

# Discovering Freedom



Complete  
Workbook

## Introduction

Hi, my new friend! I am looking forward to walking with you through this study as we learn to make the impact of the Gospel personal and practical. You may be hurting, confused, broken or just curious about how this will all work for you. I want you to know I have so much hope for each person in this course—I have prayed for you throughout writing it.

I get to work with people every day who are struggling, and my desire for this study is that you will find a way ahead through the fog of today and meet Jesus in a new way as He impacts your real, rubber-meets-the-road life. I am not interested in a bunch of trite expressions—I want impacting truth that changes your life and inspires you with hope beyond comprehension. Thank goodness that isn't up to me! I know the true Counselor is the Holy Spirit and He is already at work in you, even if you don't know it.

Even if you are pretty skeptical about the whole thing, I encourage you to launch into this process with all the vulnerability and bravery you can muster. You determine what you will get out of it by what you are willing to put into it. Let's dive in and figure out who you are, who you could be and what's stopping you from getting there.

As you work through this course, I would suggest watching the video first, then proceeding through the workbook. None of the videos are longer than about ten minutes, as I wanted them to all be doable in the middle of a busy schedule. As you answer questions and read the workbook, pray that God would reveal what He wants to in you to bring you freedom, healing and hope.

Let's get started!

## Module 1: Where Are You Stuck?

One of my favorite memories of counseling is of a girl who walked into my office and said immediately “Oh a couch, how cliché!” I laughed so hard at her insight. I am not one of those counselors, though, so let’s dispense with that misconception right away. I had a couch because it was comfortable seating, not so you could lie down and I could pretend to be Freud! I hope that those who come into my office immediately have a sense of welcome, peace and safety. Today as you begin this course, please find a place of quiet and sanctuary that will allow you a few moments to really think. I want this to be your healing place, an area where you can feel free to cry, to pray, to laugh, whatever you need to do. The idea is not to race through the material, but to walk through it gently and give your heart time to really deal with the issues as God brings them up.

Now that you have found your place of refuge, let’s talk about what brought you to this course. What are the problems, the frustrations, the habits, the addictions, the reactions, the “stuck-ness” that make you want to work a little to get out of them? Please don’t misunderstand—this will be work. Emotional, mental and spiritual work is sometimes some of the hardest you will do. But the value that can be gained in it is transformational.

1. What problems are surrounding you right now?
2. What are your reactions to those problems?
3. What things about yourself do you wish you could change?
4. What have others communicated about you that has hurt them?
5. How are your relationships at this time?
6. Who do you blame for your problems?
7. What in your life frustrates you or makes you feel stuck?

8. What are the things that block your relationship with God?
9. How do you think God would describe you?
10. How do you cope with life?

These questions are designed to get your brain moving and help you identify some of the main presenting problems in your life today. They are not for you to use to beat yourself up. We have to have some honesty about our lives for us to go anywhere. The first step really is having a frank examination of what we hate in ourselves and what we wish was different.

One of the things my friend and mentor Mike Wells told me was that often we see someone sit in front of us with ten problems and we want to attack all the problems at once. We want to “fix” a person. But this is not where God is working—this is just where we see problems. We need to be aware of the problems, but follow what God is doing as He can work in the heart. So, as you look at this list you have made, present it to God as an honest reflection of where you are right now. He isn’t afraid of it, nor is He disappointed or even disgusted. He already knows all of it and still loves you as His child. Jesus wants freedom for you, a freedom that allows you to live life and not just survive through each day. But if you don’t have that yet, He is not sitting in judgment and condemnation. He is waiting patiently for you to be ready. So, present these findings to Him and ask Him for His work in them. I know it can be scary to admit some of this, but it is in bringing these things to light that the healing can really begin.

If you are working through this study as a group, you don’t need to share all of these vulnerable things with one another, but perhaps a few would help to remind each of you that you are not alone. I think one of the most poisonous things the enemy tells us is that we are alone in our battles and no one else struggles like us. There is such a huge amount of shame in that accusation. And it isn’t true! I talk to plenty of people who struggle with similar things and yet all of them think their struggle is unique. So, I would encourage you to share a few things with a trusted group to allow you to support one another in that honesty. We don’t share these things to beat up on or judge one another. We share them to admit we are flawed humans who need Jesus—all of us.

Father, thank you for not being afraid of my junk. Thank you that you already knew all of it and you still love me indiscriminately. I am blown away by this incredible love. Please remind those walking through this course of the amazing love You have for them even in the midst of their brokenness. Thank you that you haven’t adopted me as your child because I do everything right and have never screwed up, but

simply because you love me to the point of sending your Son to die for me. This is such good news, and such an incredible gift of Life. Please envelope those walking through these hard things in Your hope, so they don't get stuck in the bad but move into the amazing work You are doing in them.

Amen.

## Module 2: What Got You Here?

Hey! Still with me? That's good. Sometimes when we start to tackle the whole problem, it can scare people off. But not you. You are ready to fight through and figure out how to make life different! Let's get on with why you are in the mess.

The first step is looking back at the past a little. We don't want to be there forever because that's just depressing. But we do need to know what has formed your identity. That usually comes from your past. Some of you may have had a golden childhood, and I don't want to suggest a problem that isn't there. Usually, I have noticed that when people come from really great childhoods in which they did not experience much pain, there is plenty of pain later on (probably where you are now) as God often uses suffering to bring us to Him. So, don't judge your past based on the amount of hurt or lack thereof you find there.

I want you to think back to the relationships that surrounded you as a child. Who was there helping raise you? Mom, dad, grandma, aunt, step-dad? For each of the people who were foundational in your upbringing, I want you to think about what characterized your relationship with them. Were they usually loving, encouraging and upbeat? Or the opposite? Were they abusive, volatile, alcoholic? How did they react to hard days? Some parents stuff things and withdraw, others yell and scream, and a few more over-share with their children and put them in an awkward position by trying to treat them like adults.

Make a list of the people who raised you and next to their name, write the things that described them on good days as well as really hard ones. It might look something like this:

Mom: kind, passive, didn't protect from step-dad, nurturing  
Dad: abandoned at age 6, didn't want any relationship  
Step-dad: tried to be a dad, verbally abusive, yelled, alcoholic

Or like this:

Grandma: loving, never mad, very close, withdrew when overwhelmed  
Mom: did lots of drugs, wasn't there, abandoned at age 4 to pursue her addiction  
Dad: in jail since birth, no contact

Or like this:

Mom: loving, would yell if frustrated but felt bad after, firm but caring  
Dad: a little passive, kind, sometimes withdrawn, wanted to participate in my life, very close

Here's a spot for your people and a description of them at their worst:

Whatever it looks like, write it all down—good, bad and ugly. Now we want to look at the events and people who have caused you pain. The pain does not have to be something that everyone would consider a big deal. This can be anything from a death in the family, to a friend who betrayed you, to losing a pet. It is something that affected you, and you still feel a bit of a pang when you think about it. Write these down, and then add the feelings associated with them. Here's a list to get you started as feelings are sometimes difficult to identify:

Unloved	Worthless	Failure	Unacceptable
In the way	Ugly	Fat	Can't get it right
Not good enough	Alone	In Chaos	Dirty
Rejected	Invisible	Left out	Unheard
Stuck	Abandoned	Unwanted	Afraid
Used	Guilty	Stupid	Betrayed
Inferior	Disappointment	Ugly	

Add more of your own here:

Also, write down the things that brought you joy as a child and as an adult. What experiences, people or things have contributed to this joy?

Finally, write down the dreams and desires you had for your life growing up and what those look like now. Consider even the ones that might seem a little silly from your childhood (wanting to be a superhero when you grew up, wanting to have claws, etc.) as this will give you a little insight into some things that drew you from the beginning. For example, wanting to be a superhero often speaks of a child who loves justice and wants to help people while taking down the bad guys. Wanting to be a princess talks of a desire to be beautiful and accepted for your appearance. (Probably also that you wanted to wear fun frilly things and eat cake. 😊)

Ok, that's a lot of past stuff we just walked through. You did great. It's not easy to delve into all that stuff and dredge up the past. But I do believe in order to understand your behavior today and not repeat it, you need to understand why you are acting the way you are in the first place, and this comes through examining the past for patterns and clues. Next session, we will dive into what you did to cope with these painful things from your past, and painful relationships (in some cases) with those who raised you.

Father, thank You for not wasting anything. Even my past is allowed by You to bring me deeper with You. You want me to know you and to be prepared to walk with You in heaven. I don't always understand the past, and often it's hard to reconcile the events therein with Your character, but I stand firm in the knowledge that You are loving, and You are allowing all things for my good. Thank you for growing Your revelation in me. Amen.



## Module 3: What Messages Did You Receive?

Ok, so we know what happened in your life to start to form your identity. But that's only half of the story. People react differently to similar hurts, and that can be confusing. So, let's think about how you dealt with past stuff—the way your parents were, the hurts that happened, what you wanted in life, and what happened to your dreams along the way.

First, what were the ways you tried to deal with things in a positive way? What were your attempts to clean up your life and make it go a different direction? Often these are “good” ideas, but the motivation behind them is to get rid of the identity messages you received. This doesn't work, and that's part of why you can get so frustrated. A new job, a new relationship, a move out of state or a new church—these may all be attempts to sort out your problems by changing the scenery. Or you could try to work harder, get more education, gain more power, make more money or join a ministry. These are all to try to fix this piece of yourself that keeps telling you that you are unloved, unacceptable and rejected. Again, none of these are necessarily bad things, but they won't fill the space you are trying to fill.

Say your parent was rejecting and communicated covertly that you weren't good enough. You might try a relationship with a person who acts the same way, although that wasn't what you were looking for. In essence you are attempting to heal the part of you that feels lacking by showing someone who is much like your parent that you are, in fact, good enough, and that they can accept you. Of course, this doesn't work, so you may leave that relationship and try a new one with someone who is very different from that parent. Unfortunately, you don't actually have tools to know how to deal with someone who is very different, so now instead of feeling rejected, you feel you can't settle in and are always left without a clue. This is often how cyclical relationship people operate—they aren't just trying to date or marry a bunch of people. They are looking for the wrong thing and can't find it, so they figure if they find the “right” person it will all work out.

The issue isn't finding the “right” person, though. It's that they are trying to get a person to fill a void in them that a person can't fill. So, these attempts to fix themselves don't work.

Another possibility could be that you grew up poor and were embarrassed about your house, clothes and parents. Perhaps you vowed you would work hard and make lots of money so you wouldn't have to feel that way anymore. You did it, have all the money, but still don't feel the embarrassment is gone. You have to keep trying different things to get rid of that rejection. You might get faster cars, bigger houses, luxury vacations, and the list goes on. Of course, none of that stuff will work either.

One issue that many people struggle with is appearance. What if your parent kept trying to put you on a diet, communicating over and over that no one was going to want you because you weighed what you did. The kids at school made fun of you as well, and the person you first dated broke up with you (for a different reason, but you can tell yourself it was because you weren't attractive enough). Now, you are going to lose a bunch of weight, be a body-builder and judge all those people who don't look like fitness models. Even if you become a fitness model, however, you can't get rid of that voice of your parent and the laughs of those kids in your head. You are fighting a battle that can't be fought with proving a crazy person wrong. I have had a few professional models in my office, and I can tell you even they don't have it figured out! That isn't the answer either.

So, how have you tried to deal with these past issues and hurts? What was the result? Write these down.

Usually when our "fix" doesn't work, we get angry and turn to something more destructive and addictive to deal with life. This is when the rejecting messages of our past barrel down on us and we have to cope somehow. These destructive coping mechanisms can run the gamut of drinking, doing drugs, looking at porn, shopping, withdrawing, obsessing, or yelling and screaming. Some gossip, some cheat on their mates, some just obsess on cheating on their mates. When the pressure of life is on and it runs into all the negative identity messages you have felt in your life, you have to survive somehow. This has been a survival mechanism up to now, but I don't want you to have to keep doing life this way. We need to figure out what you run to right now in order to work through how not to go there.

Often these coping mechanisms are tied to the original problems we talked about in Module 1. The yelling is making your family upset. Or your spouse has caught you cheating and now your marriage is over, or on the rocks. Or your withdrawal because of workaholism (to gain acceptance) has led to loss of friendships and family relationships - and you are lonely.

Whatever it is, I want you to write it all out for me. What are all the things you run to when life is hard and seems too much?

Father, I have run to a lot of things to try to deal with life other than You. Some look ok and some were really dumb, but none of them worked like I wanted them to. Thank You that you love me even when I run to things that don't give me comfort and when I repeatedly do stuff that is stupid. You really are a patient Father. Thank You that You have put me in the best place to know You every day, even when I've made choices I want to regret. Thank You that You don't waste anything. Amen.

## Module 4: Who Are You Really?

Have you ever noticed you can talk to your siblings about growing up in your family and they seem to have had a completely different experience than you did in the exact same situation? Or have you seen how your spouse looks at you as if you're crazy when you accuse them of something, all the while maintaining that was not their intention in any way? I have noticed that many relationship problems stem from the absence of considering that someone else has a radically different view of life, and their view, though different, isn't necessarily wrong.

God created you in a very specific way, with a specific personality. Personality is the grid through which you look at the world, and how you take everything in. You may have taken a bazillion personality tests, or you may be completely unfamiliar with the concept. Either way, I want you to consider the impact your personality has on both your current situation and your life moving forward. This unique grid is what you filter your history through in order to extract pieces of the negative identity messages that form your whole identity now. It isn't bad, but rather neutral as it can be used for bad or good.

If you have never taken a personality test (or even if you have and can stand to take one more!) I love the one Mike Wells wrote called The Unique Self Test. You can take it online at [Abiding Life Ministries](#) for \$10. It will provide you with some information vital to beginning the process of accepting who God made you to be and becoming comfortable with this uniqueness. If you've taken another personality test, reexamine the results to help you understand who you are and why the hurts in your past have affected you.

In Mike's test, there are three basic separations—thinker, feeler and doer. One of the reasons I love his test is its simplicity. You don't have to try too hard to figure out who people are in these categories. The thinkers are analytical, obsessive, procrastinating, perfectionistic and loyal to a fault. The feelers are relational, emotive, subjective, blame-taking and people-lovers. The doers are driving, leading, bull-in-the-china-shop people who occasionally run over people in the process of accomplishing their larger-than-life visions.

Usually you major in two of these, and the realization of these will help you to understand why you are hurt, happy, or why you hate the things you do. If you are a thinker, for example, you will be undone by chaos in the home—you need a safe place to come home to and feel as though you can rest and recuperate from all the "crazy" people outside. If your home is in chaos, this lends itself to the feeling of being unsettled and unable to open up and it often promotes even more withdrawal. If you are a feeler who lives in a home with thinkers, you might be seen as weak, emotional or unstable. This can lead you to try to be more "thinker-ish" to make

them happy. Of course, this isn't natural for you, so you can feel stuck all the time, and frustrated as you try to be something you are not. If you are a doer, you can tend to feel as though everyone is always telling you how you forget the details or do things in such a hurry, and meantime you are wondering how these people expect to get anything done at such a snail's pace and with no vision!

Go through the test results (either of Mike's test or another you've taken previously) and record some characteristics below. Please don't take this test as you wish you were but as you actually are. You will not help yourself if you aren't being honest. Also, don't think about the test too long—just answer each question speedily because if you think too long about any one answer you will talk yourself out of your answer and you will get stuck.

Whether or not you are happy with the outcome in the end, sit down before God and ask Him to begin to show you how much He loves the real you—the one He created you to be. A lot of people wish they could change their personality. Instead of allowing Jesus to show them what it is He loves so much in them, they work hard to try to fix themselves. This will lead to confusion and frustration. You aren't limited to your personality, but it is helpful to start with who you really are before you try to work on something you're not. I think that God sometimes calls us to be something other than what He's created in us, but He is always enough for that and it isn't forever.

The other piece of this personality puzzle is the acknowledgment of the difference between your personality and others' personalities. When you realize they are not supposed to be like you, you can give them the freedom to be who they are created to be. This includes your spouse, your children and your parents. Often, we try to make people we love be like us because then we could understand them; but we are really trying to extinguish the beautiful flame as God created it, and instead form our own. It isn't good for the person, or for you. If you are married, ask your spouse to take the test as well, then put the results on the fridge so that every time you walk by them, you are reminded of who your spouse is and how he or she ticks. This

helps to prevent you from going down the path of thinking that your spouse is just a big jerk rather than realizing he or she has a different motivation for behavior than you do. I gave some illustrations of this in my own marriage in the video.

Assumptions about other peoples' motivations behind behavior are usually wrong. Don't do it!

Father, please give me eyes to see others as different but loved by You just as they are. Allow me to see how You've created me and to settle it's not something I should strive to change. Thank You that you created me this way for a purpose and know exactly how to minister individually to me. Please let me learn to love who You have created me to be, and to love others as You have created them to be. Thank You for the beautiful diversity of personalities and how your image is found in all of them.

## Module 5: Where Did This Get You?

Ok, guys, this is where things start to come together. We are going to take what you've written down so far and put it all together. Go through your list of feelings associated with the people who raised you (unloved, something wrong with me, failure, etc) and write them down in the Identity Messages section. Then, add your list of feelings from the hurts that have occurred in your life. Pay special attention to how your personality compounds these hurts. For instance, if you are a thinker who likes a safe place at home, the chaos that an abusive, alcoholic family will generate is much more problematic than if you had a doer personality. Or if you are a feeler who is highly subjective and assumes things are always your fault, a manipulative person in your life who constantly makes you feel even more as if you should take the blame, will be more impacting than if you are a thinker who looks at things in a more logical way. If, as a doer, you find yourself in the midst of chronic illness, you might feel more stuck and worthless than would a thinker who finally has lots of time to ponder without any other distractions.

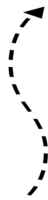
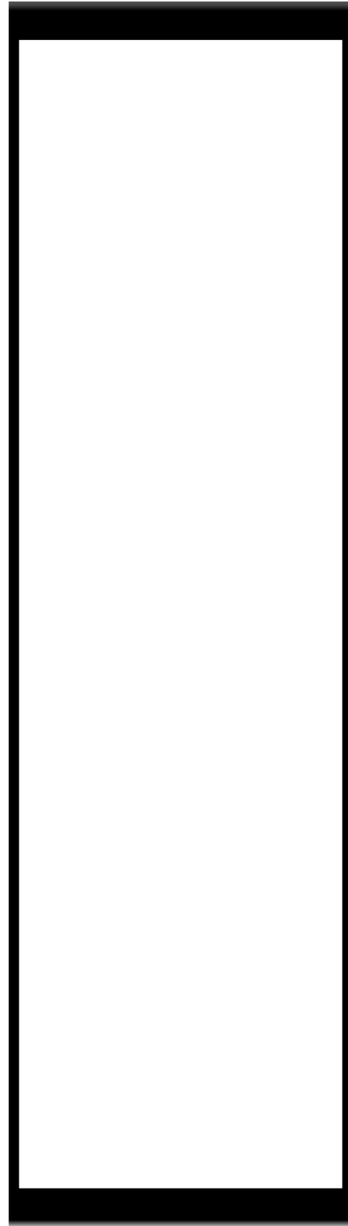
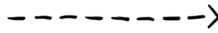
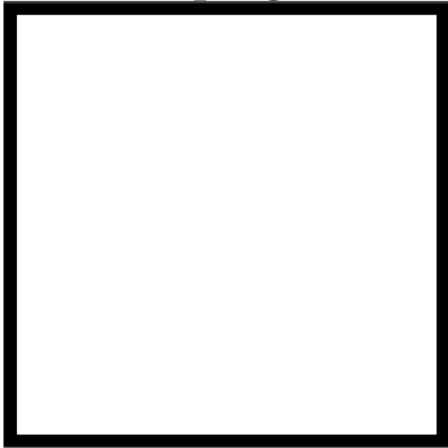
If your past was more positive than negative, make a separate list next to the negative identity box with the expectations that were placed on you because of a positive background. For instance, if your dad thought you were the smartest and hardest-working person around and communicated that to you often, you might end up with some serious pressure to continue to be the smartest and hardest-working. Your positive image isn't really a help as it puts pressure on you to maintain the image, even in the face of new hurts that come along.

Now, take the ways you attempted to fix the feelings of a negative identity in the Attempts to Change box. Again, these were not necessarily bad things, but the motivation behind doing them was to try to get rid of the feelings of the negative identity.

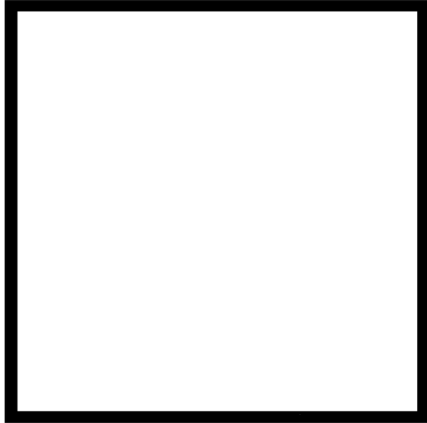
Finally, add your coping mechanisms to the "Coping" box. Do you see how the coping makes you feel the negative identity messages even more? Or adds to them? So, if you withdraw to cope and no one follows you and tries to pull you out, you feel even more alone and as if no one cares about you. If you drink a lot to deal with the pain, now you can add alcoholic or addict to the negative identity messages. If you yell and scream at the people you love, now you are a jerk and a "bad" father/mother/spouse as well.

Identity messages

Coping



Attempts to Change





Now that your pattern is laid out before you, can you see how multiple times in your life, you have been in the repeating cycle of this mess? Have you experienced trying so hard to get out of it and just seeming to make the cycle spin faster? And do you see that the original problem that brought you to this course isn't really the problem? It's a symptom of the deeper problem of living out of an identity that makes you react and deal with things in a way that has created the situation before you.

We have this negative identity following us around, and no one wants to feel that way about themselves. We attempt to change and use coping to try to deal with it, but it doesn't help. The reason we are struggling with this in the first place is that we have deep needs of love and acceptance that are basic to every human. And we start looking for someone to tell us that we are ok from the moment we are born. Of course, everyone around us is human and they all fail in one form or another to help us feel loved and accepted. So, the negative identity develops instead and tells us we are unloved, unworthy, unacceptable and rejected. In trying to fill the voids with people, things, money, power, etc, we are only making ourselves more miserable. You follow the arrows around to discover your flesh pattern, or the default method of dealing with life when you are not coming to Jesus.

Ok, here's the good news! If you know Jesus, you have exchanged your crappy identity for His, which means that everything that is true about Him is now true about you. You aren't this negative identity mess that sits before you on the page!! Please draw a big X through the whole thing to remind yourself that this is not who you are. I know you may feel as if it's true, but it is not. You carry the thing around with you, though, and often choose to use it to try to deal with life because it's something you have been doing your whole life. But it's not your only choice!

There are two options now in doing life. You can try to get acceptance from people and keep feeding that negative identity through the same cycle, or you can realize that you need Jesus and ask Him to be your Source so you can operate out of the identity that is really true about you. Can you imagine the difference in your behavior if you really believed you were loved, accepted and cherished by God? You wouldn't need a person to confirm you were ok. You wouldn't keep running into performance or relationships or whatever else to find acceptance. You could love the unlovable, have patience with the impossible and find faith for the insurmountable. In Jesus's Life, you are all these things and can do all these things! Sit and soak in that for a bit. And if this idea makes you uncomfortable, please move on to the next module with me and don't quit. I want to figure out why this makes you squirm. 😊

Father, thank You for loving me in such an indescribable way, with such a beautiful fierceness. Thank You that I don't have to keep trying to perform to gain love and acceptance from others. Thank you that you make me whole, perfect, loved, treasured, liked and righteous. What an extravagant love!

## Module 6: Where is God?

In the last module when I said that stuff about God, what was your reaction? Did you cringe in fear? Did you roll your eyes? Did you almost give up and throw in the towel on this whole thing? I'm afraid that a lot of us (Christians or not) have some real issues with God and haven't realized it yet. Or have realized it and have not known what to do about it.

First we need to look at what you really believe about God. Mike Wells included a great emotional God concept test in his book [Sidetracked in the Wilderness](#). I have used that to write my own which is below. I want you to walk through the questions, answering each one in the mindset of being in the midst of your worst day, with everything going wrong and all hell breaking loose. What we are at our worst is what we truly are. Hence the need to answer the questions in this frame of mind.

1. When you are in the middle of a really bad day and think about trusting God, what do you feel?
2. What frustrates you about God when all circumstances seem against you?
3. What do you wish God would do in your life?
4. When, if ever, does God surprise you?
5. When, if ever, do you enjoy God?
6. What changes do you think you would need to make in your life to convince you that God loves and accepts you?
7. How do you think God feels about you?

8. What are you afraid God will do to you if you continue as you are today?

9. What do you think God wants from you?

10. When, if ever, do you feel you can depend on God?

Now, in looking at your answers to these questions, what characteristics do they identify in your emotional concept of God? For instance, if you are afraid God will judge you, this portrays a condemning god with impossible standards. If you have never been surprised by God, you might be entertaining a very disconnected god who has no impact in your daily life and remains passive and far away. Or if you think God feels you don't measure up and wants to punish you, your concept may be of a Zeus-like figure who shoots lightning bolts at you from the sky when you mess up.

As you can probably understand, none of these concepts are conducive to a close relationship with God or to trusting Him in any capacity. Why would you want a relationship with someone whose character is so questionable in your emotions? We often act out of what we feel rather than what is true. Ask God to reveal to you what it is you really believe about Him as you go through these questions.

Now that you know how you really feel about God, how do you change that? Not many people really want to believe their emotional concepts of God, but it's difficult to know what to do with this false character that's been formed over many years. The concept, incidentally, is often very close to the description of a mom, dad or authority figure in your life. This is how we learn about God experientially, so it makes sense. The beautiful thing is that it isn't your job to fix this. God is very concerned with truth and He wants you to know Him truly. Your job is to be open to the possibility that the things you believe about Him are not true, and to look for what is true.

I remember when God started working on the concept I had of Him in my emotions, and I could only read the Gospels because the rest of the Bible was too difficult for me right then. Every time Jesus said something about Himself, I wrote it down. And I began to ask Him what it meant in my life. He's the bread of life—what does that mean to me? And I'd ask Him to make that real to me, because my perception of Him was that He was manipulating me with His gifts to get what He wanted out of me. Mike Wells also had me read through 1 Corinthians 13 and look at everything that it said about love. If God is love (1 John 4:8) then everything that's true about love should be true about Him. This list is so encouraging!

*Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.  
1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (The Message)*

Will you take time as God heals this concept of Him in you to soak in His character as dictated by Scripture and ask Him to make that sink from your head to your heart?  
Will you allow Him to teach you about Himself and draw you to know Him as He really is?

Father, thank You for Your lovingkindness, Your long-suffering and Your keeping no account of wrongs. You are so gracious and loving to me, but that often gets smothered by the junk that surrounds me in the world. Please help me to see You and know You truly.

## Module 7: How Do We Deal With Brokenness?

Ok, so now we have established that allowing Christ's life to flow through us will enable us to do something different from the default flesh pattern we developed for coping with stress and pressure. We have discussed God's character and how our emotional concept of Him is probably not the truth. We are beginning to allow Him to bring us into a deeper knowledge of Him in His very relationship-oriented way. So, how does He deal with all the pain of the past if He doesn't fix our flesh? Because He doesn't necessarily dismiss the flesh. He leaves that mess to push us to Him. We have a choice not to pursue it, but it's still there.

But I don't want to live broken all the time, you say. I want all the cracks to be healed up and made new.

Yes, me too. But your kind Father sees a purpose in the cracks, and I think that's why He leaves them. This doesn't mean that healing is irrelevant. One thing I have seen repeated in many people's lives is the bringing out of a hurt similar to one in their past. A woman may realize her husband reminds her of her dad in many ways that tweak her. Or a man might feel rejected and demeaned by his boss in much the same way a former girlfriend made him feel.

I believe sometimes that God reaches into the past and brings a repeat of a situation you survived as a child or young adult, and it isn't intended to be frustrating. I think in that repetition, He is showing you a new way. He is showing you that you don't have to be a slave to this anymore. You can look at your husband and love him, not because he is being very lovable right now but because you have the Love of Jesus flowing through you as a branch on the Vine. You can see your boss with different eyes and not need him to validate your meaning or worth because you are secure in God's hands and He gives you that acceptance. It feels so similar in experience to the thing that happened years ago, but there is a choice to do things differently.

And when you do respond differently, you are free! Your needs for acceptance and love are no longer tied to that person in that situation. God will bring many other difficult people to move you toward Himself, but that one doesn't hold power over you anymore. This is an amazing experience as you are healed from the poison that was injected into you at that point. Your scar may linger, but scars and cracks are the means by which more light can get out of you. When you have these, you see Jesus pouring out of you through those so-called broken places and you are made beautiful in that. (Psalm 31:12, 2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

I think this is how Paul could rejoice in his weaknesses. (2 Corinthians 12:9) His weaknesses held no power over him anymore. They were still present, but not in control. In his weakness, he acknowledged the power of Jesus manifesting in him, so

there was no lack and no end to the possible. What if you were to live life this way? What if you looked at the broken places in your life and saw the potential of Jesus' Life coming out of those? You no longer live in fear of the places you fall short—you celebrate them!

Father, thank You that in the cracks of our lives, You are pouring out all over. Thank You that as you heal us in Your Life, we aren't beholden to any of the people who hurt us, or the mistakes we have made ourselves. Instead, we are bearers of light, and the places that once seemed to be our downfall are now made strong in Your Life.

## Module 8: How Do We Make Choices?

Ok, so how do we do daily life? All this talk about healing and Jesus' life is nice, but how do I wake up in the morning to feed the kids, kiss the spouse, go to work, go about the stressful day? What is the difference in living this way? I want to talk today about practical, rubber-meets-the-road living.

A few years ago, I took my son and daughter to the park to play. My son was about 3 and my daughter wasn't even a year old. I pulled the stroller out of the back of the car to open it up and when I did, a big water gun was dragged out with it and landed squarely on my toe. I (somehow) held back the questionable expressions and just cried something unintelligible, then picked up the water gun and threw it into the back of the car in a rage. Now that I had taught that water gun a lesson, I opened the stroller and proceeded to load the kids into it to walk into the park. My son walked beside me as we made our way through the parking lot, and in all his sweetness looked up at me and asked, "Mom, did you want to say sorry for doing that?" It was like a punch in the gut. I turned to him and said that yes, I did indeed want to say sorry for behaving so badly. He was very satisfied with this and went on.

The lesson of the day was humility for me. I was just called out by my 3-year-old who regularly throws temper tantrums. But he recognized my own tantrum and asked me if I wanted to be humble enough to own it. I am not more spiritual than the next guy and I still throw temper tantrums at 39. But I have a choice! I can ask for a few seconds while my rage is mounting to go to Jesus and ask Him for His patience, love, wisdom, maturity—whatever it is I desperately need in that moment. I also can come in humility and understand that my own self-control or power is pretty useless in the face of my immaturity. Trying harder is not going to help that thing. I can probably make it prettier, but it's only a dressed-up pig—still smells and rolls in its own poop.

So, when the kids are driving you crazy, when your spouse forgets to do a chore you requested, when the carpool is late, when the boss is a jerk, when a girl at work gets the promotion you wanted, when you have a flat tire, when you spill your coffee all over yourself—you have a choice! You can choose to go to Jesus in humility and ask Him to be whatever you need in that moment. Or you can go about it in your usual fashion and hurt people or throw tantrums.

I sometimes will pray for my few seconds to recognize where I am, then in that few seconds scream at God in my head about how I need something and don't even know what it is. But you know what? I can then bend down and really see my kids with His patience. And I can forgive my spouse's forgetfulness with His forgiveness. And I can stand up to my boss in His boldness. And I can recognize my worth in spite of a promotion that went to someone else in His love (and begin to see myself

through His eyes). And I can deal with the flat tire and spilled coffee with a laugh because I have nothing to prove and everything comes from God. This is not my natural, guys! This is supernatural power at work in the very mundane details of life.

And I think often we fail to see Christ's life as working out miracles like loving your enemy (which is totally impossible in our own love) and being kind to those who hurt you (which is ridiculous unless you have strength more than your own) and standing up in boldness (not because you are strong but because He is your confidence and boldness). These are all miraculous deeds, and utterly impossible in our own strength. (Luke 6:27-36, Matthew 5:43-48, Hebrews 4:16)

What things in your life are driving you crazy right now? Will you join me and pray for the few seconds to ask Jesus for His Life to be spilling out of you through all those cracks of brokenness? What a difference it makes to spill out love when the expectation is anger or bitterness.

Father, thank You that You provide the choice of Your Life in us. We are so grateful for the supernatural that makes itself visible in the natural everyday, and even more so that you have put that supernatural in our own hearts to come spilling out to those around us. In our humility, please let us look to you, asking you to be all we need for this day.



## Module 9: Joy in Thanksgiving?

My mentor and friend Mike Wells used to say “Whatever gets your focus gets you.” If we are obsessing on all the things we believe have gone wrong in our lives, we aren’t focused on the right thing. If we focus on all the potential worst-case scenarios, the mistakes we have made, the people who have wronged us—all of this will leave our focus in the wrong place. So, what do we do instead?

I believe if we are to quit obsessing on these things, we have to have something else to set our mind on. Colossians 3:1-2 says “Set your mind on the things above.” That seems like a choice, a physically placing of your mind on something that will pull you up instead of drag you down.

Philippians 4:4-8 says “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

The message is clear—where your mind goes determines whether or not you experience peace.

Sometimes I talk about the “concentration camp perspective shift.” If you were stuck in a concentration camp with no way to change your circumstances, what would you do? There are many who made it through one of the worst environments on earth and came out not just alive but really living. It didn’t make them bitter or resentful. I always wonder how you get through a situation like that. I remember reading in Corrie Ten Boom’s *The Hiding Place* about her and her sister sitting in their women’s cell and Corrie being so frustrated at the fleas. Her sister reminded her that the fleas were the reason the guards didn’t come into their quarters, which allowed them to sing, have Bible study and hide things they didn’t want found by the guards. Corrie realized she could be thankful for the fleas, even as they were biting her.

An attitude of thanksgiving and looking for the good gifts from God is vital to surviving a bad situation. Think about how many times in the Bible the terms “praise Him” or “give thanks” are used. It is obviously an important concept to God. It reminds us that circumstances don’t define the character of God, and there is always something you can find to be thankful for. Seriously, if those ladies in the midst of a concentration camp could do it, so can you and I.

If you are setting your mind on the good gifts God has given in this moment, it is harder to be distracted by all the other things clamoring for your focus. It might be a very small praise, but the very act of giving thanks in the midst of hard things is a choice of faith. It means that I believe God is who He says He is even when all the things around me tell me it isn't true. I believe God helps me to define the circumstances rather than letting the circumstances tell me about God.

What can you be thankful for right now? Maybe it's a loyal friend, a beautiful sunset, a warm cup of coffee, a sweet moment with your child, a breakthrough with your spouse, a random flower popping up out of a sidewalk crack. These little details bring beauty to an otherwise dreary day, and they are Jesus saying I love you over and over. Will you receive those as a love letter?

Make a list of the gifts God has brought today. Even if it's a small list, start thanking Him for each one. As you begin to train your brain to see these things, it will be easier to find them, even on dark days. When you are tempted to put your focus on the negative, the worst-case scenarios and the worries, remind yourself of these things and in this way, bring your focus back to Jesus.

Father, thank You for surrounding me with Your precious gifts of love for me. Thank You that even in the midst of a hard season, you still provide these and I need only look. Remind me when I get stuck in the anxiety and worry of a moment that You are not defined by circumstances, no matter how bleak they look. You are good, You love me and You have a good and loving plan for my life through which I will know You in a deeper way.

Thank you for joining me in this study as we attempt to personalize the message of the Gospel for your everyday life. I pray you have grown in your relationship with Jesus, the Lover of your soul.