what others are going through. We feel like we are going through it too. We respond in one of two ways:
   - We put up walls to protect ourselves from the overflow of emotions; e.g., we use our protective techniques (i.e., anger, contempt, flight, denial, etc.) to keep from hearing more and becoming disoriented, or
   - We try to teach others our 'dysfunctional' coping mechanisms. Since these tools have not worked well for us, we will not be helping them either.

If our boundaries are in place, and our perceptions are accurate, we can respond to others with the empathy of one who has had similar experiences and yet we can step back and allow the Lord to direct us in our responses.

How can we learn to help others with similar experiences to ours.

R: As we listen through our boundaries, we can ask questions that enable them to think through what has happened to them and develop their own responses and solutions to events (past, present, and future).

How do we develop accurate perceptions?

R: We ask God to reveal to us what is actually happening in a particular situation.

How do we keep our emotions under control? We ask God to help us to see these experiences as unique and separate from our own.

R: We ask Him to help us walk in self-control and to listen patiently and carefully, rather than to be quick to respond.
What role do our boundaries play in this process?

R: Without boundaries we will not be able to hear the other person nor will we be able to heed the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We especially have trouble knowing where we end and others begin when the situation or emotional responses are similar to those related to our past abuse. Our emotions about the past contaminate the feelings we have about the present. We have trouble letting others feel because of our own emotional responses.

R: An example of not knowing where we end and others begin would be: A friend might come up to us and describe a stressful circumstance they are experiencing. In the process of talking about their problem, they begin to cry. We find ourselves crying too. In the end, we are both overwhelmed by the experience. We may respond by not wanting to hear what they have to say, or we may start talking about something that happened to us. Either way, their issue is not addressed and they leave the conversation feeling invalidated.

Impaired Judgment

Our judgment can be impaired by our fear of what our actions will do to others. The problem begins with our evaluation of ourselves. Many individuals have difficulty learning to go to God for a clear understanding and definition of who we are. For sexual abuse survivors our tendency is to define ourselves by what others say (or what we think they say) about us. God wants us to learn who we are in Christ Jesus so that we can be conformed to the likeness of Christ and no longer worry about how this world sees us.

R: For example: We believe we are inadequate and cannot speak in front of groups. Our pastor asks us to speak about an upcoming event. We become so nervous that we are shaking when we get up to speak that we falter and stumble over our words. We sit down convinced that we can never speak in front of groups. How else might we interpret this event?
We have trouble just saying no.

We have trouble setting appropriate limits within relationships. We do not know how to take on only manageable amounts of responsibility as volunteers or employees so we become inundated and immobilized by the demands made on us.

We may have trouble saying no to sexual advances. Since our 'no' was not respected by the perpetrator and may have caused us to be punished or hurt. We become afraid to say no to others' sexual overtures for fear we will be hurt again. We think we know what others are feeling, especially how they feel about us. God wants us to focus on how we feel about Him; the love we have for others, and who we are in Christ.

Being able to say no to you and yes to what is good for me may feel weird at first. After all, our "no" did not have much "enforceability". We were unable to stop the invasion of our boundaries by our abuser(s).

The families of abuse set us up for boundary problems. They showed little or no respect for our boundaries. As we discussed in Session II, this is a common problem for survivors of sexual abuse.

Taking Care of Ourselves

Learning to set a limit means making choices that are healthy for ourselves. Three factors come into play. First, we must learn to want for ourselves what God wants for us (to prosper us and not to harm us). Not hurting ourselves to satisfy others is one of the most difficult boundary challenges we face. Particularly, as a Christian, we may feel that we have no right to set limits - that we must always be available to others.

Secondly, when we do say no, we often have to muster up all of our strength to do it. The response comes out too strong, too aggressive, and defensive. We tend to retreat because we feel guilty about the way we responded and become afraid that others will reject us.

We have a role model, Jesus, who is our best example of how to behave. He always took time to go away and communicate with His Father so as to understand what he was to do. He clearly set limits with his family, with others who were bombarding him for help, and with those who were
trying to get him to approach the world as they did (e.g., the Pharisees).

He poured himself out for this world, but he always made sure he had the mind of His Father. He would take time out to be alone with God and make sure that He was walking in His Father's will. He knew how others felt, but he did not compromise his walk with the Father as He responded to the demands placed upon Him. From His example we can learn to set limits without compromising our Christian walk or our personal integrity.

Finally, learning to set boundaries is necessary for the fullness of the healing process to be completed. Until we have well thought out and established boundaries we will never be able to let down our walls and barriers to intimacy with God and with one another.

While God can certainly protect us, one reason we hold onto our walls is to protect ourselves from the demands of others. With boundaries we can choose how we will respond. We can seek God for His will. We can pray and meditate on His Word for wisdom as we respond. When our responses are based on God's Word and His Will for our lives, they come with gentle, loving authority.

Ultimately, we cannot protect ourselves. Our walls do not keep us safe or relieve our anxiety. They do keep us from intimacy with others and limit our relationship with God.

Boundaries allow us to make choices. They are lines between us and our sin nature. They are lines between us and the sin nature of others. Boundaries keep Satan out and sustain us in every situation because they are based on a trust in God's ability to watch over and protect us. Tearing down the walls and establishing boundaries is mental health. It is also Spiritual Health.

We draw the boundaries. God builds the walls of fire (protection) around us. He becomes the Glory within (Zechariah 2:5).

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS LEAD-IN
R: As we begin discussing the spiritual impact of learning to set boundaries, it may help to stop and pray for those
in the group who seemed to be most moved by the material we have discussed above. Prayer for the Lord to help them and fill in the gaps when they cannot seem to be able to set those boundaries themselves may be really helpful as we go on.

What examples do we have of our Lord setting boundaries?

*R: Mark 3:31-35*  “Then his mother and his brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent someone to ask him to come out. The crowd sitting around Jesus told him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you." He replied to them, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Then looking at those who sat in a circle around him, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does what God wants is my brother and sister and mother."

Are there any ways in which your inability to establish boundaries interferes with God's will for your life?

**SPIRITUAL AWARENESS.**

Did Jesus limit his sharing of the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven? What does He tell his disciples in the following scriptures:

Luke 8:10 He said “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."

Mark 4:11 He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables”

*R: He told them the meaning of his words that was not shared with others.*

What does Mark 1:35 tell us about Jesus shutting the World out and limiting contact with others?

*R: Jesus made it a practice to take time out to be alone with God.*
In Mark 1:38 what limit did Jesus set with his disciples?

R: When they found him, they told him that everyone was looking for him. He insisted that he was going to another place to preach because that is what God had called him to do.

What does Ephesians 5:1-7 tell us about setting clear sexual boundaries?

R: We are to live a godly life and avoid things like sexual immorality that separate us from our Father.

Do we need to set boundaries with God? John 17:20-23 answers that question.

R: No! God is the only person we should never consider setting boundaries with.

What does Ephesians 4:3 tells us about boundary setting with the Body of Christ?

R: When Christians set boundaries with one another they do so while maintaining a unity of the spirit.

What kinds of things interfere with that effort?

R: We have difficulty saying no because of our experiences of sexual abuse. We also have feelings that are easily ‘hurt’, e.g., we feel ashamed even though we haven’t done anything to be ashamed; we have fear within us and when someone recounts a story similar to our own, it may trigger that fear and cause us to respond negatively to protect ourselves.

LIFE APPLICATION
Why is it that we need to set limits with others, but we do not need to set limits with God?

R: Setting boundaries in this world allows us to hear what God is saying. We are better able to hear the Holy Spirit as He teaches us to apply the Word of God to our circumstances, know God's Will for our lives, and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. People will try to influence us away from God. After all, we all have the sin
nature. Boundaries help us to limit the influence of the sin nature on ourselves and on our interactions with others.

Boundary issues are a major concern for anyone who has been sexually abused. We can learn to respect our own boundaries as we study how Jesus lived His life. As we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and put to death the desires of the flesh, we are able to understand who we are. We are His children. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are new creations. We were created through the Word of God to be first-fruits of His creation (James 1:18). We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Go back to the readings on the Fourth Session of this manual and remind yourselves of who you are in Christ Jesus. As we walk that out, our boundaries become clearer. We are better able to remember that Jesus bears our pain and the pain of others as His burden. Our burden is light - to do the will of the Father. We can rejoice in the Lord and be strong.

Boundaries are fluid. They can move from one level of intimacy to another. They can be adjusted to fit the person and the situation with which we are confronted. Walls are all or nothing. They keep everything out - the good and the bad. They allow for no in-between.

How do we establish boundaries when we have built walls? We do it one step at a time, by faith. We start by 'putting a door in the wall' and share our hearts with God. We allow a few people to know some of our more personal information - based on our relationship with them and the need for them to know us. We ask God for His leading to have clear discernment and good judgment. Then, we move toward the process of tearing down the walls and establishing reasonable boundaries.

We work together with the Lord. Carefully we establish the boundaries that allow us to be safe and to enjoy the fellowship of intimacy that we need as we grow and become the person God has created us to be. After all, we are His workmanship (meaning he will do the work if we let him) created in Christ Jesus (the Holy Spirit working in us - Ephesians 2:10).
CLOSING PRAYER

Precious Heavenly Father, we come before You and thank You for showing us our limits and our boundaries. More importantly, You are showing us more about who we are in You. Help us to seek You before we commit ourselves to activities and tasks. Help us to walk in Holiness so that we can hear your leading. Let us seek You for our definition of ourselves rather than listening to the World or to Satan who is in this world and wants to destroy us. And thank You, Lord, that we can be sure that whoever we were before, we are not that now, and whoever You would have us to be, You are able to carry out that work to completion. In Jesus Name I pray.

SESSION TWELVE
BEING CONFORMED TO HIS LIKENESS

INTRODUCTION

OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, we come to You today in thanksgiving. Over the past eleven weeks You have shown us who You are and who we are in You. You have helped us to face down the memories of the past that have haunted us. Now we ask that You would help us to face those areas of our lives that need to change so that we can have a richer, fuller life. Conform us to the likeness of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us, Lord, to forgive the unforgivable and accept the unacceptable. In Jesus Name I pray.

SHARING QUESTION
What are the aspects of your life that have been affected by abuse?

R: Personal Response. Help participants to take a personal inventory of the ways their perceptions have been shaped by
their experiences, and how that has influenced their
decisions and actions.

In what ways do you want your life to be different as a
result of the healing and cleansing work of the Holy Spirit
and the Word of God?

R: Personal Response. Make time for participants to make a
brief list of behaviors they would like to change.

SELF-AWARENESS
Forgiveness

There are two tasks that we must do to be set free
from the hold the past has on us. Forgiveness is a process
of letting go of our need for justice. Through forgiveness
we state unequivocally that we trust that God is a God of
Justice.

Why we would want to hold onto resentment and
bitterness? Several reasons emerge:
- Rationalization interferes with forgiveness. We
  rationalize about our past abuse and minimize its
  impact. We feel we do not have to forgive anyone
  because the perpetrators did not know what they were
doing. But in our hearts we know differently. We
  have not forgiven; we are only denying the resentment
  we harbor. We may feel like we have to rationalize to
  forgive, but that will not empty us of our negative
  feelings. Our actions continue to belie our protests
  of having forgiven.

R: How has rationalization been a part of your coping with
your past abuse?

- Denial causes us to ignore the impact of what happened
to us. Though the consequences of these early events
are still limiting our ability to function effectively
as a Christian and as a person, we refuse to
acknowledge that these effects of the abuse have any
relationship to our past experiences. We deny our
unforgiving attitudes when we go to God as well, and
that puts a wall between us and our source of relief
from the pain of the past.

R: Have you used denial as a way to cope with the pain of
the past abuse?
- There are special problems of codependency that result from our early experiences. We lack objectivity and feel overly responsible for what happened to us. We need to let the perpetrator(s) take responsibility for what they have done. Our role is to forgive them, not to excuse them or minimize what happened to us.

Forgiveness may not be possible until some healing has occurred. That is why we put this chapter at the end of the manual. True forgiveness sets us free. We acknowledge and validate our feelings, and then allow God to heal them. That healing frees us from all of our resentments and helps us put the past and the pain associated with it behind us.

**Repentance**

As we move to the topic of repentance, it is important to understand that repentance is God’s way to freedom. We may not be able to forgive without repentance, because the act of coming to the Cross in repentance invites the Holy Spirit to become part of the process of our being able to give up the fears and concerns that forgiveness raises. Secondly, it is really hard to change our protective behaviors without the Holy Spirit giving us that peace that surpasses all understanding.

Repentance is the gift of God by which we are conformed to the likeness of Christ. It is coming to God and asking for the very thing he most wants us to have -- freedom from the natural self and its destructive inclinations and behaviors. We are not just asking for forgiveness. We are asking for the Holy Spirit, living within us, to change us and make us more Christ-like and less 'Adam-like'.

As we move from forgiveness to repentance for those thoughts and actions that fall short of God's perfect Will for our lives, we become even more acutely aware of the importance of being honest with ourselves and with God.

Allender (1990) states that “a problem cannot be solved until it is faced honestly”. He points out that the choice to face our past abuse is in response to the quiet prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Once we face the past abuse we have a second choice to make. Do we deal with the abuse? Allender (1990) points out that openness about our survival strategies and the
need for change and growth must not be rushed. Eventually, openness and honesty will win out if we continue to face the truth about the past and acknowledge and repent of the many dysfunctional ways we have developed to try to protect ourselves.

How can repentance make the process more successful?

**R:** Ask participants if they can understand how difficult it is to face these changes without repentance?

We persist in our pursuit of healing as we realize that without it we can not have a truly honest and meaningful relationship with one another and with the Lord. Intimacy and fellowship require risk, transparency, and trust.

What is preventing us from being free? Our past wounds and the intense emotions attached to them will not let us freely relate to the Lord and others close to us. There has been a wall between us. Unforgiveness, lies and secrecy which we have used for protection keep us from facing the truth and drawing closer to God.

How do we get beyond these barriers to a fuller relationship with the Lord? Prayer, fasting, Bible study, an honest exploration of how our past experiences affected us, and many trips to the Cross in repentance will eventually bear the fruit we require for healing. We must seek God with our whole heart, for he has promised that if we do, he will be found by us. A closer relationship with Him is the prize that comes with freedom from the past.

Prayer helps us to bring our past to God. Through fasting we demonstrate our commitment to seek His healing. We put ourselves in direct (intimate) contact with him by seeking His answers to our problems without the distraction of the demands of this world. Bible study brings the power of the Word of God to bear on our situation. In combination, God works mightily to make all things work for good for us.

Through God's Word we take to Christ our past abuse and the pain we feel because of it. The Word of God, by the Holy Spirit, searches us and probes our thoughts and intentions. The Word also helps us to face ourselves and look at our behavior in the light of what we are called to
So, of what do we need to repent? **First, we are never called to repent for the abusive acts that happened to us** - the hurts or wounds others caused us are something over which we had no control. They exercised their free will to do something to us that was wrong. They are accountable to God and to man for their actions.

As we acknowledge that we had no control over those things, we are able to examine how we have allowed the fear of these past events to keep us from depending on God as our protector. We ask Him to forgive us for trusting ourselves more than we trusted Him and we ask Him to help us to change. So what specifically do we need to bring to the Cross?

- We repent of bitterness, resentment, rage, anger, and feelings of malice.
- We repent of the self-destructive behaviors we use to protect ourselves; e.g., defensiveness, misinterpretation of events around us, etc.
- We repent because we have not taken him at his word and believed his promises.
- We repent because healing will only come with changed behavior, and repentance is the only way to accomplish real change.
- We ask God to remove the walls we have built up to protect ourselves, empty out the pain and sorrow we feel and replace it with His love and healing anointing.

**R: Which of these areas of repentance seems most difficult for you?**

Repentance brings us healing. It opens the door for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to change those parts of our being that are 'stuck' and still under control of the natural self. Repentance opens the door for intimacy with our Father and with His Son. It enables us to be conformed to His likeness and to walk in His will. It is the only way to rid ourselves of bitterness, rage, anger, resentment, and unforgiveness.

As we explore the ways we have developed to protect ourselves, we see that they are usually ineffective anyway. We see that our self protection leads to destructive relationships with others, and interferes with our
relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit gently and lovingly reveals to us the folly of our ways and helps us to make better choices and respond more lovingly.

We learn to face ourselves honestly. We realize that we are not condemned. As we face our shortcomings with the Lord holding our hand in support, we are set free from shame, guilt and grief or disappointment. We recognize that our efforts to protect ourselves from being hurt have created a division between ourselves and our loving God who gave His son that we might be whole and free and us.

As we live his Word, we are healed. Just as Jesus was the Word walking in the flesh, we become conformed to that likeness. The past does not go away; we see this world differently - as God sees it.

R: Have the group members describe some of the ways that this process has become more real to them as a result of the group ministry experience of the past 12 weeks.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD-IN
What makes forgiveness so important to us? Look at what the Lord tells us in Matthew 6:14: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

R: We must forgive if we want to be forgiven.

And what does God tell us in Jeremiah 15:19 about why we are to repent?

R: The Lord tells us that if we repent, he will restore us.

SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS
Over and over again, the Word exhorts us to forgive. What do the verses in Colossians 3:13, Mark 11:25, and Luke 6:37 have in common on the topic of forgiveness?

R: We are to forgive as the Lord forgave us. If we hold anything against anyone, we are to forgive him, so that our Father in heaven may forgive us our sins.

Forgive,
and we will be forgiven.

Is there a limit to how many times we are to forgive in
Matthew 18:21?

R: Jesus said seven times seventy. He is telling us we must always forgive.

Forgiveness is impossible without repentance of a bitter and hard heart.

Sometimes we cannot forgive easily. We hold onto bitterness. God wants us to come to Godly sorrow and repentance for that unforgiveness because He wants to set us free. What does 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 tell us about what Godly sorrow will produce in us?

R: Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

What does Isaiah 30:15 tell us are the benefits of repentance?

R: In repentance and rest is our salvation, in quietness and trust is our strength.

What other benefits are associated with repentance in Luke 3:8?

R: We are called to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. It is the only way to God. We cannot depend on what we do or who is our forefather. We are to repent for our own salvation.

R: Discuss what the fruit in keeping with repentance is. For example, giving up defensive responses, opening up to intimacy, and learning to give of ourselves to others are fruit in keeping with repentance.

What happens when we repent as Paul tells us in Acts 26:20? “First to those in Demascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”
R: Paul preached that we should repent and turn to God and prove that we mean what we say by our deeds. What kind of deeds would these be?

What does the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:12 reminds us that without forgiveness we are not forgiven. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

R: Remind participants that without forgiveness, we are not forgiven. However, God has made a way, through repentance, for us to forgive even the most evil of things that someone can do to us.

LIFE APPLICATION

The Word says that the process of healing involves repentance and forgiveness. How do we uncover the decisions and behaviors for which repentance is needed?

R: Review the list of areas you thought of earlier that need to be changed in your life. How would you approach God to ask him for help in making these changes? Personal response.

What has honesty to do with this process?

With whom do we have to be honest?

R: With ourselves, and with God. We even need to be honest with those who have abused us and with family members who could have made the abuse stop but did not. If confrontation is too difficult or impossible, I recommend writing letters (as many as you need to write to get all of your feelings out) to each person toward whom you have unforgiveness.

Before closing it is important for us to spend time privately with the Lord. Ask Him to show us the areas where we are still holding onto unforgiveness, how the difficulties we encounter in living our lives are reflective of our past abuse, and what role repentance plays in our healing process. Take about 15 or 20 minutes now to ask God for forgiveness and direction about these issues.

R: Let participants know that if they would like to include you in their process, you will make your self available, but
this is really a time for them to come to the Lord and have that special intimacy with Him that He has made possible for us.

CLOSING PRAYER
Blessed Heavenly Father, deliver us from any root of bitterness. Help each one of us to come to You as a little child, humbly and repentantly to seek the freedom You have for us. Let Your Holy Spirit search our hearts and minds for remnants of bitterness, unbelief, lack of trust, walls of protection, and barriers to intimacy. Help us to bring these to the foot of the Cross and let the Blood of Jesus wash away every spot and wrinkle. In Jesus Name we pray.

SESSION THIRTEEN
INTIMACY FIRST WITH CHRIST, THEN WITH OTHERS

INTRODUCTION
OPENING PRAYER
Blessed Lord, search our hearts and show us how we can be more available to You. Help us to understand where we are resisting Your leading and the love that You have for us. Help us to learn to love You in the way You have called us to do. Teach us to walk with You and let down the walls and obstacles we have constructed that rob us of the
fullness of life You have for us. Set us free, Precious Lord, and help us to be completely transparent to You. Teach us to discern who is safe to trust, who we can trust to have healthy relationships with. Praise You and Thank You for drawing us to You and making it possible for us to have closer relationships with others. Now, Lord, help us to dwell in the shadow of the Most High and rest under Your wings forever. In Jesus Name we pray.

SHARING QUESTION
What does intimacy mean and what does it require of us?

R: Intimacy requires three things that are difficult for us: Vulnerability, Trust, and Transparency

SELF-AWARENESS
R: Start this group by having members read John 17 and Psalm 139:1-16 aloud.

Intimacy with God is Christ in us and each of us in Christ. In that wonderful prayer in John 17, Jesus asks of the Father that we would all be able to enjoy the intimacy that He and the Father share.

God created us in 'His image and likeness' so that we can fellowship with him, know him and be intimately known by him. We can understand this more clearly as we look at Adam and Eve and their relationship with God before the Fall. They walked daily in His presence. They were completely transparent before Him, and they felt no fear of Him. Sin changed that relationship completely. God did not change. He remained omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, but man no longer was able to come to him with openness and transparency. After they sinned, Adam and Eve hid from God and then covered their bodies with animal skins because they became conscious of their nakedness. The self-consciousness was a direct result of the sin in their lives. And their very nature was changed. They not only had sinned, but they had become sinners by nature. The image of God had been damaged, and they would die, as would all of their offspring, who would to our own day be born spiritually dead and separated from God. Scripture puts it, “No one does right, no not one.”

R: How do we come to terms with the differences between
Then Jesus came. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, the unblemished Lamb. When Jesus redeemed us on the Cross, we were given back our intimacy privileges. The veil to the Holy of Holies was torn, and we were invited to come boldly before the Throne of Grace, because He now lives in us, having taken our sins upon Himself, having paid the penalty of the death we deserve.

But like any invitation, we must accept it and act on it. If we do not, we in effect choose to reject it. Why would anyone reject the opportunity to be one with Jesus and the Father?

For one thing, we have an enemy who is constantly trying to construct obstacles to our path to intimacy with God. Abuse is one of those obstacles. Trauma is another.

Efforts to change are met with resistance for several reasons: We get caught in the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, as Paul describes it in Galations 5, and details his own struggles in Romans 7. The sin nature was crucified with Christ only so long as we walk in the Spirit. Since no one is able to walk entirely in the Spirit, theologians have described Christians as simultaneously saints and sinners. Sanctification is the process of putting on the new nature and putting off the old. It is a process and the victim of abuse must recognize that there will be times when the world, the flesh, and the Devil will draw him or her to old attitudes and patterns of response. We don’t have to go back to them simply because we fail. Repentance and return to Jesus in the Spirit’s power is the remedy.

R: Discuss how this struggle between the sin nature and the ‘born again’ Spirit-filled life come into conflict. For example, the following issues are important in influencing where we turn for discernment and guidance.

Some of our struggle comes from the following:
- Change causes us to be afraid. We remember the past abuse and all of the awful feelings and experiences we had before we developed a way to deal with them. Letting go of our defenses may make us feel vulnerable
- We still have issues with God. Where was He when we were abused? How do we know he would stop it if it happened again?
- Intimacy requires transparency and vulnerability. We must learn how to handle the fear and the anxiety that accompanies that. We must seek God for discernment so that we do not over-expose ourselves and encounter devastating consequences. If what we want is to learn how to have fellowship Him and with others, God will show us how to appropriately share ourselves; we must ask him how to do that.

The ability to use discernment as a guide to trust will enable us to stand against the anxiety and fear of exposure. As we understand who we are in Christ Jesus, we learn that we do not have to be afraid nor do we need to feel ashamed and condemned. We can leave anxiety behind. We are truly not perfect, but we are redeemed. Satan cannot and God will not condemn us (Romans 8:1).

Trust is another obstacle to intimacy. As we come honestly to God and talk with Him about the events of the past, He will help us to find the answers to our questions. He will show us where he was when we were being abused. He will cover us with His love and help us to understand our experiences in the context of a fallen world. He will also show us the incredible love He has for us and His Heart to give us a full, abundant life.

As we talk with him about our feelings of shame and fear, He will help us to see ourselves as His children. As we can begin to live in the freedom that God has for us we experience the moving of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What is the role of prayer and Bible Study in this process?

R: Prayer helps us to remember that God can give us the direction we need. Bible Study helps us to identify how God has helped others to find their way, and gives us examples of things we can do to keep on track.

Things happen - in this world we will have trouble - but God is with us. As we grow closer to God and let down our defenses we start to handle experiences differently than we did before. We begin to see things from a different perspective. The result - our experiences become
more positive, or at least more manageable. We stop getting in God's way, and He is able to turn each situation around and work it for our good.

Often, when we think that someone has rejected or disrespected us, we find that, as we look at the situation with God's eyes, they had not. Those we thought had put us down hadn't. Through this process, we begin to understand how our perceptions and automatic reactions have caused us pain. We learn that our responses to circumstances influence the outcomes. We become aware of the role we play in perpetuating our own problems. As we change the way we approach situations, our lives change too.

As we learn to trust God, He will show us how to trust others. He will help us to understand that human beings are fallible and may let us down. He will help us to understand that some people are more able to handle the responsibilities that go with intimacy than are others, and He will show us how we ourselves have not been open to the risks intimate relationships require.

Once we have an understanding of how we cause pain to ourselves and others, God will help us to understand that when we do experience negative reactions in our relationships with others it is often caused by our own fears or theirs, and that these fears come from painful past life experiences in both of our lives. We will begin to see others as struggling just like we are.

As we develop empathy for the suffering of others, compassion helps us to reach out to others in love. We refocus our concern. We ask God to help them, too.

Soon, we realize that, as we go about our Father's business and keep our eyes on Jesus instead of ourselves or the circumstances around us, we are no longer self-conscious and self-protective. We begin to understand that He is protecting us from harm, and that, even more wonderfully, he does have a purpose for our lives.

As we take our eyes off of ourselves, we offer more concern for those around us. As we see how Jesus comforts others through us, we will begin to relax. We become more able to share with others and accept their imperfections as God shows us with whom we can safely be transparent.
Can you think of times when you may have forgotten about your own needs as you moved forward to help someone else?

R: Some examples of this include Paul’s sufferings while he was focusing his concern on the Spiritual growth of his children, e.g., Timothy, Titus.

**SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS LEAD-IN**
What does I John 1:5-7 tell us about the meaning of intimacy with God?

R: God wants us to share in an intimate relationship with Him. The intimacy we share with Him enables us to receive freedom from sin through His Son, Jesus Christ. As we walk in freedom from sin, the Holy Spirit will help us to be more able to experience intimacy instead of intensity of feeling.

**SPIRITUAL-AWARENESS**
R: We construct walls to protect ourselves. These walls not only keep out the pain. They keep out the joy, love, and fellowship that God so much wants to share with us and that we want to share with Him and with others. Without this fellowship, this special intimate communion with God, we cannot grow in the Lord.

What does Jeremiah 17:9-10 tell us about God's knowledge of us?

R: Our hearts are deceitful and beyond cure, but God searches our hearts and examines our mind, to reward us according to our actions. We put up walls to keep God out, but as we let these walls down, he is able to heal us.

What does God tell us in Colossians 3:12-13 that we should be doing instead of walking around being defensive and self-protective?

R: God has compassion on his children, and He commands us to have compassion for others as He has shown us by His compassion for us.

What does 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 instruct us about comfort.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who
comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

R: God gives us healing and then he gives us meaning and purpose in our lives, by helping us to help others who are also struggling with pain and suffering.

LIFE APPLICATION

R: Focus discussion on what barriers participants have erected that keep them from being able to enter into intimate relationships. Bring the discussion to areas that interfere with our ability to have intimate fellowship with God and look at how these barriers effect every area of our life and our Christian growth.

The purpose of this small group ministry is more than healing. God wants us to be healed because he loves us. But, he also desires that we would have an intimate relationship with him and with each other. Being able to enter into this closeness with God enables us to walk in the Spirit. In James 1:18 we are told that God gave us life through the Word of Truth. In Romans 8:5 Paul says that we have to live according to the Spirit and set our minds on what the Spirit desires if we are to be able to overcome the sin nature and live a victorious life. In Ephesians 2:10 he says we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do.

As we allow the Holy Spirit to work these qualities of understanding, empathy, trust, perseverance, honesty, integrity and consideration for others into our lives, we get our eyes off of ourselves and become able to trust God and enter into intimate fellowship with Him. The Fruit of the Spirit -- Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control will become evident in our actions.

As we trust God, we can learn to trust ourselves. As we are honest about our shortcomings and areas of weakness, we become better able to trust ourselves. We also learn to trust others and better judge just how far they are able to be trusted. And, we can rest in the knowledge that God is willing and able to show us what those limitations are in ourselves and in others.
God does not stop there! He wants us to be healed. He wants us to have an intimate relationship with Him and with one another. He also wants us to have meaning and purpose in our lives. So, he teaches us to be part of the healing process for others who have similar past abuse issues. Because we have learned what the healing process is, God will use us in the lives of others to guide them to freedom.

As we meditate on this session, we need to look at God’s instructions to us in II Corinthians 1:3-4 where he helps us to understand that we are comforted because he loves us, but we are then able to take the comfort we have received from Him and share it with others who are troubled.

R: Take the time toward the end of the group to allow participants to offer testimony of how the groups have affected their lives and what they have learned that they can apply to their lives in the future.

R: Suggest that they will want to keep growing, i.e., continue to come to the prayer group, some might prepare to lead a group or participate in prayer for the groups during the time that they are meeting, a general Bible study and fellowship group? Staying in touch with one another? Etc.

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Heavenly Father, thank You. Thank You for giving us meaning and purpose. Thank You for showing us how to overcome. Thank You for allowing us to come into Your presence and enjoy the pleasure of fellowship with You. Thank You that You did not throw us away or leave us to deal with our sin and pain without help. Thank You for Your son who reconciled us to You. As we enter this new phase of our life, help each of us to walk in Your will, to serve You, and to fulfill the call You have on our lives. Help us to learn to lead spiritually meaningful and useful lives and leave the worries and concerns of this World to You. Help us, Lord, to allow Your Spirit to work in us to Conform Us To The Likeness of Christ. We want to become the men and women of God that Your Son gave His life for us to be. In Jesus Name We Pray!
BIBLIOGRAPHY
