

Beauty in the Battle

*The creative way of
fostering authenticity
& healing among teams*

Katie LaRavia
*With Group & Individual
Activities By Jessica Winniford*

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This handbook is available online for download free of charge for ease of
printing out individual activities in a group setting
<https://tinyurl.com/y83npjmt>

I have received permission to use the quotes and concepts in this handbook and for it to
be printed and used free of charge. If you have any questions or confusion about any of
the exercises, please reach out to me. I would also love to hear how they have impacted
you!

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Acknowledgments—Katie LaRavia

My overseas community has been the ultimate guinea pig for almost everything written in this handbook. For that, I apologize, and for that, I am truly grateful. You have trusted me with your stories and invited me to share in your pain. You have allowed me to speak into your lives, and you have taken leaps of courage to speak out loud your shame when everything inside you screamed that it would be a terrible idea. You have told me things that you have never shared with anyone else. You have cried on my couch, on my futon, on my bed, on my balcony, in my kitchen, in my guest room, and in the Starbucks down the road. You have both cussed me out and called me your best friend. You have listened graciously when I have told you things that were extremely difficult to hear. You have trusted and valued my counsel so much that you would accompany my children and me to a store and be interrupted 37 times just to hear it. You have chosen to feel hard things because there was a part of you that believed me when I told you it would be better that way. You have used my tools and tactics against me, checking assumptions with me and telling me something isn't in my circle. You have received my artistic creations with non-judgment and have blessed me you're your own. You have trusted me and have believed me to be a safe person and I feel incredibly honored and humbled by that.

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A Note About The Title & Cover

This past fall, my family took our first sabbatical. We have lived overseas for 10 years, but have been in full time work of this nature for 15 years. I was a little resistant to the idea, convinced that I didn't need it and terrified that I would lose my ever-loving mind if I were to be in the US for that long. (No offense to the US, it's just not my home anymore). My friend Magan sent me a book to read while I was there, about a woman who was very resistant to *her* sabbatical (no hidden messages there, I'm sure). Here is a quote from the book, *Sensible Shoes*, by Sharon Garlough Brown:

“Do you know why leaves change color in autumn?” Hannah shook her head.
‘...During the winter, there isn't enough water or light for producing food, so the trees take a rest. As they do that, the green chlorophyll disappears from the leaves, revealing bits of yellow and orange that have been there all along. We just can't see those colors in the summer because they're covered up by the green.... Isn't it interesting how bright and beautiful colors emerge only when productivity shuts down?’¹

I was truly dumbfounded when I read this. Because it was *true*. I was just a mere 3 weeks into the sabbatical when I read it, and I had already seen the beginnings of beautiful things emerging because my productivity had shut down.

I started to think about how I could watercolor this leaf, with the bleeding of the green into the orange and red and yellow, and how it would be this push and pull of colors resisting each other. Messy but beautiful, submitting and resisting all at once. Then I thought about how life is like that: this push and pull against what God wants for us, His way against our way, sometimes with us submitting and sometimes resisting. It's like a battle, a fight for our lives. *But there is beauty in the fight*. (I also proceeded to write a rap about it over the next 7 minutes, but that is neither here nor there...) Luckily for all of your eyeballs out there, you don't see *my* watercolor leaf on the cover of this handbook but you see the one Jess made.

Our emotional health is the same way, often feeling like a battle that we will never win. We are often either trapped in feeling emotions that we don't want or don't know what to do with, or we feel nothing. Ann Voskamp wrote, “*Emotions demand to be felt. Otherwise they demand you feel nothing at all.*” The journey that this handbook will lead you on will often make you feel like you are in a fight. But keep at it, because there is beauty in the fight.

¹ Brown, Sharon Garlough. *Sensible Shoes: A Spiritual Journey*. InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Foreword

“Why am I here? I didn't even want to come to this in the first place. Am I supposed to just whine about my feelings? That ain't me. Ugh. Here she comes, I guess we will see.” Those were my first thoughts as I sat in Starbucks before doing a counseling session with Katie. She was ordering our drinks, a caramel macchiato with 8 extra pumps of sugar for her and an Americano for me because I was not comfortable enough yet as a “coffee expert” to admit how delicious a caramel macchiato really is. So there I was wondering how I ended up agreeing to do this while drinking a crappy Americano.

Small talk here and there and then some “counseling wizardry” as some would say and it hits me. I remember something that I don't talk about. I never have. I can't share it. I've kept it to myself my whole life and I've been “fine”, so I'm good. She asks again, “What's another time in your life you felt this way?” And the words began to come out of my mouth. One part of me is screaming, “No! Don't say it! You're fine. You've gotten through this without ever telling anyone. You're good. It is what it is.” But another part of me, the better and authentic part of me, wants this. I want to be free. I want to be heard. I don't want to be alone anymore. I proceed to share about an abuse that happened to a member of my family. How I've never told anyone and how I've had to pretend like it never happened because my family has never spoken about it. For over 12 years we have never spoken about it. The unspoken rule was that it's fine and it didn't seem to have happened as long as we don't talk about it. But it did happen. I was about 10 years old and I remember and have never forgotten. I have lived with guilt because as the only man in my family, maybe I should've done something. I lived with that. No one could ever speak truth into that because no one ever knew.

That was the start, a timely one at that, of a friendship of truth, vulnerability, and “realness” as I've come to call it with Katie. We still look back at that moment as the foundation for it all. The Lord was right on time, as He usually is, in the start of my personal path to pursuing an authentic and vulnerable me. Neither of us knew that 3 months from that day I would begin one of the most difficult trials of my life. One that would move me away from my home overseas to start a new career in America, end an engagement, and then move back to overseas into a brand new city to start a new church. The truth is that hurt happens and will continue to happen. We cannot avoid it. The only thing we get to do is to decide how to respond to it. Brené Brown says it best in *Rising Strong* when she says, “*When we deny our stories and disengage from tough emotions, they don't go away; instead, they own us, they define us. Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending—to rise strong, recognize our story, and rumble with the truth until we get to a place where we*

think, Yes. This is what happened. This is my truth. And I will choose how this story ends.”² I didn’t get to choose what happened to my family and me, but I did have the choice to write my own ending to that story. Now I accept my past as part of my journey and I am choosing to write my own ending.

The methods in this handbook are real, powerful, and life changing *if*, and a *big if*, you allow them to be. I was hesitant as you may be. How is drawing or painting or “arting” (as I like to call it) supposed to fix my issues?! Or how is talking about my issues supposed to change anything? Things change when you do something about it, not by complaining, whining, or simply talking about it. You have to lace up your boots and do something about it. Right? Yes and no. That is halfway true. You do have to fight but how can you fight if you don’t even know what you should be fighting or without knowing that you need to fight?! So yes I’ve done it all. I’ve written the SFD. I’ve “arted”. I’ve probably done every exercise in this book and probably had more hesitancy than you can imagine. I just didn’t buy how it could work, yet now here I am writing the foreword as an advocate for them. They have been tools, along with my community, that the Lord has used to help make me into the man I am today; still a broken one with struggles, but one that now has the right tools to know how to fight for my emotional, mental, and spiritual health. I’m a better Roger. It’s not that I’ve become someone now who I never was, but I have become more of the Roger God created me to be.

Last but not least, this book is more than just great tools; it is an invitation to live an authentic life amongst the people around you. You don’t do it alone. I believe in that, and it reflects the heart of its writer, Katie LaRavia. Growing up in New Orleans one of the highest honors or statuses one could receive was to be known as “real”. It was attributed to someone who was known for being honest, genuine, transparent, loyal, and who in love is willing to do whatever it costs for the truth and for those whom he or she loves. Katie LaRavia is a real one. This book isn’t just theories to her, these methods have all been part of her journey and consequently of the journey of our community. I have had the blessing to be part of our community for about two years, and the growth I have seen in myself and others is unmatched to any other place or season I have been in. It is no coincidence that as we have grown in our prioritization of emotional health, with Katie as our pace setter, we have also grown in other areas of our lives. As believers, we, more than anyone else, should know that real change happens from the inside out. I pray and hope that you will be courageous to risk overcoming whatever fears this may bring. I pray that this book will help you in your journey to becoming the real you, the one God created you to be.

Roger Osorio

² Brown, Brené, *Rising Strong*, First edition. New York: Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House, 2015.

Introduction

My whole life, people have told me that I am a bold and extreme person. I'm not going to try to make an argument for myself here about that. Instead, I'll just make a bold statement: I can't imagine a team functioning in a healthy way without tools like the ones in this handbook. I honestly don't even want to see one attempt to try, which is why I decided to put all this together.

I have lived overseas with a team since February 2009. Over the years, that team has seen some drastic changes. It started as my husband and myself, and two single guys straight out of college. It has seen people date and get married. It has seen families started through the birth of children, and it has also seen the heartache of miscarriage and infertility. It has said goodbyes to people that you can't imagine doing life overseas without. It has seen sickness, death of family members, depression, anger, anxiety, and addiction. But it has also seen *healing*. Our team now consists of 4 teams, living in 3 different cities, totaling 44 people. Each team in each city has its different gift sets, quirks, strengths and weaknesses. Each team has somehow been made healthier because of the exercises in this handbook.

Somewhere along the way, probably about 1 year into this life, I saw a need: Our people were hurting. And everyone knows that "hurt people hurt people". Hurt people hurt *teams*. So my new job responsibility and my new passion was born. I started reading whatever I could get my hands on that would help our people. I started attending conferences, seminars, and trainings that would train me in the specific areas that I felt our team was struggling in. I met with a mentor to talk about specific issues people on our team were wrestling with so I could learn how best to help them. I started using everything that I was learning with our team, almost immediately, and started to see people change. These tools were actually helping people. I started to see individuals experience freedom that I could have only hoped and prayed for them. I started to see them using the tools with each other, and with the people they were interacting with on a weekly basis. Slowly but surely, I started to see our team culture change. I saw a team of people who were each fighting for his and her own emotional and spiritual health, and I saw that create an emotionally and spiritually healthy team.

What you will find in this handbook are tools, exercises, tidbits, thoughts, quotes, general ramblings and stories. The vast majority of them I did not come up with; people much wiser and more experienced than me created them and graciously shared them with the world. I had the desire to put them all together along with our team's experiences because it has taken me 10 years of literally going all over the place for me to learn what I have learned and to be able to use it strategically and practically with others. And, for the love, if I could spare that journey for other teams

(though fun, it has been), and they could jumpstart their team health because all the tools are in one place, then the work that I've put into this handbook will be well worth it.

You can use these tools in a variety of different ways: on your own as an individual, or with a friend. They could also be a weekly team activity to foster authenticity in your group, or perhaps something you do on a monthly basis. You will also find short testimonies from people in our community who have used and been impacted by some of the tools. I wanted to include these so that you could see very specifically how these tools can work, and that they are effective. Those in my community have been brave for trying them out, and I hope that you too can be brave and try them for yourself.



Chapter 1

Healthy Communication With Others

Introduction

*“Communication leads to community, that is to understanding,
intimacy, and mutual valuing.”*

Rollo May

They say (to be honest, I’m not sure who “they” is, but whenever “they” speak, people seem to pay attention) that the number one reason people who were living overseas return home is because of team conflict. I can see that. There is nothing worse than feeling like you have to walk on eggshells around a teammate. Actually, there is something worse. Feeling like your teammate just flat out doesn’t like you would probably be worse. Conflict is hard. I get it. *They* say that 95% of the people in the world are conflict avoiders. Chances are, 95% of your team members are conflict avoiders. What does that mean? That means 95% of your team is walking around either with a chip on their shoulder or acting as if everything is okay when it’s not.

I personally love conflict (I clearly fall in that 5%). But it’s not really that I love the actual *conflict*; I love *resolution*. I love the reconciliation. So I encourage everyone to put on your big kid pants and just try this stuff. Yes, I know, most of it feels unnatural and awkward because you have spent your whole life trying to *avoid* stuff like this. So how about this: if you are having a conflict with someone on your team, and you try ALL of these exercises, and NONE of them work, call me. As you are asking, “Is it worth it?” and “Can’t I just get over it?”, I want you to consider this: Where will you be as a person, 1 year, 10 years from now, if you continue to avoid conflicts and stuff your disappointments and hurts?

“Talking successfully about feelings requires you to be scrupulous about taking the judgments, attributions, and statements of blame out of what you are saying, and putting the statement of feeling in. It is crucial to look at the actual words you are using to see whether those words really convey what you want them to.”

Douglas Stone

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

I’m someone who, as I have already said, loves conflict, and I am pretty quick on my feet during an argument. I still use this tool. I have even used it in helping me sort out my feelings with my husband of 11 years because it is that effective. It provides a systematic approach that helps people to be honest and transparent as they address problems or conflicts with another person. What I love is that it is designed to first get you to figure out how you feel about a situation; believe it or not, some people can’t even do that. Then it helps you to realize why it is that you care, and the end result is that it leaves you with a nicely packaged statement for the other person. And that nicely packaged statement really does leave them believing that you have their best interest in mind. It really opens the door for a healthy conversation, which is why it is the first exercise, because it is the *door opener*.

So the idea is that you start from the beginning, and you *write down your answers*. I know, there are some speed racers out there who are going to try to skip that step, (I can spot you because I *am* you) but it’s not going to work for you this time. You have to write down your answers so that you end up with the nicely packaged statement I mentioned. Also, writing slows down the way your brain processes and makes you have complete thoughts. Writing is actually very effective in all of these tools because it helps you see where you really are in a situation. After you go through all the steps, go back and read what you have written. You can take time right then and there if you are emotionally able to edit out or reword some statements. Or you can put it aside and come back to it the next day. Either way, I highly recommend putting it aside until the next day before you do anything with it. I am constantly amazed at how our perceptions and feelings about a situation change overnight. It helps give you some distance from the issue and then you can come back to it with fresh eyes the next day. Also, I have yet to hear of someone regretting waiting a day to communicate something important to someone, but I often hear people regretting *not* waiting. When we *don’t* wait, we sometimes end up saying something out of anger or communicate in a way that cannot be received well because we are allowing our emotions to take over. After you come back to it, edit it again, and put it into one nice paragraph. You will see that the sentences will actually

flow into each other quite well. Then, you read your statement to the person you are having the issue with.

“But can’t I send it to them in an email?”, someone is thinking right now. Face to face is always the best. There is no tone in an email, and no facial expressions. Try as hard as you can to do face to face. If and only if you can’t, email can be an option.

Preparing for a Hard Conversation in Action

Testimony from Clint

“When I first looked at this, I was hesitant to allow myself to fully walk through the steps. However, as I sat down and began to walk through the whole exercise, I found myself being able to put to words what I was actually feeling. It helped me process my feelings and hurts in an appropriate order and way so that when I had to sit down and resolve the conflict, I was more prepared and capable to help my friend understand where I was coming from. Not only that, but then it gave me a new insight to also listen and hear from my friend’s perspective as well. It was incredibly helpful for me and I hope to pass this on as I lead others through conflict.”

Preparing for a Hard Conversation

Group & Individual Activity

Individual Activity

Materials:

Pen and paper to write down your answers

Suggested Time:

15-30 minutes plus a night to let your thoughts and feelings have the opportunity to be filtered by space and time.

Procedure:

Start at the beginning, think about your answers and *write it down*. Be sure to stick to one issue. If you try to address every problem you have with the person at once, they will end up feeling attacked and may shut down. This is not a rapid-fire word vomit attack. Doing one topic at a time will also help you keep your thoughts and feelings clear and sorted. Afterward, read through it again and make any changes. Wait a night, read it again and make changes. You can then contact the person and tell them there is something you would like to talk with them about and ask them when they will have about 30 minutes free to meet face to face. You then approach the other person and read your answers as one paragraph. Yes, you are welcome to read directly from your paper. You can explain to the person that you are reading because you want to make sure you are clear and not leaving out anything important.

- The situation that is on my mind right now is...
- I am worried about talking about this because...
- The reason I am involved in this is because...
- A need I have in this situation is...
- I feel...
- My feelings show me that I...
- This situation is important to me because...
- I am willing to...
- I am not willing to...
- I could make the situation better by...
- I really want you to know that...
- My sharing this with you will be helpful because...
- For our relationship in the future, I hope that...

Goal:

To help you discover what is going on inside you and to give you a format to communicate that clearly with the other person.

Group Activity Option

Materials :

Pen and paper to write down your answers

Suggested Time:

1 hour (30 minutes for Individual Process and 30 minutes to share and hear feedback)

Procedure:

Start at the beginning, think about your answers and *write it down*. Be sure to stick to one issue. This is not a rapid-fire word vomit attack. Afterward, read through it again, make any changes. Read through your answers with a partner (make sure the partner does not know the person involved in the situation, or that specifics are hidden. It is important that this does not become a gossip session about anyone. Anything you say should be vague enough that the person hearing really has no idea who it is that you are talking about.) As the listener, take notes on what is good, and how it could benefit by changing some words around. Affirm the person who shared, give suggestions, then switch roles. Wait a night, read it again and make changes, then approach the other person face to face if possible, reading your answers as one paragraph.

- The situation that is on my mind right now is...
- I am worried about talking about this because...
- The reason I am involved in this is because...
- A need I have in this situation is...
- I feel...
- My feelings show me that I...
- This situation is important to me because...
- I am willing to...
- I am not willing to...
- I could make the situation better by...
- I really want you to know that...
- My sharing this with you will be helpful because...
- For our relationship in the future, I hope that...

Goals :

To help you discover what is going on inside you and to give you a format to communicate that clearly with the other person. To allow an opportunity to be honest with a struggle in your life with a teammate and to hear constructive criticism and feedback from them.

“Remind yourself that if you think you already understand how someone feels or what they are trying to say, it is a delusion. Remember a time when you were sure you were right and then discovered one little fact that changed everything. There is always more to learn.”

Douglas Stone

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most

How often do you *think you know* what another person is thinking about you? How often do you *think you know* why another person did something they did, or said something they said? The reality is, when we *think we know* and then we start to respond accordingly, we are assigning motives to the other person that **might be wrong**. Yes, I said it. There is possibility that you might be wrong. That alone should be enough to motivate us to do something differently. We don’t want to be making decisions and formulating opinions and experiencing feelings based on things that could be wrong.

This is now a phrase that is thrown around with regularity in our community. You will often hear someone say, “Can I check an assumption with you?”. People actually get a little bit excited when someone asks them. You can see their face light up with anticipation, and see them thinking, “Ooh, I wonder what it’s going to be this time!?”. Personally, I have used it often and it has been used by others on me.

One time, I heard that a girl on our team, Kate, was having a game night at her apartment, and come to find out, we were not invited. My feelings were hurt, I felt left out, and immediately started assigning motives that would explain why Kate would leave us out. Probably because my husband is too competitive. Or probably because no one wants to hang out with our kids. The list of reasons why went on and on in my head. I found that over the course of the next 2 days, I was really upset about this, and it was causing me to act differently around Kate. Finally, I sucked it up and asked her if I could check an assumption with her. This is how our conversation went:

Me: “Can I check an assumption with you?”

Kate: “Sure.”

Me: “Is the reason that you didn’t invite us to the game night at your house because you think John is too competitive and because you wanted an adult night without my kids hanging around?”

Kate: “What game night? I’m not having a game night at my apartment, Nikolai invited people over to a game night at Andrea’s apartment. I’m not even going. He said he wanted to hang out with people he hadn’t gotten to spend much time with.”

I can't even make this stuff up. The truth of the matter is, **I was wrong**. Not only was I wrong, but my wrong story was causing me to act differently around Kate and to feel differently toward her. Since Nikolai, who is a teammate from another city, was staying at our house, I couldn't have cared less that *he* didn't invite us to the game night.

The other example is of someone checking an assumption about me. A friend of mine, Tonni, taught a group of us an art lesson at a staff retreat we had last year. I was struggling through the lesson, because abstract painting isn't my thing apparently, and I got into a fight with my paintbrush. She saw my irritation, and then I decided I was over it and went on to go do something else. About 15 minutes later, she approaches my friend Andrea and me.

Tonni: "Can I check an assumption with y'all?"

Us: "Of course!"

Tonni: "I just came out of the bathroom to see you both whispering, and as soon as I saw you, you quickly stopped. Were y'all talking about how bad the art lesson was, and how I didn't do a good job teaching it?"

Us: "Oh my goodness no. We were absolutely not talking about that, and we thought you did a great job."

Had Tonni not checked her assumption with us, she would have gone on thinking that we were not only disappointed in her class, but also gossiping about it. Gross. I am *sure* that would have changed the way she felt toward us and how she felt about herself. I am so glad that she checked. It felt really awful to hear that someone was assuming that I was thinking something about them that wasn't true. I don't want to do that to other people.

These are just *two* of my personal examples and I have so many more. Checking assumptions changes everything. It actually invites facts into situations and reduces so many conflicts. And it is so easy to do, it is literally going to blow your mind.

Checking Assumptions

Individual Activity to be done with a specific person

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time:

30 seconds - 5 minutes, depending on the person's answer

Procedure:

Follow these steps:

1. Reflect on something you suspect the other person thinks or feels but hasn't told you.
2. Ask: "Can I check an assumption I am making about you?"
3. Say: "I assume you are thinking...(fill in the blank). Am I right?"
4. Give the other person an opportunity to respond.

Goals:

To stop believing lies about a person in your head. To confirm thoughts or ideas that you have about a person. To live in relationships with an accurate reality. To eliminate unnecessary conflicts.

Assumptions

Group Activity

Materials:

No materials needed

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Explain that this activity will involve listening and responding. Pick an animal (cow, goat, cat, dog, etc). This activity starts with one person making a noise that the animal would make and each person in the room will need to describe the animal based on the animal call made. What does this animal look like? What's his disposition in life? Is he hungry, angry, black, white, just had a baby? After everyone has made their guess, the person who made the animal call will share what they were thinking when they made their animal call. Everyone in the room will have an opportunity to do the same for the same type of animal. If you don't have a lot of people, feel free to do several different animals.

Example:

Person 1: Mooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

Person 2: Hmm, I think this is a happy cow... maybe he just had an amazing bite of grass and is celebrating this yummy accomplishment of finding this beautiful grassy field.

Person 3: I think this cow is agitated.... He's mad that other cows are coming into his field and stealing his grass.

Person 4: I think this cow is just being a cow and making cow noises.... He's probably black and white....he's probably just a boring old cow.

Person 1: I was thinking maybe this cow was calling out to his spouse across the field and wanting her to know he found some amazing grass over here.

Goals // Discussion :

This activity is great for helping people relax, enjoy community and learn the importance of checking assumptions and communicating clearly. Maybe every person in the room guessed something different for one person's animal call -- this can be used to illustrate how easy it is for one word, or even sound, to be taken a million different ways. What's the best way to find out what that person meant by what they said? Not through gossip or asking around but going directly to the source and finding out. And the communicator can be aware that it's best to be clear in what they say, especially in difficult conversations.

“If I could give men and women in relationships and leaders and parents one hack, I would give them, ‘the story I’m making up.’ Basically, you’re telling the other person your reading of the situation — and simultaneously admitting that you know it can’t be 100% accurate.”
Brené Brown

Brené Brown, leading author, speaker and researcher on shame and vulnerability, says that we are wired to create a story in our heads. In her book, Rising Strong, she writes,

“In the absence of data, we will always make up stories. In fact, the need to make up a story, especially when we are hurt, is part of our most primitive survival wiring... Our default is often to come up with a story that makes sense, feels familiar, and offers us insight into how best to self-protect.”³

What does this mean for us? I know that for me, it means that if I’m not really careful, I can get myself into big trouble. This tool is very similar to the checking assumptions tool. It’s honest without being accusatory. It acknowledges that there is a divide between what is happening and what we are feeling and gives us a clear way of sharing that with someone. And it’s only five words. “The story I’m making up...” It can’t get easier than this.

³ Brown, Brené, *Rising Strong*, First edition. New York: Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House, 2015.

The Story I'm Making Up in Action

Testimony from John

“I was doing this before I ever had the vocabulary to call it “the story I am making up”. I am still amazed every time I do this at how quickly my stories get out of control. My first reaction is toward the dramatic by assuming the other party is out to get me. I create a story that lacks facts and generosity. That is when I usually awake to the craziness of this direction and seek to be more generous in my story toward the other party. But really my heart will be unable to move forward until I contact the other party and get the rest of the story. This happened just the other day. My wife relayed a heated conversation two people had about something I may or may not have said to a third party. I could tell she regretted telling me the moment it came out of her mouth. I pretended I was not bothered by the situation in the moment, but my mind immediately started to create a story where motives and blame were assigned to the different people. After a few more minutes of flooding with this created narrative, I began confessing to the Lord my anxiety over the situation and releasing my need to look good in this story. Next, I proceeded to call my wife to share the story I was making up. Just the process of sharing was therapeutic and calming. She also reminded me that the other parties involved needed to be generous with me. I recommend using this tool in order to stem the crazy cycle of working out a story in your life that is potentially devoid of crucial facts.”

The Story I'm Making Up...

Individual Activity: to be done with a specific person

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time:

30 seconds - 5 minutes, depending on the person's answer

Procedure :

Try this phrase in your own relationships. When you find that you're having a line of thoughts that may or may not be true and you want to confront this in an unaggressive way, do the following:

1. Take a deep breath and find 10 seconds of kindness.
2. Say: "The story I'm making up..." and finish with a worry or a fear.
3. Then, say nothing. Wait for the person to respond. And have a (hopefully productive) dialogue.

Goals :

To have a correct narrative of what is really happening. To be honest about our feelings with someone else in a non-confrontational way that invites them into healthy dialogue.

“Stop walking through the world looking for confirmation that you don’t belong. You will always find it because you’ve made that your mission. Stop scouring people’s faces for evidence that you’re not enough. You will always find it because you’ve made that your goal. True belonging and self-worth are not goods; we don’t negotiate their value with the world. The truth about who we are lives in our hearts. Our call to courage is to protect our wild heart against constant evaluation, especially our own. No one belongs here more than you.”

Brené Brown
Braving the Wilderness⁴

The idea of generosity is really as simple as it sounds. Instead of being generous (giving above and beyond) with an *item*, we are being generous in our *thoughts* toward someone and the story we are making up about them. Our normal mode of operating is to be stingy with this. We think to ourselves, “She didn’t want to come over to my house to hang out with me because she actually just tolerates me.” Being generous would instead think, “She has been really swamped this week and extra stressed. I bet her coming over would have just been too much for her at this time.” It totally changes the narrative. It changes our view of the situation and our opinion about the other person. It stops assuming the worst in other people. Why do we like to play the victim card so much, believing that other people are out to get us/hurt us/use us? Generosity says ENOUGH ALREADY. Instead of telling myself, “Unbelievable. He knew I wanted him to take the trash out before he left, but all he cares about is himself. He never helps around the house,” generosity allows me to instead say, “Oh man, he forgot to take out the trash. He must be really upset about that phone call he had earlier; it’s caused him to be so distracted this morning. I hope he’s okay.” Generosity actually causes you to dig down deep and find ten seconds of kindness and pull it out for someone else. Try it out. It can be a total game changer, and it will literally transform your relationships with other people for the better.

⁴ Brown, Brené, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*. 2017.

Generosity in Action

Testimony from Nikolai

“I am continuously reminded about my pride, lack of patience, and failure to extend generous assumptions when I message someone, and they don't respond quickly or how I would desire. Usually, if I'm in an emotional state, then I tend to misread any communication. Last year I reached out to a friend asking for their blessing regarding my future, which I would consider very important to me. Upon reading their honest feelings about how they couldn't currently process my leaving, I chose to believe that it was an impersonal response. This led me to believe deeper lies, which caused me to lash out in defense. A friend not involved in the situation was able to point out the obvious truth, that the person wasn't ready to process. It didn't mean I was unloved or not important, but that I was important enough for them not to give a thoughtless answer. If I had only taken the time to put myself in their shoes and be more generous in my thoughts toward them, it would have caused us both less heartache.”

Generosity

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Have participants get comfortable: suggest they may lay down, change chairs, lean back, whatever they have to do to get comfortable. In a slow and soothing voice, suggest the group to close their eyes and slowly breathe in and out. Ask them to focus their attention on their breath, slowly filling their lungs and then emptying them out. Have participants focus on their breathing for several minutes, reminding them if they become distracted to gently, with non-judgment, draw their attention back to their breathing. (Continue for about 5 minutes).

After about 5 minutes, ask participants to imagine their breath is embracing them. Suggest that they are being “surrounded by peace, tranquility, and love.” Ask them to “breathe in calmness, acceptance, and affirmation and breathe out non-judgment, peace and love.” Ask participants to “imagine being embraced by someone they care about in a moment when they felt like they didn’t deserve it.” Allow 5-10 minutes for this.

After this, ask participants to draw or write about how it felt to be embraced in that moment. Allow 5-10 minutes.

Give an opportunity for people in the group to share what they experienced.

Goals // Discussion:

For people to have a focused time of stillness and meditation, which calms and quiets the soul and mind. For people to be able to have a personal experience with what it feels like to have someone offer generosity to them. For people to have an opportunity to reflect upon this experience through art and to practice vulnerability and honesty by sharing with others.

"Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Read the following statements and consider if they sound familiar to you.

- “Well, I *would* talk to her about this problem, but I know how she is going to respond. There’s no point.”
- “I’m probably just over reacting. This is my issue to deal with, I don’t need to bring this up to him.”
- “I would say something, but it’s just going to make our relationship awkward. I’d rather just deal with it the way it is right now.”
- “I have to do something to make this person change. If I don’t do it, no one else will.”

If any of these are things that you have found yourself saying before, then you have struggled with circles of responsibility. Circles of responsibility are all about taking and releasing ownership in a situation. They are about avoiding the common pitfalls of blame taking and blame shifting that so many of us often fall into.

When I first moved overseas 10 years ago, I met an older couple who had already been here for 8 years. In their time, they saw that people and teams needed to be better equipped for what they called *people helping*. They saw that people were floundering, and that they simply just did not have the tools that they needed to have healthy relationships (Sound familiar? This chick was my kindred spirit, I’m telling you). They taught a 3-month lay counseling class that I took, which is when I first learned about circles of responsibility. They have become so ingrained in our team that you will often hear people say, “Ain’t my circle, bro” or “Are you sure that is in your circle? Maybe you could step back and reconsider your role in this.” I personally love them because I find them to be a great launching pad to determine whether or not you even need to address a conflict or a concern with someone. For me personally, it keeps me from playing the Holy Spirit in people’s lives (Yes, I sometimes like to take God’s responsibility. Yes, I know that is unwise. Yes, I hear it from my husband almost constantly, as he loves to point out that he has not one, but *two* Holy Spirits in his life). The idea is that you write down in each circle the person’s responsibilities in the situation. Note that it really is pretty simple when you think about it. So, try them out and see if they change your involvement in things.

Circles of Responsibility in Action

Testimony from John

“This is far and away one of the most practical tools I have learned. My wife and I have the privilege to do pre-marriage counseling with numerous couples throughout our years of ministry. We always use this exercise to give a framework for processing conflict and entering into crucial conversations. I recently used the tool while on an overseas flight. A passenger that I met a few minutes earlier on the flight was detailing the difficulty he was having with his ex-wife and how this was affecting their children. You might be wondering why this stranger was sharing such intimate details with me. Honestly, I think it was because I was asking questions and then sitting with a willingness to listen to his story. After a few minutes of listening, I immediately drew out the circles of responsibility diagram for him. We discussed the need to properly own his part of the responsibility and to have a conversation with his ex-wife about her circle. The rest he would need to entrust into the Lord’s capable hands. Whether thinking through your relationship with your first family or a recent fight with your roommate or a difficult work conversation, I encourage you to utilize the circles of responsibility.”

Circles of Responsibility

Individual Activity

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

5-10 minutes

Procedure:

Draw out the 3 circles of responsibility onto a piece of paper. Inside one circle write “ME,” inside the second write “THEM,” and inside the third write “GOD.” Take a few minutes to reflect on the situation that is bothering you. Consider the following questions as you do that:

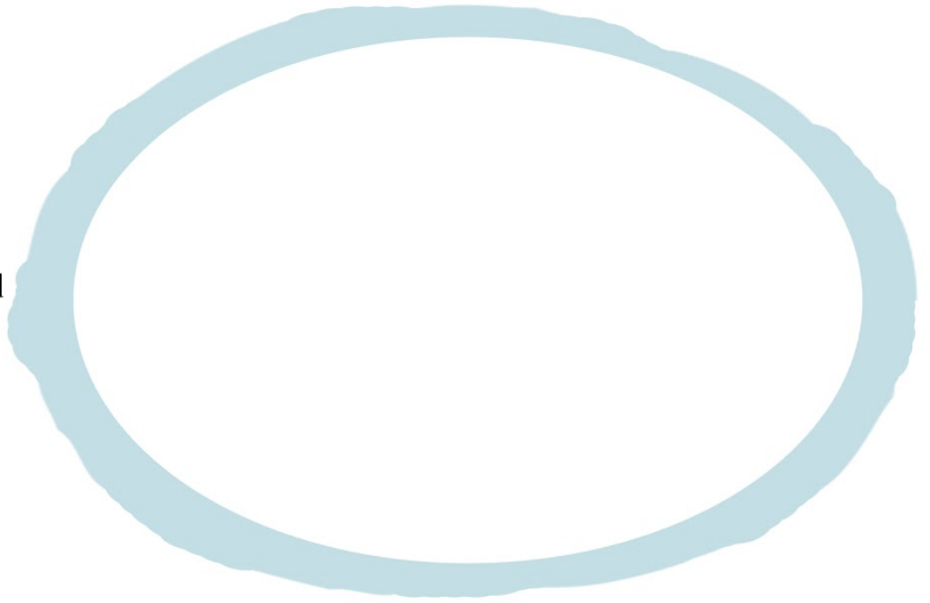
- What are you responsible for in this situation?
- What are you *not* responsible for?
- What are you trying to put in your circle that should not be there?
- Is there anything that the *other* person is trying to put in your circle that should not be there?
- Can you trust that God will bring the other person to conviction and change?
- If you are struggling to trust that God will do that, what can you do to change that?

Goals:

For people to see where they are tending to take or shirk responsibilities that they should not. To provide motivation and an impetus to have a conversation with the other person. To consider what they can do to trust that God will do His part in the situation.

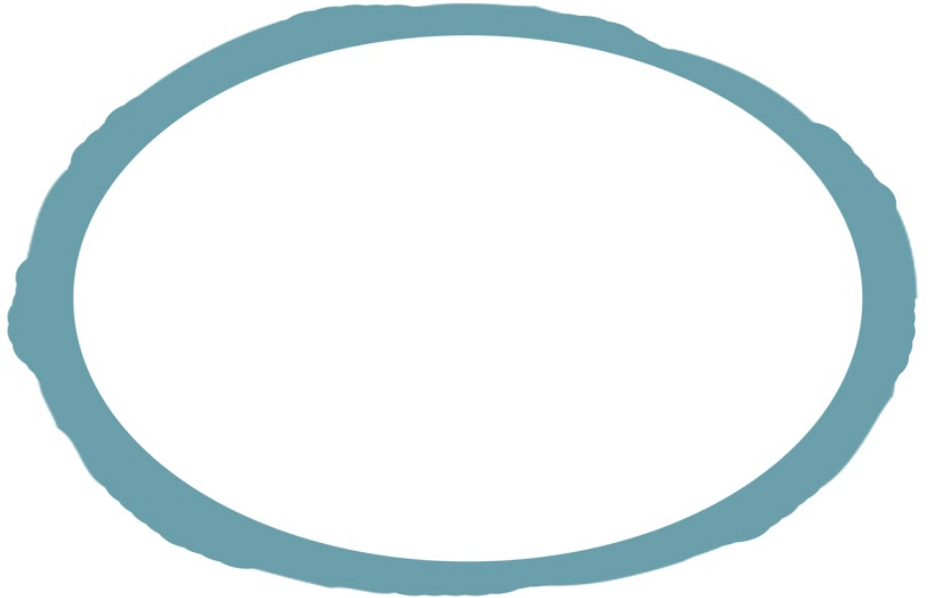
ME

- : To communicate with the other person in a kind & gracious way
- : To listen
- : To apologize where necessary



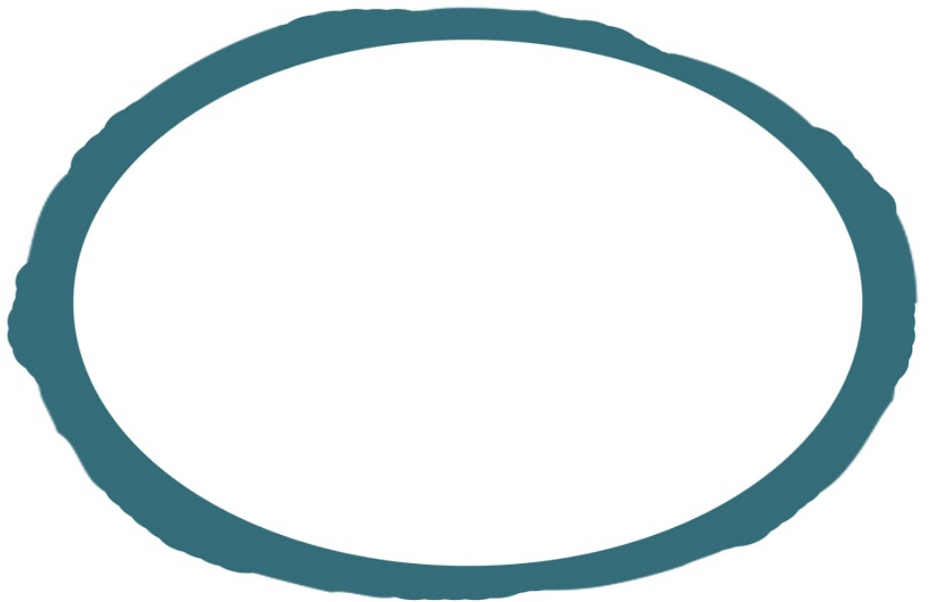
THEM

- : To listen
- : To respond in a kind & gracious way
- : To apologize where necessary



GOD

- : To convict the people involved
- : To bring about change



Circles of Responsibility

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask participants to fold their piece of paper in half. Have them draw on one side things they cannot change (feel free to offer or not offer suggestions - examples could be age, a disability, particular things about a situation they are in, things from their past, etc). On the other side, have them draw things they can change (examples could include perspective, mood, assumptions, certain emotions, boundaries, their body, etc).

Goals // Discussion:

It's so easy to focus on what we cannot change and have little to no control of in our life. This exercise can help give people a clear and visible picture of what is and is not changeable in their life -- what is in their circle of responsibility and outside their circle of responsibility. Through awareness of what they cannot change and what is outside of their circle, they can turn their attention to what is in their immediate circle of responsibility and make a plan to implement change and attitude adjustment where needed.

“We often get caught up in our own reactions and forget the vulnerability of the person in front of us.”

Sharon Salzberg

The Force of Kindness: Change Your Life with Love & Compassion

I would hope that the following concepts would be common sense, but I’ve been around humans long enough to know that it doesn’t always work out that way. So let’s just throw out a few “rules of engagement,” for dialoging with others and having healthy conflict.

- + **Don’t use Always and Never.** “You *always* use that tone of voice with me. You *never* look at me when I am talking to you.” People just stop listening to what it is you are saying because all they can think about is that ONE time they didn’t do that.
- + **Don’t Interrupt.** Easier said than done, but this one is as simple as it sounds. Let the other person finish talking before you respond.
- + **Control Negative Body Language.** This means no eye rolling, deep sighs, arms folded across your chest, avoiding eye contact.
- + **Control Your Tone of Voice.** Don’t raise your voice and please, try to keep the dripping sarcasm to a minimum.
- + **Try to Find Truth.** Even if you believe you are 99% right and the other person is wrong, try to find the 1% of wrong that you have done in the situation, own it, and apologize for it.
- + **Stonewalling.** Don’t end the conversation just because you are done. This can mean physically getting up and leaving or just shutting down and refusing to talk.

“Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”

Ronald Reagan

Sometimes, you can try everything and still feel like you are just spinning in circles. We have a saying in our community: “If you have a problem with someone, don’t go sideways, go up.” What does that mean? It means don’t go talk to your friend/roommate/co-worker (oh wait, those are usually all the same people for us), but go *up*-talk to your boss or leader for counsel. What ends up happening is that often people just want to “vent” to someone else about their situation. But all that really ends up doing is that it brings someone else into the situation that really has no business being there. In a simple word, it’s a form of gossip, and we try really hard to avoid it on our team. We like to follow the Matthew 18 principle in our community:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

Basically, if you have a problem with someone, first go to that person and talk about it. IF and ONLY IF they do not receive it well (THEN talk to someone else—a leader or a boss, not a friend), and ask for advice. If you have tried a few different exercises in this handbook and feel like you are still not getting anywhere, it’s best to tell the person, “Hey, I really value making our relationship work, and I think the best way for us to head in that direction is if we invite _____ to be part of a conversation with us. Is that okay with you?” Sometimes you and the other person really are just *missing* each other, and having a mediator can help with that.

Having a Mediator in Action

A Testimony

“I was hesitant at first to have a mediator — I’d rather push things under the rug and move on (which is not healthy!). Having a mediator present to facilitate conversation and work towards reconciliation was completely valuable for us. Having a mediator present was a little uncomfortable at first, but soon was very comforting knowing that whatever I said was being interpreted by a third party in a helpful way. If I said something confusing, the mediator could help clarify or ask non-threatening questions. Also, I knew whatever the other person said was being monitored by the mediator, and that brought me a lot of peace. At the end of our mediating sessions, we came a long way and were able to come to a place of understanding and forgiveness; I’m not sure that would have been possible without the mediating sessions.”

“Those people in our lives who can respect our boundaries will love our wills, our opinions, our separateness. Those who can't respect our boundaries are telling us that they don't love our nos. They only love our yeses, our compliance. ‘I only like it when you do what I want.’”

Henry Cloud // Boundaries

About 11 years ago, I was sitting in a counselor's office, talking about a difficult relationship in my life at the time. She got up out of her chair, and started putting things in her office on my lap. An ottoman, a chair, a trashcan, a lamp. I just sat there, dumbfounded, not saying anything, but inside thinking this woman was crazy. As she kept going, the pile on my lap started to grow, and then something started to fall off, and my husband reached out to catch it. “Don't help her,” she said to him, “She didn't ask you for help.” So she kept on piling, and said, “Let me know when you've had enough.” So I awkwardly said, “Okay, you can stop now.” She kept going. “Um, you can stop.” Nope. Finally with irritation and a sense of urgency, “I SAID STOP.” That did the trick. She then said, “This person in your life is doing the same thing to you, and you are just allowing it to happen. You have to decide when enough is enough, and you have to draw the line and create the boundary, for your own sake and sanity.” Oh.

Not everyone has this kind of relationship in their life, but a lot of people do. That person who manipulates, criticizes, abuses, dictates, needs, you name it; they do it to our detriment and their benefit. And they do it because we let them do it. Often, we are so accustomed to dealing with them in this way, that we aren't even really aware that there is a problem. It has become *normal* for us, having a relationship with someone who treats us this way. I have found the best indicator for determining whether or not you have one of these problematic relationships in your life is to describe it to someone else and ask them about it. A pair of outside eyes and an unbiased opinion is very effective. They can say, “Wow, I can't believe your mom talks to you that way” or, “If he were to do that to me, I would _____.” Sometimes their perspective is just what we need for us to honestly be able to take a look at our situation and say, maybe I'm *not okay with this*.

“Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom. Taking responsibility for my life opens up many different options. Boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out. Setting boundaries inevitably involves taking responsibility for your choices. You are the one who makes them. You are the one who must live with their consequences. And you are the one who may be keeping yourself from making the choices you could be happy with. We must own our own thoughts and clarify distorted thinking.”

– Henry Cloud, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life*⁵

⁵ Cloud, Henry, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life*.

Boundaries in Action

A Testimony from Hannah

“In two of my close family relationships, I have often been used as a "mediator" for each party to complain about the other. For a long time, I felt like it was my responsibility to be a listener and to offer advice in each of these relationships. Slowly, however, I realized that by constantly allowing these two people to speak very negatively about the other to me, two things were happening:

1. My view of each of them was being greatly affected by what I was hearing (i.e. gossip), and I was beginning to struggle in my own relationships with each of them (judging them, thinking negatively about them, etc.).
2. I was enabling them to shrug off the responsibility of going to the person themselves and addressing the conflict in a healthy way.

I finally told each of them that I would continue to pray for their struggling relationship, but that I was no longer able to be the mediator of their relationship. I drew clear boundaries (‘You can no longer speak negatively about this person to me,’ ‘You can no longer tell me how this person has offended you,’ etc), making it clear that I valued each of their relationships and wanted them to go to each other about conflict instead of to me. They have been able to have better conflict with each other, and my relationship with each of them is healthier today because of the boundaries drawn.”

Boundaries

Group & Individual Activity

***If you are in a physically abusive relationship, this exercise is not intended for you. Please reach out to someone in your life immediately who can walk with you through your situation.*

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

20-30 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Think about the relationships in your life and focus on 1-2 that you are currently unsatisfied with because you feel you cannot stand up for yourself to that person. Reflect on the following questions and write down your answers:

- Do you feel like part of your real identity is lost in your relationship with this person?
How so?
- Do you feel like you can't say no to this person, or that if you do, it is ignored? Write a specific example of this.
- Do you feel like your thoughts and opinions are not respected by this person? Write a specific example of this.
- Do you often feel defeated after interacting with this person? Write a specific example of this.
- What would/do other people think if they were to watch your interactions with this person?
- Imagine you had a 3-minute surge of courage. You can say whatever you want to this person and there will be no consequences. Write down what would you say.
- Write a list of the specific things that this person does that violates or disrespects you as a person. Leave a few blank lines of space after you write each thing.
- Think of one thing that you could do or say in response to each thing you just wrote that could demonstrate that you are not okay with how the person is treating you. These are potential boundaries.
- Commit to setting some of these boundaries in your next interactions with the person.

Group Option: Complete your individual reflection time, then get in groups of 2-3 and share what you have learned. Ask them for their insight regarding whether or not this is a relationship in your life where boundaries are being crossed. Ask them to share other ideas of what you can do to create better boundaries.

Goals:

For people to have the opportunity to reflect on harmful relationships in their life, and to consider how those relationships might change if boundaries were to be put in place. As a group, it allows others to speak into the situation, and affirm whether or not boundaries are indeed being crossed.

Boundaries

Group & Individual Activity

Activity Option I

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask participants to sit quietly for a minute and imagine the relationships in their life. Ask, “Is there someone in your life you are chained to? How are you chained to them? How is this chain affecting you? How does this chain make you feel?” After a few minutes of meditation, invite them to draw what they saw and how it made them feel. Encourage them to use color, texture, pattern, shape to express what they saw and felt.

Goals // Discussion:

Ask participants to share about their image, encouraging them to elaborate on the size, length, weight, strength, location of their chain and who or what they are chained to. How does this chain make them feel? How does it feel to see the way they are chained to this person, place or thing? Goals for discussion include attachments, co-dependency issues, what it could look like to have healthier relationships, or boundaries that need to be rethought or put in place.

Activity Option II

Materials:

Large piece of drawing paper (12x18 or larger), magazine, scissors, glue sticks, pencils
30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask participants to sit quietly for a minute and imagine the relationships in their life. Ask, “Which relationships are causing you the most anxiety, stress, fear, insecurity, drama in your life right now?” After a minute of meditating on this, invite them to create a collage using magazine clippings of what it looks like for them to be interacting in one or two of these relationships. Who is there? What’s happening? Where are you? Create a narrative of your relationship with this person and why it causes you the feel the way you feel.

Goals // Discussion:

Ask participants to share the narrative of their relationship with this person. What’s happening, who are they with, where are they? Why did they pick this person? What are the emotions they experience in this relationship? Why? What has happened that causes them to feel this way? Where did they place themselves in relation to the other person in their image? Why did they pick the magazine clippings they picked to describe this scene, this person, this situation, or this feeling?

Goals for discussion include their uncovering emotions in this relationship, the development of this relationship (how it got to be where it is today), and assessing whether there is a need for boundaries and creating healthy boundaries in this relationship.



Chapter 2

Understanding What's Going On Inside You

Introduction

Emotions. I'm waiting for all the groans and eye rolls to settle. I know. I get it. I used to be there. Actually in 2013, I took the Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis and scored a 3 out of 99 on "emotionally inhibited" (I also scored a 99 in both "dominant" and "hostile", but that is a story for another day). Then I started to learn about how my *not feeling* was affecting my life. And it wasn't in a good way. I was numb, apathetic, cold, detached, hard. I had to literally learn a new way. But first I had to be convinced that it was going to be a good idea. So here is my attempt at trying to convince you that emotions are important and why we need them.

Emotional Intelligence is a big deal. Psychologist Daniel Goleman⁶ wrote a whole book on it, and really pioneered the way in studying its importance in our lives. Unlike Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), Emotional Intelligence (EQ) can be learned and developed over time. High EQ invites, creates and sustains intimacy. High EQ helps us get to heart-issues in our own lives and the lives of others. High EQ helps us be able to share our feelings with others and enter into theirs, resulting in deeper relationships, deeper level of community, greater personal wholeness, and greater ministry effectiveness.

EQ is also important because most importantly, we need to learn how to connect to our emotions. We need to allow them to happen, acknowledge them when they do happen rather than pushing them down. We need to acknowledge physical symptoms that may arise when emotions are in play. We need to be able to understand and control our non-verbal actions like body language, hand gestures and eye contact. Being aware of how our actions affect others and how to read others' body language is important in effective communication. EQ helps to manage stress and remain positive — helping us to be aware of stress triggers and symptoms — and helps to relieve stress in our lives. It helps us to find a peaceful resolution to conflict and view hardships or setbacks from a positive perspective rather than a defeating one. Ultimately, we were created to feel. When we choose not to feel (because it is a choice), we are choosing to live a way of life that was not intended for us. It is an incomplete, lacking, unfulfilling version of a life.

Imagine a person like this: fully in control of their emotions, calm in a crisis, makes decisions sensitively, however stressful the situation, can read the emotions of others, knows what to say to make people feel better, and how to inspire them to take action. Wouldn't life be so much richer and more full and free of so many conflicts if we were all like this? Are you convinced yet?

Daniel Goleman identified five elements that make up emotional intelligence. These are self awareness, self regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Following the explanation of

⁶ Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

each element are ways you can practically develop good skills in each area. After all 5 elements have been explored, there is a quiz you can take, so that you can determine which areas you are strongest and weakest in.

Self Awareness

People who have a high level of self awareness can understand their emotions, and because of this, they don't let their feelings rule them. They're confident because they trust their intuition and don't let their emotions get out of control. They're also willing to take an honest look at themselves. They know their strengths and weaknesses, and they work on these areas so they can perform better. Many people believe that this self awareness is the most important part of Emotional Intelligence.

Here are some ways that you can increase your self awareness:

- Be aware of your moods as you are having them. Label your emotions, know what it is that you are feeling.
- Learn about mindfulness. This involves focusing on the present moment, including how you're feeling.
- Keep a journal in which you write about and analyze the emotional situations you experience from day to day.
- Understand your strengths and weaknesses. If you are unsure of what they are, ask others who know you well.
- Do a personal SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and ask for feedback from your boss and friends.

Self Regulation

This is the ability to control emotions and impulses. People who self regulate typically don't allow themselves to become too angry or jealous, and they don't make impulsive, careless decisions. They think before they act. Characteristics of self regulation are thoughtfulness, comfort with change, integrity, and the ability to say no. They are able to stay in control and manage their emotions effectively.

Here are some ways you can increase your self regulation:

- If you often get angry, note what triggers this feeling, and think about why this happens. Use techniques such as deep breathing to calm yourself down, and give yourself time to pause before you respond to emails or requests, so that you don't say something that you'll later regret.

- Do what you can to manage anxiety and stress effectively. Breathing exercises are effective in the midst of a stress-inducing situation.
- Examine how you react to stressful situations. Do you become upset every time there's a delay or something doesn't happen the way you want? Do you blame others or become angry at them, even when it's not their fault?
- Accountability is another important element of self regulation. Take responsibility for your actions and behaviors and apologize when needed.

Motivation

People with a high degree of EQ are usually motivated. They're willing to defer immediate results for long-term success. They're highly productive, love a challenge, and are very effective in whatever they do. Self motivation is strongly affected by your emotions; when you're distracted by your emotions, you may find it hard to see tasks through.

Here are some ways you can increase your motivation:

- Develop self-discipline in various areas of your life: sleep schedule, exercise, eating, spending money, media use, and reading, are good ones to begin to focus on.
- Set yourself longer-term goals. When you decide what you want to achieve, you'll focus on what really matters to you.
- Rediscover your purpose and your values. Try to create a personal life mission statement in one sentence that encompasses what it is that you want your life to be about, and make sure your actions, words, thoughts, and decisions are filtered through those values.

Empathy

This is perhaps the second most important element of EQ. Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand the wants, needs, and viewpoints of those around you. People with empathy are good at recognizing the feelings of others, even when those feelings may not be obvious. As a result, empathetic people are usually excellent at managing relationships, listening, and relating to others. They avoid stereotyping and judging too quickly, and they live their lives in a very open, honest way. People often ask what the difference is between *sympathy* and *empathy*. Imagine a person has fallen into a well. Sympathy would be you standing at the top of the well looking down at them and saying, "I'm so sorry, you poor thing, that must be terrible." Empathy would be you

getting into the well with them and helping them get out. It requires you to dig down deep and imagine what it is the other person must be feeling, with you remembering a time when you have felt that too, and using those feelings to help the other person in their current situation. Empathy is *not* you getting into the well and then you both getting stuck there. You have to have a strong enough hold on your self awareness and self regulation to be able to get in and get out.

Here are some ways you can increase your empathy:

- Think about other people's viewpoints and imagine how they may be feeling.
- Use active listening skills to understand them fully when they express their emotions to you. Look at their body language; it can tell you a lot about their emotions.
- Don't interrupt or talk about your own feelings during conversation.
- Look at their body language, too: it can tell you a lot about their emotions.

Social Skills

It's usually easy to talk to and like people with good social skills, which is another sign of high EQ. Those with strong social skills are typically team players. Rather than focusing on their own success first, they help others develop and shine. They can manage disputes, are excellent communicators, and are masters at building and maintaining relationships.

Here are some ways you can increase your social skills:

- Develop trust and rapport with people; this is an essential part of building good working relationships.
- Don't shy away from negative situations.
- Learn how to deal with conflict (using some of the tools and exercises in other sections of this book.
- If you're uncomfortable with social situations, work on building self-confidence.
- If you are an introvert, make sure that you are getting enough alone time so that you can be present and engaged when with others, rather than reserved and reclusive.
- If you are an extrovert, make sure that you allow other people a chance to talk and that you don't dominate conversations.

Emotional Intelligence in Action

A testimony from Erica

“Most of my life I thought I had my emotions in check - I didn’t cry often, I didn’t lose my temper, I wasn’t dramatic, I didn’t let things rock me, and I always kept a smile on my face. In reality, I was suppressing emotions, not allowing myself to experience them which put distance between myself and those around me. I think my goal was to keep peace but that made life dull and unrealistic. I took an emotional intelligence test after living overseas for three months. Realizing I was emotionally inhibited was defeating and shameful because I felt I failed and couldn’t handle this on my own. It was finally time to swallow my pride though and ask for help. I was not thriving overseas; I was experiencing a lot of anxiety and felt like I was trapped. This prevented me from entering into community, letting myself be known and getting to know others; affecting my personal life, work and spiritual life negatively. While learning about emotions and exploring what goes on inside my head, I realized my reaction to stress or what I view as threatening is to withdraw. As stress would approach, I would hide behind this armor I created and my head would fill with white noise that blocked thoughts from forming, making me functionless. I had no way of regulating it, I felt like I had no control of it, it was a sinking pit that pulled me under out of nowhere. Through working with Katie and learning about emotions, I’m learning to recognize the triggers and am able to recognize when this armor starts to go up. Completely stopping the armor or getting out of it is still a work in progress that I work on almost daily. I’m fighting to not exist in the dull, fake, emotionless state that’s more comfortable for me. This process invites people into my life, and even though it’s difficult and terrifying sometimes, it’s certainly less lonely and allows personal growth as well as growth for those around me.”

Emotional Intelligence Quiz

Individual & Group Activity

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

5-10 minutes for individuals, 30 minutes - 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Read the following questions. If the answer is true for you, mark the box next to the question. When you are finished, tally your results.

Optional Group Exercise:

Answer the quiz individually, then get in groups of 2-4 or discuss as one group your results. If the group knows each other well, you can take it a step further by discussing examples of each question that you see in one another's lives. You can also ask someone who knows you well to answer the questions for you, and you do the same for them.

Goals : For people to understand where their emotional strengths and weaknesses may be, so that they better know what areas they need to grow in.

- 1. I can recognize my emotions as I experience them.
- 2. I don't lose my temper when I feel frustrated.
- 3. People have told me that I'm a good listener.
- 4. I know how to calm myself down when I feel anxious or upset.
- 5. I enjoy organizing groups.
- 6. I find it easy to focus on something over the long term.
- 7. I find it easy to move on when I feel frustrated or unhappy.
- 8. I know my strengths and weaknesses.
- 9. I am willing to engage in conflict and negotiations
- 10. I enjoy my work.
- 11. I ask people for feedback on what I do well, and how I can improve.
- 12. I set long-term goals and review my progress regularly.
- 13. I find it easy to read other people's emotions.
- 14. I am able to build rapport with others.
- 15. I use active listening skills when people speak to me.

The more boxes you check, the higher your EQ is. Are you surprised at your results?

Here is the breakdown of the 5 different elements of EQ and how the questions corresponded to them:

- Self Awareness (Questions 1, 8, 11)
- Self Regulation (Questions 2, 4, 7)
- Motivation (Questions 6, 10, 12)
- Empathy (Questions 3, 13, 15)
- Social Skills (Questions 5, 9, 14)

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

Individual & Group Activity

Section 2

Very similar to the idea of Emotional Intelligence is Peter Scazzerro's idea of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. This is another questionnaire to help you see areas in which you might need to improve. I'm going to warn you: your assessment results might offend and shock you. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

15 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Take the following assessment, trying as best as you can to answer honestly, rather than what you think you *should* answer. You can access the assessment on Peter Scazzerro's website, <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/personal-assessment/>

Optional Group Exercise:

Answer the assessment individually, then get in groups of 2-4 or discuss as one group your results. If the group knows each other well, you can take it a step further by discussing examples of each question that you see in one another's lives. You can also ask someone who knows you well to answer the questions for you, and you do the same for them.

Goals : For people to understand where their emotional strengths and weaknesses may be, so that they better know what areas they need to grow in.

*“When we deny the story, it defines us.
When we own the story, we can write a brave new ending.”*

Brené Brown
Rising Strong

Before you start to tell me all the reasons why you don't have time to journal, or that journaling is for teenage girls, humor me for a moment. Our brains work faster than our hands. So when you are thinking about something, especially something important that is emotionally charged, your brain is going a million miles a minute, and it's very hard to keep up with it. If you get out a pen and a piece of paper and just start writing everything that you are thinking and feeling, you will find a few different things happening. For starters, you will realize that there were things in your thoughts that you weren't even aware of, but you now see them because you gave them a place and a space to actually come out. You will find that you will have *complete* thoughts, rather than rapid thinking and rabbit trails, because you are forced to slow down enough to write them down. You will find that it is a safe place to vent your anger, shame, and frustration. You will find that it is actually quite helpful to write it all down, because then you can go back through it later and see what it is you were thinking and feeling, and then filter it down a bit and tidy it up so that it is safe to be processed by others when you communicate it to them.

I'm not asking you to start journaling every day. I'm asking you to journal when you are coming out of an emotionally intense situation. I believe that you will find it to be a very helpful tool for you that not only calms you down (self regulation), but will also make you become more aware of what it is that you are actually feeling (self awareness). It will also help you to see what needs to happen for you to handle the situation effectively (motivation).

Brené Brown calls this journaling technique the Shitty (or Stormy) First Draft, or the SFD⁷ for short.

⁷ Brown, Brené. *Rising Strong*.

SFD in Action

Testimony from Nikolai

“For me, this activity begins with just stopping to breathe. I then progress to pausing, feeling my emotions from a certain situation, and beginning to write. I usually have to create a space away from people, listen to instrumental music, and then accept that I can be myself. I write down all the feelings I know I “shouldn’t” feel or voice, and it feels amazing to actually see them written down (horrifying at the same time, but so healing). I discover, usually, that what I am making up in my head is never based on the facts, just my fabrications. Writing things down helps me realize this so that I can change my response, change the ending of the story — since that falls into my circle of responsibility.”

Writing a Sh*tty First Draft

Individual Activity

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

15-20 minutes

Procedure:

As soon as possible after an emotionally charged situation, write down everything that you are thinking and feeling, without editing, for 15 minutes. This is for your eyes only, so there is no need to censor anything or make it acceptable for public consumption.

Read it through and see what you notice – add margin notes and “!” or “?” as appropriate. Then give yourself some feedback in writing. For this reflective feedback writing you can use Brené Brown’s 3 questions from *Rising Strong*⁸:

What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation?

What more do I need to learn and understand about the other people in the story?

What more do I need to learn and understand about myself?

Goals:

For people to see what it is that they are actually and fully thinking and feeling about a situation. To slow down your thoughts so that you can actually feel them, write them down, and then see them later so that you are able to process them. When it is done with courage and commitment, this practice can open the possibility of telling of new stories, finding new endings and meanings, instead of having to relive old patterns.

⁸ Brown, Brené, *Rising Strong*.

*“I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions.
I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them.”*

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

I like to think of the way we understand our emotions as a filing cabinet. There was a time in my life (let's be honest, it was 5 months ago), when, if you would have opened up my filing cabinet, you would have seen a file labeled “Important Documents.” I kept only important things in it: passports, my apartment lease, medical records, police registration forms, health insurance information, medical receipts that would need to be scanned for reimbursement, etc. Anytime I got something that I deemed to be important, I would quickly open the file cabinet without thinking and shove it into the “Important Documents” file. I didn't take the time to think about what it was that I was putting into the filing cabinet, and where it should go. What's ridiculous is that I even had individually marked files: “Medical Documents,” “Apartment,” but I never took the time to sort things out and put them where they needed to go. It was just too overwhelming. The file was breaking on the sides and was about 4 inches thick and had no less than 100 pieces of paper in it. I couldn't ever find anything when I needed it. It was a situation. We're not even going to talk about my tupperware cabinet.

The way we sort our emotions is the same way. If we experience something, and then just quickly shove it into our brain without really considering what it is that we are feeling, or why we are feeling it, or if we have ever felt it before, we don't really know where it should go or how we should respond. In the future, when we are in a similar situation and we want to remember this situation from the past, we can't even access it, because we don't know where we put it. Even if we knew where we put it, there are too many other emotions shoved in all around it to sort through. It just becomes too overwhelming, so we just end of shoving them all in there. It's a bad habit and we need to stop.

I shared this analogy with a group of people I was teaching about understanding and labeling emotions. Afterward, someone approached me and said, I would love to come help you organize your filing cabinet. Of course I took him up on the offer. It took the two of us a few hours. We had to first open it up and see everything that was in there. Then we started sorting everything into piles. We also had to throw away a huge bag of stuff that I had been holding onto that I didn't even need anymore (Talk about a good analogy, right?!). Then we (well, *he*) clearly labeled different

files and put the documents where they belonged, clearly marked, organized, and not at all overwhelming anymore. I feel like I can now function.

When we are feeling something, we need to acknowledge that it is there, and give it a name — label it. Then, in the future, when we feel the same way, we can recognize it quickly and decide what we want to do with it. Do we need to throw it away? Do we need to investigate it further? Is it a positive or negative emotion?

I've found that people in general really lack an *emotional vocabulary*. Beyond sad, happy, and mad, we get stuck, and can't even think of any other words. The following exercise is helpful in starting to get people to understand and communicate what it is that they are feeling.

Emotional Vocabulary in Action

A testimony from Matt

“Quick List of 10 Emotions is extremely helpful for me. I don't say this lightly or just because I'm promoting the exercise. I have always been the kind of person that loves to share with people my heart and emotions, but I have noticed that I can tend to rely on others to ask me how I feel or what emotions I'm feeling. I can struggle with expressing or feeling my emotions when I don't have someone to bounce off of, so this type of list works wonderfully for me to be able to put what is inside into words. I'm the kind of person that knows how I am feeling but I need words to help me explain it to others and that is what this list does for me.”

Quick List of 10 Emotions

Individual & Group Activity

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

10 minutes for individuals, 30 minutes for a group

Procedure:

Take a moment to be still and silent and have feelings about a past, current, or future situation. Look at the following list of emotions, and write down 10 emotions that you can resonate with. After you come up with the list of 10 emotions, narrow it down to the top 3 that you feel most strongly. Then try to write a simple sentence or 2 with those emotions explaining what it is that you are feeling and why. You can go further and ask yourself what you want to do with those feelings.

Also look at the list of oatmeal words. Oatmeal words are just like oatmeal-it's just okay, there's not much to say about it. They aren't very descriptive, and when people use them, we often don't really know what it is they are actually feeling.

Optional Group Exercise:

After spending 10 minutes alone reflecting on your situation and choosing what your emotions are, get in groups of 2-4 and share what you have learned. Ask each other follow-up questions, such as: Do you believe you are *allowed* to feel those things? What do you want to do with those emotions?

Goals : For people to develop an emotional vocabulary that they can use in future situations. For them to develop an awareness of what it is they are feeling and to decide what they want to do with those feelings.

Emotion Words

Amazed	Proud	Sad	Self-consciousness	Jealous	Lost
Foolish	Anxious	Bored	Motivated	Terrified	Stupid
Disdained	Content	Hurt	Overwhelmed	Worried	Relieved
Inspired	Loving	Joy	Embarrassed	Excited	Ashamed
Shocked	Grieving	Scared	Comfortable	Angry	Suspicious
Envious	Satisfied	Happy	Frustrated	Trapped	Nervous
Tense	Depressed	Lonely	Disgusted	Energetic	Worthless
Resentful	Peaceful	Bitter	Irritated	Miserable	Annoyed
Confused	Inadequate	Silly			

Oatmeal Words

Nice

Fine

Okay

Whatever

Interesting

Cool

It is what it is

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.”

Brené Brown // Daring Greatly⁹

Shame is a powerful, raw emotion that all of us experience. It has the power to isolate, belittle, condescend, blame, guilt and destroy. But it doesn't have to do all these things. It only has this power if we allow it to. Shame can also create an opportunity for vulnerability, transparency, intimate connection and belonging. It's really up to us to decide what we want to do with our shame when we are in it. But it first takes us recognizing when we are actually in it.

Shame is what is happening inside of us when we go into one of the *flight, flight, or freeze* responses. It's what makes you feel like you have to either puff up or shrink down, or it makes you feel like you are paralyzed and can't do anything at all. Shame can make you feel anxiety, fog, depression, and anger all mixed together. Guilt says “*I did something bad.*” Shame says, “*I am bad.*” We all have shame triggers, things that elicit shame within us, and it's helpful if we can identify them. Any event that ruptures the flow of positive emotion can bring shame: lack of reciprocated attention or love, rejection, disappointed expectations, or lack of empathy. All of this leads to withdrawal. Shame felt in a group leads to either pulling away internally or externally. Tackling shame requires a certain element of bravery. We have to first be able to recognize that we are in it, we have to know what it is that put us there, and we have to make a hard decision. Shame resilience means that we can make mindful, thoughtful decisions about how we will respond to our shame. Brené Brown, the leading researcher on shame and vulnerability writes, “You can choose courage, or you can choose comfort, but you can't have both at the same time.” Tackling shame means that we can't just sit in it, we have to do something about it. Shame wants us to hide and to be alone, and to believe that we are the only ones experiencing whatever it is that we are experiencing. When we can't recognize shame, it blindsides us and washes over us.

But the antidote to shame is empathy. It is someone else understanding what it is that we are feeling, and saying, “Hey, I've been there too, and it really sucks.” We have to shed light on and expose shame if we want it to go away.

A few months ago, I was talking with a friend, and I had an opportunity to choose courage over comfort. Inside, however, I was reeling, thinking, “There's *no way* you can share this with

⁹ Brown, C. Brené. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York, N.Y.: Gotham, 2012

them. It is shameful. They wouldn't understand. They would judge you. You're supposed to be a leader. It will be really bad." But quick like ripping off a bandaid I went for it, and shared an experience that I had had that I was truly ashamed about. I shared it honestly and fully. As soon as I finished, they asked me why I hadn't told them before this. I said it was because I was ashamed about it. They were quiet for a moment and my heart was pounding. Their response literally *shocked* me. "The same thing happened to me a few months ago too."

WHAT? I don't think I could possibly put into words how I felt hearing them say that. I literally felt the shame dissipate. I felt understood. I felt heard. I felt relieved. I certainly did not feel judged. And then the words came into my head, "The antidote to shame is empathy." I *knew* this, in my head, at least. But I had never personally *experienced* it until that moment.

Freedom from shame can come to you as well. It takes some work on your part, but the work is well worth it.

Tackling Shame

Individual & Group Activity

Materials:

Paper and pen

Suggested Time:

30 minutes to answer questions individually, 1 hour to share answers with others (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Individually, take some time to reflect upon and respond to the following questions. Write down your answers. When you are finished, get into groups of 2-4 to share your findings. *The questions are adapted from Brené Brown's I Thought it Was Just Me, But it Isn't*¹⁰.

RECOGNIZING SHAME

The first element of shame resilience is recognizing shame and understanding our triggers. Men and women who are resilient to shame have this capacity. Shame has physical symptoms. These might include your mouth getting dry, time seeming to slow down, your heart racing, twitching, looking down, and tunnel vision. These symptoms are different from one person to the next. So if you learn your physical symptoms, you can recognize shame and get back on your feet faster.

I physically feel shame in/on my

I know I'm in shame when I feel

If I could taste shame, it would taste like

If I could smell shame, it would smell like

If I could touch shame, it would feel like

¹⁰ Brown, Brené. *I Thought It Was Just Me (but It Isn't): Telling the Truth About Perfectionism, Inadequacy, and Power*. New York: Gotham Books, 2008.

EXPLORING TRIGGERS AND VULNERABILITIES

Our unwanted identities dictate our behavior every day. It's worth it to figure them out and get real about them. Often, you'll see that the perceptions you want to have and want to avoid are totally unrealistic. To get at shame triggers, figure out how you want to be perceived around a specific identity. So for example, with regards to motherhood, one might want to be perceived as calm, knowledgeable, or educated and not perceived as overwhelmed, stressed out, too ambitious, or unable to balance career and mothering. When we write these down and look at them, we understand the perceptions that make us vulnerable to shame. In the process, we learn a lot about ourselves.

To start, pick a shame category (body, work, motherhood, parenting, etc.)
Then, answer the following questions.

3-5 Ideal Identities

I want to be perceived as:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3-5 Unwanted Identities

I do NOT want to be perceived as:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Looking at your list of unwanted identities, answer the following questions for EACH identity?

1. What does this perception mean to me?
2. Why is it so unwanted?
3. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from?

Looking at your list of unwanted identities, complete the following sentence:

If you label me and reduce me to this list of unwanted identities, you will miss the opportunity to know that I'm complex and that I have many strengths, including:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

STRATEGIES OF DISCONNECTION

We have learned to “move away” by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves and secret-keeping. We have also learned the strategy of “moving toward.” This can be seen when we attempt to earn connection by appeasing and pleasing. We have developed ways to “move against.” These include trying to gain power over others and using shaming others to fight shame and aggression.

I use the strategy of “moving away” when:

I'm most likely to “move away” with:

I use the strategy of “moving toward” when:

I'm most likely to “move toward” with:

I use the strategy of “moving against” when:

I'm most likely to “move against” with:

CONNECTING

We are wired for connection. It's in our biology. As infants, our need for connection is about survival. As we grow older, connection means thriving – emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. Connection is critical because we all have the basic need to feel accepted and to believe that we belong and are valued for who we are. As you work through understanding your shame, remember to reach out and stay connected.

Tackling Shame

Group Activity

Materials:

Room to dance, drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels, Youtube or iTunes song “Happy” by Pharrell Williams <<https://youtu.be/ZbZSe6N_BXs>>

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Explain to the group that you are going to play the song “Happy” by Pharrell Williams and everyone is going to get up and dance.

Option 1: Ask everyone to make enough space around themselves so they don’t hurt anyone because they will start off by closing their eyes while they dance. Encourage everyone to really let go and dance with whatever level of enthusiasm they desire. If people start bumping into each other, they have permission to start opening their eyes and dancing together.

Option 2: Encourage everyone to let go of what other people think by leading them in different dance moves. Move people to dance together, have everyone start a line dance, whatever is needed to help people really let go and dance. Encourage them to feel the rhythm of the music and respond to the lyrics of the song with whatever level of enthusiasm they want.

At the end of the song, ask everyone to sit down and draw what it felt like to let go and dance. If they had trouble letting go, encourage them to draw their experience during the dance.

Goals // Discussion:

Discussion can focus on how they felt at the beginning of the dance vs. how they felt at the end. What are helpful things they’ve done to tackle shame in their life? Have they been helpful or hurtful solutions? How can dance and music be used to tackle shame in their life?

Encourage participants to see the safety they can have in their community, and if they don’t feel safe to be vulnerable in their community, create space for people to share why they do not feel safe and what can change to make that happen.

“Before there was psychotherapy, there was poetry, which can be recognized as one of the oldest healing arts that has been utilized across many different cultures throughout history.”

*Hoffman and Granger // Stay awhile: Poetic Narratives
and Multiculturalism and Diversity*

Poetry, writing, music, and art are all really effective ways of engaging with and processing your emotions. Unfortunately, a lot of people resist using these tools because “they aren’t wired that way.” Nonsense. We were all created to create and creating in this way is one of the best tools there are for feeling and releasing strong emotions.

In writing poetry, it is first important to feel or experience an emotion. Second, it is important to think about the emotion and make meaning of the emotional experience. Poems often emerge in the midst of strong emotions, or in the midst of suffering. Louis Hoffman (PhD) says, *“While part of what the poem does is describe the painful experience vividly and creatively, there is often a component of trying to make sense of the experience through understanding it more fully or through finding meaning in the suffering. When this second component is part of the writing process or the reflections on the poem, it closely parallels therapy.”*

Self awareness comes from processing emotions, and poetry is helpful to bring about new insights to a situation. Sharing your poetry with a friend is also part of the healing process; it isn’t to seek affirmation for the work, but rather for the person writing the poem to understand the significance of the poem in their life.

Psalms of Lament, specifically, are prayers for help coming out of pain, and are very common in the Bible. When we hurt physically, we cry out in pain; when we hurt emotionally or spiritually, we cry out in lament. A Psalm of Lament is an address to God: a complaint, a request, and usually an expression of trust. They are cries of despair, anger, protest and doubt. They follow this general structure:

Address and introductory cry: Identify the Lord as the person to whom the Psalm is addressed.

Complaint or Lament: Articulate the problem and ask the Lord for help.

Confession of Trust: Verbalize your trust in the Lord.

Prayer for Deliverance: Request deliverance, or God's intervention in the problem.

Praise: Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's many blessings.

You can see how this structure is followed in Psalm 4:

Address and introductory cry

1 Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

Complaint or Lament

2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Confession of Trust

3 Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Prayer for Deliverance

4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.

6 Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.

7 Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

Praise

8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalm of Lament in Action

Testimony by Nikolai

“Doing this assigned counseling homework has birthed probably one of my favorite hobbies to date and has given room for me to actually feel more emotionally healthy. Before, I held the belief that “men don't feel.” Boy, was I wrong. Ironically, training myself to not acknowledge and/or feel the emotions God gave me and created me with crippled me in the past. Having a tool to creatively pierce my feelings wall and step out onto the “Ocean of Uncertainty,” was vital in helping me to become healthy. Starting to write a Psalm of Lament is one of the best things that has happened to me. If you are like me, you’re probably saying, “What's the point...I give up...etc.” The amount of rewiring required to start being able to process emotions this way doesn’t just happen instantaneously. It takes time, but don't be hard on yourself.”

Writing A Psalm of Lament

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

30 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Take some time to reflect on how the last week (or a specific event of your choice) has been for you. Make note of the predominant emotions you have been feeling during this time, in particular the more negative ones. Reflect on a particular situation or recurring theme that you know has been causing you distress, pain or anxiety and that you feel is beyond your control. Imagine that God is with you and that He has given you complete freedom to lay it all out, to complain fearlessly without judgment, in order to get it all off your chest. Follow these steps:

Address and introductory cry: Identify the Lord as the person to whom you are addressing your complaint. Request for His presence as you express what is on your heart.

Complaint or Lament: Articulate the problem you are wrestling with. Detail how it is affecting you, the pain it is causing, and ask the Lord for His help.

Confession of Trust: Verbalize your trust in the Lord. Share your hopes that He will come to your aid, that He will be present with you in your situation.

Prayer for Deliverance: Request deliverance or God's intervention in the problem.

Praise: Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's many blessings and faithfulness.

Do not worry about the quality of the poem. If your focus is on creating a great poem, this may interfere with the healing quality of the poem. Try to deeply engage your emotions when you begin writing the poem. This can be a beautiful way of inviting your emotions to be more present in your life without any judgment of the emotions.

Optional Group Exercise:

Explore your expressions with others. In a group of 2-3 people, share your poem, talking about its meaning and significance.

Goals :

To help people have a tool where they can release intense emotions in a healing way. To give a structure and framework to a creative process, and to invite others into the results of that process.

Drawing A Psalm of Lament

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask participants to sit quietly and think back on their day, their week, or even the past month. Allow the emotions, stresses, anxieties, fears, or failures to surface. Is there a theme or pattern linking these situations and emotions? Does it revolve around something or someone you can't control? Ask participants to fold a piece of paper into four boxes (folded in half twice).

1. In the first box, ask participants to draw who they know God to be in truth in the midst of their pain and what it's like when God shows up in their suffering.
2. In the second box, ask them to draw the problem they are struggling with right now. Use color, texture, pattern, or lines to show how it is impacting you right now. Encourage them to ask God to show them how the pain, anxiety, fear, etc is affecting them right now. Encourage participants to pray as they draw, asking God for help.
3. In the third box, draw what it looks like to trust in the Lord. What are the emotions you experience when you trust in Him? What does it look like to be hopeful knowing that He will come to your aid, that He is present in your situation and with you always?
4. In the fourth box, ask participants to pray and ask God to show Himself intervening in the problem. Encourage them to pray and ask for an image or reminder from scripture of how He is going to help them. When they have an image, draw it into the box. As they draw, offer thanksgiving to God for his blessings and faithfulness in their suffering.

Goals // Discussion :

Ask participants to share starting from box one their journey through drawing their psalm of lament. Did God give them any clear picture of who He is in the midst of their struggles and suffering and what He is going to do in their life? Goals might include fostering a time of vulnerability in community by encouraging people to share what's on their heart and what they are going through. Encourage participants to share any images God gave them during this time as it might be used to encourage other people in the group who are going through similar situations.

“You should give everything you have to the task of catching more clearly the still sound of God within you.”

Andre Louf

Lectio Divina is latin for “sacred reading.” It is a slow and powerful reading with the heart. Picture *Lectio Divina* as a way of feasting on God’s Word. It is just one way of meditating on Scripture, but it certainly should not be the only way. It is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer, it simply emphasizes prayer as a personal relationship with God.

The method of *Lectio Divina* includes moments of reading (*lectio*), reflecting on (*meditatio*), responding to (*oratio*) and resting in (*contemplatio*) the Word of God with the aim of nourishing and deepening one's relationship with the Divine. *Lectio Divina* cultivates contemplative prayer, and is a silent prayer method that allows you to experience God’s presence within you. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. *Lectio Divina* is a participatory, active practice that uses thoughts, images, and insights to enter into a conversation with God. The purpose of *Lectio Divina* is to enter into a conversation with God and cultivate the gift of contemplation.

Lectio Divina

Individual or Group Exercise

Materials:

A Bible

Suggested Time:

20 minutes for individuals, 45 minutes - 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Invite yourself or the group to sit comfortably. Have them close their eyes and release the noise and distractions and chaos. Let go of everything that keeps you from being fully present with God right in this moment. Invite the Holy Spirit to open your ears to hear the Living Word.

Read the same passage several times slowly. Each person can individually read their own passage, or preferably, one person can read a chosen passage out loud to the group, *very slowly*. As you read, listen for a word or a phrase that chooses you — something that catches your attention and invites you to linger with it. When you hear that word or phrase, just sit with it for awhile. Don't analyze it, just listen to it.

Read the passage again, and this time ponder on that word or phrase. Chew and savor it, letting the word descend from your mind into your heart. Why did it catch your attention? What is God personally saying to you? How does that word connect with your life? How is God inviting you to pray? Be honest. Allow the word you have been pondering touch you at a deep level as you dialogue with God. Finally, rest in the Lord's presence.

When the time is finished, get in groups of 2-4 and share what you experienced.

Goal:

To invite stillness and slowness into the reading of the Word, and to allow people to have personal encounters with the Scripture.

“To notice and resist the stirrings that would turn us aside from God’s purpose in our day? What will happen in our spiritual lives if we do live with such spiritual awareness, understanding, and action? What will happen if we do not?”

**Timothy M. Gallagher // *The Examen Prayer:
Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today***

Sharon Garlough Brown, in the book *Sensible Shoes*, says, “The prayer of examen was developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century as a discipline for discerning God’s will and becoming more attentive to God’s presence. Think of the prayer of examen as a way of sitting with Jesus and talking through the details of your day. In the examen we slow down and pay attention to the data of our lives. We notice our thoughts, actions, emotions and motivations. By taking time to review our day in prayer, we have the opportunity to see details we might otherwise overlook. The examen helps us to perceive the moment of the Spirit and to discover God’s presence in all of life.¹¹”

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern His direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience.

Slowing down to reflect upon your day is a helpful practice, because you can see what happened, how you responded to it, and consider how you might have responded differently. It can give you an opportunity to be assured of God’s presence in all things, even when you are too busy or distracted to notice as it is happening. It can provide a time for confession and praise. It can bring closure to any type of day, in a way that brings peace through knowing that God is in all things.

¹¹ Brown, Sharon Garlough, *Sensible Shoes: A Story about the Spiritual Journey*.

The Prayer of Examen

Individual or Group Exercise

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

20 minutes for individuals, 45 minutes - 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

1. Give yourself a moment to be still and quiet. Become aware of God's presence. Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding. When were you aware of God's presence today? When did you sense God's absence?
2. Review the day with gratitude. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.
3. Pay attention to your emotions. One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. What is God saying through these feelings? Pay attention to both the things that gave you life and to the things that drained you. When did you feel most alive and energized? When did you feel drained, troubled or agitated?
4. God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. When did you respond to God with love, faith, and obedience? When did you resist or avoid God? Having reviewed the details of your day, confess what needs to be confessed. Allow God's Spirit to bring you wholeness, grace, and forgiveness.
5. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

6. Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. How will you live attentively in God's love tomorrow? How can you structure your day in light of God's presence?

Optional Group Exercise: Spend time alone doing the Prayer of Examen. Then in groups of 2-3, share what you learned.

Goal:

To give people an opportunity to slow down and reflect upon their day in light of God's presence.

“To wish you were someone else is to waste the person you are.”

Sven Goran Eriksson

How many times a day do you use the word “should” in reference to yourself or other people? We intend to use it to motivate ourselves or others, but what often ends up happening is that it instead shames us, because we aren’t doing what we think we *should* be doing.

“Should” is a dangerous word. It doesn’t motivate you to do or be better, but rather it leaves you feeling like you aren’t enough. When we use it with others, it can be controlling, and not respectful of their abilities and desires. It serves as a constant reminder and measuring rod of how we or others are falling short.

We also use it in reference to our emotions. “*I shouldn’t* be so angry about this.” “*I should* be over this by now, why am I still upset?” It robs us of our right and need to feel what it is we are actually feeling. It comes with judgment, with a lack of acceptance, and with strings attached. It puts pressure on ourselves and others to perform and conform that doesn’t need to be there.

Moving from “Should” to “Could” in Action

A testimony from Roger

“Should” kind of ruled my life without me knowing it. In many situations I would be paralyzed with guilt or regret because I “should” do this or “should” have felt that or “should” have done that. “Should” figuratively held a gun to my head and forced me to feel or to do something which I didn’t necessarily agree with or understand why. When I decided to change the “should” to a “could”, it allowed me to be in charge. It allowed me to have real choices and to have reasons for those choices other than these abstract “should” feelings. The choices could even remain the same but with a “could” I now had the power to choose with reason and not out of guilt or without knowing why. Thinking “could I _____” returned to me my God given power of choice and reason that “should” sought to hijack.”

Moving From “Should” to “Could”

Individual Exercise

Materials:

A piece of paper and a pen

Suggested Time:

15 minutes

Procedure :

Think about all the different ways you tell yourself you “should” be doing/being/thinking/feeling something. Write down your “I should” statements one by one on your paper.

Re-read your statements and take a minute to think about how they make you feel about yourself. You can refer to the exercise “10 Quick Emotions” for help in discerning how you are feeling. Write down an emotion or 2 for each statement. What do you notice about the theme of these emotions? Are they positive or negative?

Next, rewrite each statement, replacing the word “should” with “could”, and putting it in the form of a question. Take note of how your revision changes the way you feel. For example:

- “I *should* call my mom more often.” This statement leaves me feeling like a bad daughter, disappointed in myself, selfish, not caring for others.

-----changes to-----

- “What *could* it look like if I were to call my mom more often?” This question leaves me feeling like I can explore the possibility without feeling shame; it’s hopeful and motivates me to make a plan.

One person described it as feeling like saying “could” instead of “should” took away their guilt and made them feel in control of their decisions.

Then write “should” statements that you have for other people. “My husband *should* help with the dishes more often.” Re read your statements, write your emotions, then revise them into “could” questions, again writing new emotions next to your revisions. What theme do you see with your emotions after the change?

Try to make it a personal practice to eliminate the word “should” from your vocabulary. After all, *what could it look like if you were to stop saying “should” to yourself and others?* :)

Goal :

To help people to see the destructive effects of saying “should” and to provide them with an alternative that brings more hope and freedom to their situations.

Moving From “Should” to “Could”

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask group members to sit quietly for a minute or two and think of a time someone (maybe themselves, another person, the enemy, etc.) used the word “should” negatively in their life. Offer suggestions more as prompts if needed (“You should be better at this, you’re an adult now.”... “Why can’t you get this right, you should know better.”... “You should get your act together.”...etc).

Next ask participants to think of times when someone (again, maybe themselves, another person, God, etc.) used the word “could” positively in their life (“You could try rearranging your schedule so you have more time for God.”... “You could try asking a friend for help instead of trying to do it on your own.”...etc).

When participants are ready, ask them to spontaneously draw their “shoulds” and “coulds” in conflict with one another. Encourage them to engage with their drawing using lines, shapes, colors, or designs, however abstract or literal they want to be. Encourage them to really release into their drawing (for example: if they are angry and fighting for their life, drawing fast, rip the paper, crumple it, poke holes in it).

Goals // Discussion :

Ask participants how they felt during the activity and if they had any revelations about the battle in their mind against lies while interacting with their drawing. Did they learn anything new about themselves — belief about who they think they should be or what other people have told them they ought to be? Any moments of freedom?

“Art opens the closets, airs out the cellars and attics. It brings healing.”

Julia Cameron

Emotions can be felt in many different ways, and they can also be expressed in many different ways. Psalms of Lament, poetry, songs, art, are all different ways of expressing emotions.

A lot of these tools are helpful not only in *expressing* your emotions, but also in *discovering* your emotions. The process of creating something that represents what is going on inside of you often draws out things that you didn't even realize were there. Creative expression can help foster healing and mental well-being.

The American Art Therapy Association describes art therapy as "a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight."

A huge benefit to using art therapy is giving people a chance to see abstract problems in their life as visual beings. I have seen a lot of people resist any type of art therapy process, but when encouraged to try, they often discover there are a lot of emotions lurking beneath the surface that they didn't even realize were there.

Color Your World in Action

A testimony from Jacob

“I have always said that I don’t have an ‘artistic’ bone in my body, and growing up on sports teams my whole life, sharing about emotions wasn’t really a part of my growing up either. So the night that Katie explained this exercise that we were going to do as a team, I was not excited about it to say the least, partly because of not really enjoying “art projects” in the past, and partly because my tendency towards perfectionism makes me hesitant to do things that I don’t think I will be good at.

Long story short, of the 25 minutes we were given, I spent the first 10 to 15 of them internally grumbling about how this was dumb and I didn’t want to do it. But then knowing that I would have to explain myself to our team soon, I finally got to work. I quickly found that because it involved more simple things like scissors/glue/paper instead of having to draw or something more detailed that no one’s was going to be perfect, and my mind began to see it for what it was... a physical representation of an abstract idea that didn’t need to be perfect.

In the end, despite my initial reservations, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I actually enjoyed the activity and how helpful it ended up being in helping to communicate my emotions in a seemingly safer way than just sharing them. I think the best testimony that I can give, is that we did this exercise like 4 years ago, and I can still remember exactly what I made and what it represented."

Color Your World

Group Exercise

Materials:

Each participant will need the following, no sharing:

A piece of paper in each of the following colors: white, yellow, red, green, blue

A pair of scissors

A bottle of glue

Suggested Time:

1 hour - 1.5 hours, depending on group size

Procedure :

Each participant needs to find a place where they can work with their set of supplies. Make sure there is enough space for everyone. Each color of paper represents a different emotion:

White= Fear, Blue= Sadness, Green= Shame, Yellow= Joy, Red= Anger

Each person gets 25 minutes to create something with their paper, scissors, and glue (no pens or writing allowed) that represents how they feel about something. Find a topic that fits the needs of the group, but some ideas are:

- How do you feel about yourself in this community?
- How do you feel about your relationship with God?
- How do you view yourself?

After the 25 minutes are over, (make sure to give a 5 minute warning), each person can share what they have created.

There is one rule: No criticizing or joking about other people's or your own art. After each person shares, others in the group can ask follow-up questions, then thank them for sharing.

Goal:

To allow people the opportunity to discover and express what they are feeling through art, and to share openly with others.

God Is . . .

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask participants to sit back with their eyes closed and dwell on the phrase “God is . . .” for a minute or two. Lead participants in thinking through “God is . . . what . . .?” to them right now. Encourage participants to ask God for a picture of what they see him as. If the picture is unclear, encourage them to ask God to clarify the image (God, I don’t understand. Why am I standing in a field? . . . God, why is my brother standing next to me? . . . God, why can’t I see anything?).

Tell participants that, when they are ready, to pick up a piece of paper and something to draw with and draw what they saw during the meditation time. Was it an abstract image? Was it something specific? Encourage them to draw any way they see best.

Goals // Discussion:

Encourage participants to share honestly about what they saw and how they felt during the activity. Invite the positive and the negative -- remind them that both are safe to share. Did they learn anything new about themselves during the activity? Did they know they saw God that way?

If doing this activity in a group setting, you could invite participants to speak a word of encouragement over others after they share. Remind the group this is not an opportunity to fix anyone’s problems or tell them they are wrong for thinking that way. This is a chance to be slow to speak and quick to listen. If anyone wants to ask clarifying questions, invite participants to inquire about another person’s sharing or drawing.

If group members saw images or heard things that were unbiblical or potentially dangerous, open a conversation to draw them back to the truth of who God is with these questions: Do I have your permission to challenge that idea? Would it be ok if we address what you just shared? Would it be ok if we opened the bible to see what God says about himself?

Breathing An Embrace

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Ask group members to sit quietly for a minute or two and slowly breath in and out. Ask them to focus on their breath and the sensation of air filling their lungs and slowly leaving their body. After a few minutes, ask them to imagine their breath is embracing them. Encourage them to imagine their breath is covering them in love, peace and warmth — that their breath is bringing in new waves of beauty, calmness, strength.

Allow group members to sit for a minute or two in this thought. After, ask participants to next imagine being embraced by something or someone they love. After a minute or two, invite them to draw themselves being embraced.

Goals // Discussion:

Ask group members to share how they felt during this exercise and who or what they imagined themselves being embraced by. Was this a positive or negative experience for them? Why? Encourage them to share how it feels to be embraced and if they experienced any additional feelings or learned anything new about themselves during this activity.

*“Mindlessness leads to lifelessness.
Mindfulness leads to fullness of life.”*

The human mind really is a special thing. Even though our bodies are forced to function in the immediate present, our minds don't have that limitation. We can be in a conversation with someone and simultaneously be wondering if we remembered to take the clothes out of the washing machine. We can be in a group meeting all the while thinking about what we should have said in that conversation we had earlier that day. We have a bad habit of distracted multi-tasking, but can it even be called multi-tasking if we aren't really doing any of the tasks well? Don't even get me started on cell phones. The ability for people to be in a room with others, yet choose to disengage and be on their phones is mind boggling to me. When we do that, we aren't being present; we aren't experiencing and actually living the life that we are supposed to be living — the one that is actually happening right in front of us, rather than the one that is happening on a screen in our hand.

Enter mindfulness. Mindfulness is paying attention. It is noticing what you are doing, feeling and thinking at the time you are actually doing, feeling and thinking it. Given how our minds—and hearts—are prone to wander, it's no wonder that throughout the Hebrew Scriptures God repeatedly reminded people to remember both him and their history. Deuteronomy 8:18 says, “Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant.” God's kind of remembering is not just nostalgic dreaming or remorseful musing. God-commanded remembering is a kind of present-directed mindfulness; it is summoning the past as it was so as to meet the present where it is. It is re-membering, putting back together the dismembered pieces of our lives.

I get it, it's hard to stay present. Thich Nhat Hanh, Nobel Peace Prize Nominee explains this well:

“We have negative mental habits that come up over and over again. One of the most significant negative habits we should be aware of is that of constantly allowing our mind to run off into the future. Perhaps we got this from our parents. Carried away by our worries, we're unable to live fully and happily in the present. Deep down, we believe we can't really be happy just yet—that we still have a few more boxes to be checked off before we can really enjoy life. We speculate, dream,

strategize, and plan for these ‘conditions of happiness’ we want to have in the future; and we continually chase after that future, even while we sleep. We may have fears about the future because we don’t know how it’s going to turn out, and these worries and anxieties keep us from enjoying being here now.¹²”

We are constantly encouraged to be responsible and plan for the future, set goals, and people are constantly asking, “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”. How about asking, “How do you see yourself?” instead. I bet people would find it harder to answer that question than the one about their future. Why? Because we struggle to be present. We are stuck dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

So what are the actual benefits of mindfulness?

1. **Living in the present means we can trust in God’s future.** You cannot pay attention to the present if you are worried about the future.
2. **Mindfulness is a foundation of inner peace.** When Jesus wanted his disciples to not worry, he had them pay attention to the birds and the flowers that were around them. (Matthew 6:25-30)
3. **Mindfulness allows us to see what is really going on around us and respond accordingly.**
4. **Mindfulness helps us to discover our own identity.** It allows us to see our right place in the scheme of the universe.

The exercises that follow can help get you started toward having a habit of mindfulness. Try them for 30 days and see if you notice a change in the way you are living.

¹² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Breath: A Practice for Our Busy Lives*. HarperOne, 2012.

Mindfulness

Individual Activity

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time:

5-30 minutes (depending on activity)

Procedure :

1. **Do physical activities that absorb your attention.** When your body is fully engaged in what you are doing, your mind can't wander as easily. Carving out even a small window of time for whatever it is that you love enables the time to pass without you even noticing, because you are so engaged. Avoid doing things that just distract your mind.
2. **Set an alarm to think about God.** There are a number of classic spiritual practices that create regular times to think about God. These include such things as praying the hours, the Prayer of Examen, Lectio Divina, and others. A simple way to help "fix your thoughts on Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1) is to set an actual alarm on your watch or cell phone or computer. When it rings, take that moment to "set your mind on things above" (Colossians 3:2). Do this several times each day.
3. **Meditate.** Meditation has gotten a bad rap because it is associated with Eastern philosophy. But as Dallas Willard said, just because Hindus eat breakfast doesn't mean it's a bad thing to do. Christian meditation can be as simple as sitting still for ten minutes, breathing easily, and repeating a line of Scripture. This can help you be still and be able to listen for God. It can help you be able to release distracting thoughts and refocus on what matters. It is easiest to find a comfortable and quiet place sit or lie down. Focus on your breathing, slowly inhaling and exhaling for a few minutes.

“Today, I will take a full deep breath before reacting.”

@enneagramandcoffee // Type 8 Mantra

My friend Jess, who has contributed greatly to this handbook with the art therapy exercises, has probably one of the most opposite personalities to mine of anyone in our community. I am extroverted, loud, fast, and easily excitable (as I write this, I realize that I sound like a puppy). She is introverted, quiet, and needs time to process before she responds to people or makes decisions. She is also *calm*. If you were to ask anyone in our community who knows Jess well what her trademark is, they would say, “The Jess Sigh.” In our years of friendship and accountability with her, we have come to expect and love that when Jess is sharing something that is important, troubling, emotional, distressing, or discouraging to her, she will immediately follow her words with the deepest, most intense sigh you have ever heard in your life. After she does it, it’s literally contagious. We then all do it too, all together, and then we laugh. Years after knowing this about her, I read in a book that “calm people breathe.” I immediately thought of Jess, and thought how true it was. Her deep sighs calm her, and they calm all of us. They invite us to stop the crazy cycle and to slow down for a minute.

A few months ago, I was in a conversation with several people, when someone said something that really struck a nerve in me. I opened my mouth to respond with an attack, but remembered that *calm people breathe*. (Apparently as an Enneagram Type 8, I need to memorize this mantra of taking a deep breath before reacting.) I closed my eyes and very dramatically, with my arms on either side of me raising up and down like I was flying, did the box breathing technique that follows on the next page. I’m positive that the group was staring at me like I was a complete weirdo (but they do that anyway). But it worked. It calmed me down, and I was able to respond with kindness and integrity.

Use this tool anytime and anywhere. It is helpful when you are angry, upset, anxious, stressed, sad or just overly hyper and need to calm down.

Breathing to Calm

Individual Exercise

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time:

3 minutes

Procedure:

This technique is called “box breathing” and is used in the military and for people suffering from trauma.

Through your nose, inhale as you count 1-2-3-4.

Hold the breath as you count 1-2-3-4.

Through your mouth, exhale as you could 1-2-3-4.

Hold the released breath as you count 1-2-3-4.

Repeat at least 3 times, but as many times as is necessary.

“Worrying is carrying tomorrow’s load with today’s strength— carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time. Worrying doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”

Corrie Ten Boom

Everyone experiences stress; it’s a normal reaction that prepares us for and protects us from the things that life throws at us. But we also tend to stress over the future, or things that do not have a clear end. This type of stress is *anxiety*: a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an upcoming event or something with an uncertain outcome. Anxiety is chronic stress; it is stress that stays. For some people, the anxiety is often worse and more troublesome than the actual perceived threat. It can become at best exhausting and at worst debilitating and crippling. A lot of people feel great amounts of shame in their struggle with anxiety. They are often told to recite Bible verses, or that they are in sin, because they aren’t trusting God.

Just as with all the emotions, anxiety serves a purpose, and we have it for a reason. While most people want to run away from their anxiety because it’s not pleasant to experience and because we aren’t “supposed” to be anxious, it is actually not the most helpful approach. What if instead of denying the anxiety, we were to treat it as a signal and follow the worry and chase the pain? What if we were to instead let our anxiety speak to us?

If you are a person who struggles with anxiety, there are a few things you can do to help:

- Surround yourself with others who have a non-anxious presence. Anxiety is contagious.
- Identify your anxiety triggers. What types of situations tend to cause anxiety in you?
- Grow in your self-awareness of what you are feeling in the moment.
- Grow in awareness of what physiological anxiety symptoms you tend to have.
- Cut back on caffeine. Seriously though.

Dealing With Anxiety in Action

A Testimony from Hannah

“In a season when I was struggling a lot with anxiety, Katie had me keep an "anxiety log" to help identify patterns and triggers. After a week of keeping the log (which required me to sit down and write each time I found myself having anxious thoughts), I was able to see patterns of the types of situations that caused me the greatest anxiety. In learning to recognize triggers, I was able to both prepare myself when I knew a potentially triggering situation was coming and be able to step back in those situations and address the lies I was believing.

Through counseling, I realized that most of my anxiety triggers were tied to situations in my childhood where I felt abandoned, out of control of my situation, or unwanted. Because of childhood traumas, my core belief system often ran present situations through a filter of "abandoned," "unwanted," or "burden" in my thoughts about myself. In discovering this, I was able to better distinguish between my past and present situations and realize that most of the present situations I was facing vastly different from my childhood experiences.”

Dealing with Anxiety

Individual & Group Exercise

Materials:

Paper and pen

Suggested Time:

30 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Often, when a person starts to think about something that makes them anxious, they keep thinking about it long enough to get caught up in an anxious spiral that they can't get out of, but not long enough to get them *out* of that spiral. Studies have shown that the key is to think about the anxiety-causing situation for either *less than 3 minutes or more than 15 minutes*. If you keep it to less than 3 minutes, you are less likely to get sucked into the anxious spiral that you can't get out of. If you think about it longer than 15 minutes, you have actually given your anxiety enough time for you to have a chance to understand it. It turns your *worry* into a *concern* that you can actually process and consider and possibly do something about.

1. When an anxious thought comes, ask yourself if you have at least 15 minutes to think about it right that moment. If you don't, tell yourself that you will come back to it at _____ time and give it the attention that it needs. Don't allow yourself to think about it for more than 3 minutes.

2. If you have at least 15 minutes to think about it, get out a pen and paper and consider the following:
 - a. Write a Sh*tty First Draft (See Sh*tty First Draft exercise) about what you are feeling. Then proceed to the following questions:
 - b. Are my fears based on reality? Do I have any proof or experience that can defend what I am feeling?
 - c. What evidence do I have to support this? Answer this using *facts* not *feelings*.
 - d. What is the best, worst, and most realistic scenario that could play out? Sometimes the worst case scenario isn't even really that bad, which can reduce anxiety.
 - e. What story am I making up in my head? (See The Story I'm Making Up exercise)
 - f. What is my anxiety trying to tell me?
 - g. Is there anything I could do to help the situation that is causing me to worry?

3. End your time with some box breathing (See Breathing Calm Exercise).

Optional Group Exercise:

Ask each person to think about something that has been causing them anxiety recently. After they spend time answering the above questions, in groups of 2-4 or in one large group, share your answers.

Goal :

For people who are struggling with anxiety to be able to deal with it in a more effective way.

“The critical voices in our own heads are far more vicious than what we might hear from the outside. Our ‘inside critics’ have intimate knowledge of us and can zero in on our weakest spots.”

***Susan Ariel Rainbow Kennedy // Creative Companion:
How to Free Your Creative Spirit***

We all have one. No matter how confident we may appear on the outside, we all hear the voice inside our head. There’s no getting away from it. Some people hear it more often than others and some voices are louder than others, but we all have them. It’s the voice that tells us we’re not good enough and we never will be. It’s the voice that makes us feel alone, and that nobody else would understand. Sometimes the things that it says about us are at least partially true, and that’s the tricky part. It’s hard to know when to believe it and when to tell it to stop.

Julia Cameron talks about the negative impact this inner critic can have on all of us as artists and creative.¹³ It can keep us from creating what we were meant to create, or from doing what we were meant to do, or from being what we were meant to be. Imagine a scientist whose inner critic constantly tells him, “You’ll never figure this out, you’re wasting your time,” and then we never get the cure for rabies or pasteurized milk (Louis Pasteur). Or imagine some brothers whose inner critic tell them, “You can’t get your idea to get off the ground and into the air,” and we never get an airplane (Wright Brothers). Or the pastor who hears, “You can’t preach,” or the writer that hears, “You can’t write,” or the person who hears, “You aren’t loveable.” The list literally is endless. The reality is, we were all made for a purpose, and if we listen to the inner critic, there is a chance we will never do whatever it is we are supposed to do, because our inner critic will stop us before we even attempt to try.

¹³ Cameron, Julia. *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002.

Listening to Your Inner Critic

Individual & Group Exercise

Materials:

Paper and pen

Suggested Time:

5-10 minutes for individuals, 30 minutes for a group

Procedure:

On a piece of paper, write down as many things as possible that your inner critic says to you. List them all out, one by one. Consider the following:

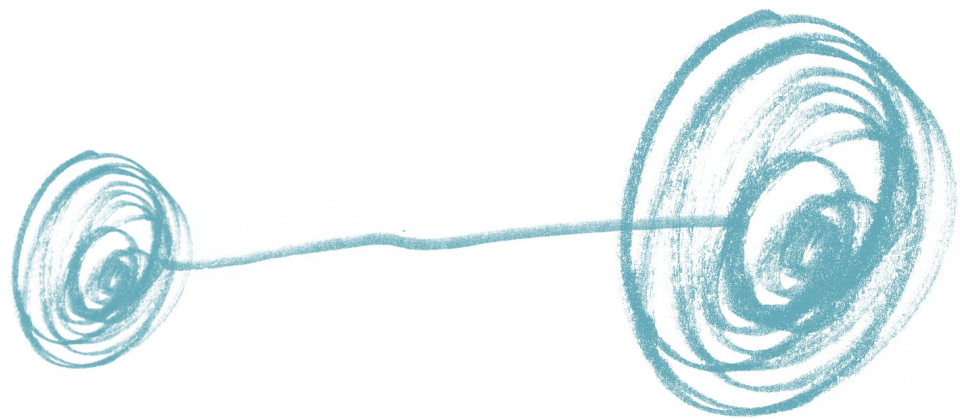
1. Read over your list. How does it make you feel? (See Quick List of 10 Emotions Exercise)
2. Which criticism has the biggest stronghold over you? How does it specifically affect you?
3. If God could respond to each of the criticisms that you wrote down, what would He say to each specific one?
4. What is your inner critic keeping you from doing? How is it holding you back?
5. If you could attempt anything and know that you would succeed, what would you attempt?
6. Consider giving your inner critic a name and a persona. The next time it speaks to you, say, "There goes _____ again..."

Optional Group Exercise:

After completing the above, consider your responses and discuss them in groups of 2-4 or as one large group. This could also be a good time of speaking genuine affirmations over one another.

Goal:

For people to see how much their inner critic is affecting them and keeping them from their purpose in life.



Chapter 3

Understanding Your

Past

Introduction

I always heard in school growing up the phrase “history repeats itself.” History, can, and often does repeat itself; but *it doesn't have to*. It is our responsibility and privilege to take a good look at our personal past, so that we can be the best stewards possible of the life that we have been given. Depending on your own story, this can be a daunting and difficult process, and for that reason, I recommend that you do it in the context of your community and support system. Understanding your own past and sharing it with others with whom you do life creates intimacy and affection for one another that is hard to reproduce elsewhere. So, take a deep breath and go back, so that you can go forward.

“If you don’t recount your family history, it will be lost. Honour your own stories and tell them too. The tales may not seem very important, but they are what binds families and makes each of us who we are.”

Madeleine L’Engle

**The following is taken from an article by AJ Gretz from www.theartofmanliness.com*

Learning about your family can be an interesting, emotional, and sometimes difficult process. Every family has a story. Some parts will leave you proud, and perhaps even inspired to pursue greater virtue and generosity. Other parts will not.

A genogram is essentially an enhanced version of the family tree. To start, you map out your family history, going back two or three generations. However, rather than simply recording the historical facts about your family, you also note patterns of behavior, and the quality of relationships between different family members. It is a really useful tool as a way of better understanding our own family history. If we know where we come from, and the particular issues and temptations that have affected our relatives, we can more easily identify and overcome those same issues ourselves.

Genograms are often used by counselors and therapists with an interest in what’s called Family Systems Theory. In a nutshell, Family Systems Theory is a way of understanding individuals as part of a larger family “system.” FST argues that evaluating a person only as an individual — outside their upbringing and family life — misses key information about them. This is because the more anxiety and conflict there is in a person’s family system, the more likely it is that they have been adversely affected by the people around them.

Genograms are useful because they help to unpack family dynamics, some of which have been in play for decades. The way your parents treated you was largely influenced by the way their parents treated them, just as your grandparents were shaped by the way their parents treated them, and so on.

Understanding the history (and sometimes, dysfunction) of your family can be a powerful opportunity for personal growth. The more we understand how we have been shaped by the network of personalities and relationships that we’ve grown up with, the more we can identify what we want to hold on to, and what we want to change.

Family Genogram in Action

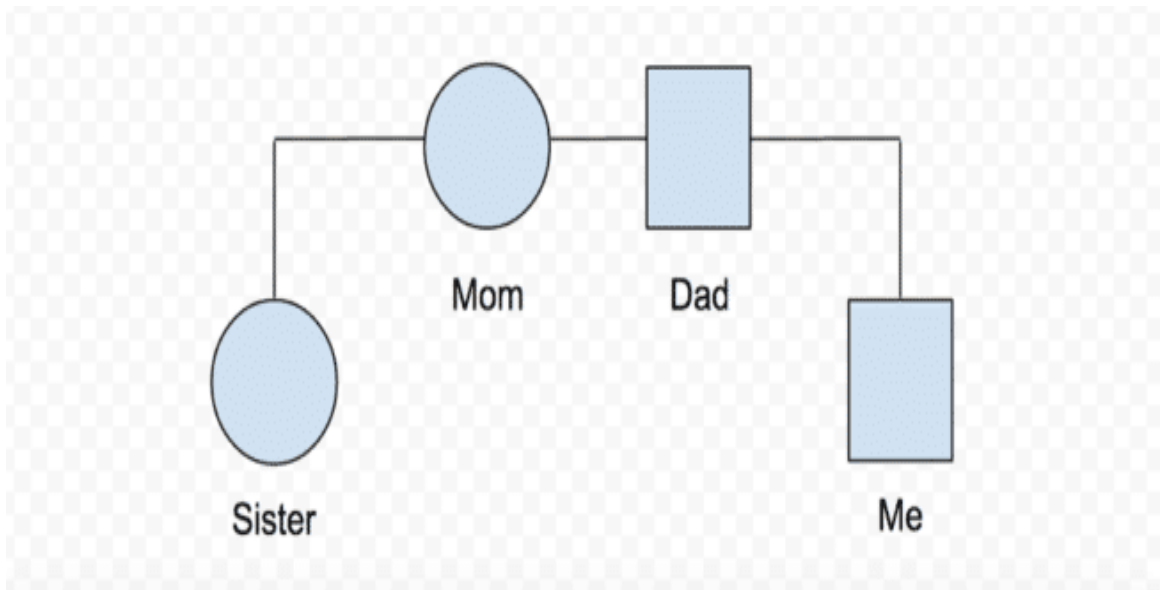
A testimony by Lydia

“As I was doing the Genogram exercise, I found that there is a divorce/remarriage pattern in my family. Before this exercise, as I was listening to the introduction of the Genogram, I had figured out that this pattern existed in my family. I had already known that my parents’ divorce had influenced my sister and me. My parents divorced because my father had an affair, and I also see that affair happening in my sister’s marriage. I always believed my father’s affair was the cause for this affair pattern. But when I was doing my Genogram exercise, I started to see this same pattern had also existed in my mom’s side. I began to put together stories I knew about my maternal grandfather’s second marriage. I also remembered something I had chosen to not think about for a long time. One I was younger, one day when I came home from school I walked in my mom’s room and I saw her and another man in the bed. I knew that that man was a married man. Doing the Genogram helped me to see a full picture of my family, and to remember and understand something I hadn’t acknowledged for a long time. It seems this pattern is on both of my parents’ sides and started even earlier on my mom’s side of the family. Now that I have my own marriage, this exercise made it more clear to me that I need to be aware of the potential for this pattern to continue.”

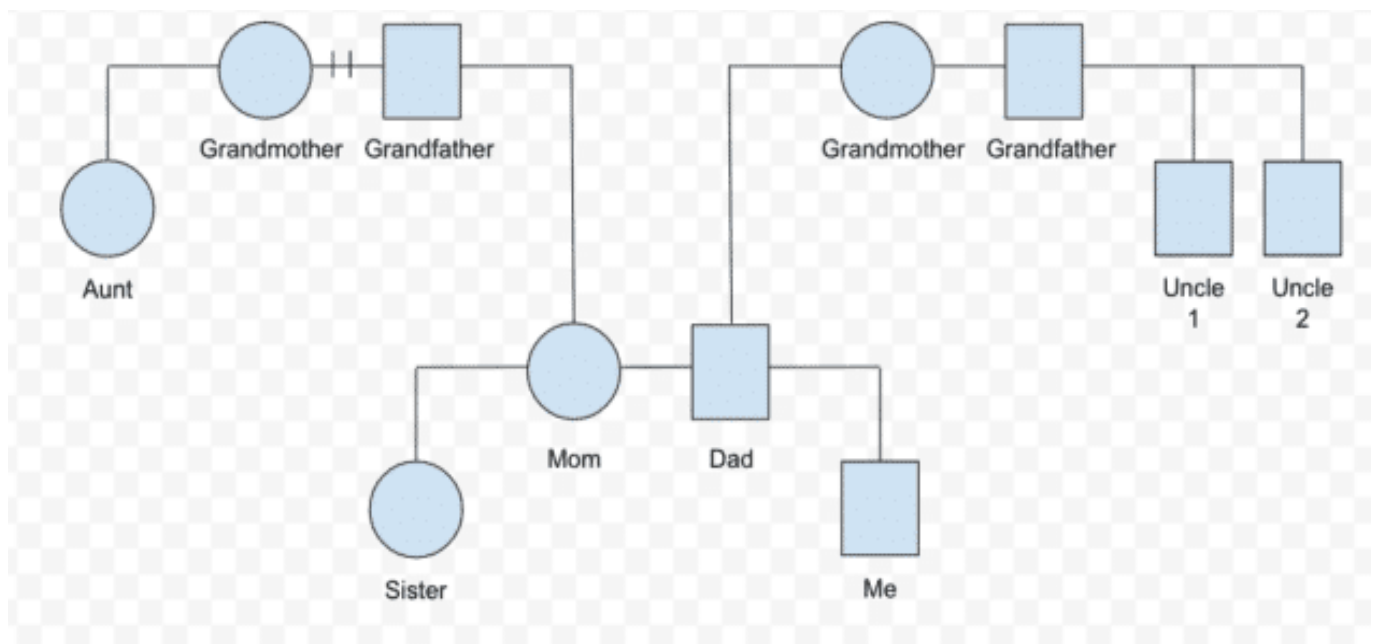
How to Make a Family Genogram

Genograms typically use different symbols as shorthand to depict both the individuals in a family system, and the nature of their relationships with one another. For example, males are often drawn as squares, and females as circles. Children are indicated through a connected solid line, usually below the names of their parents.

Here is an illustration of an immediate family:

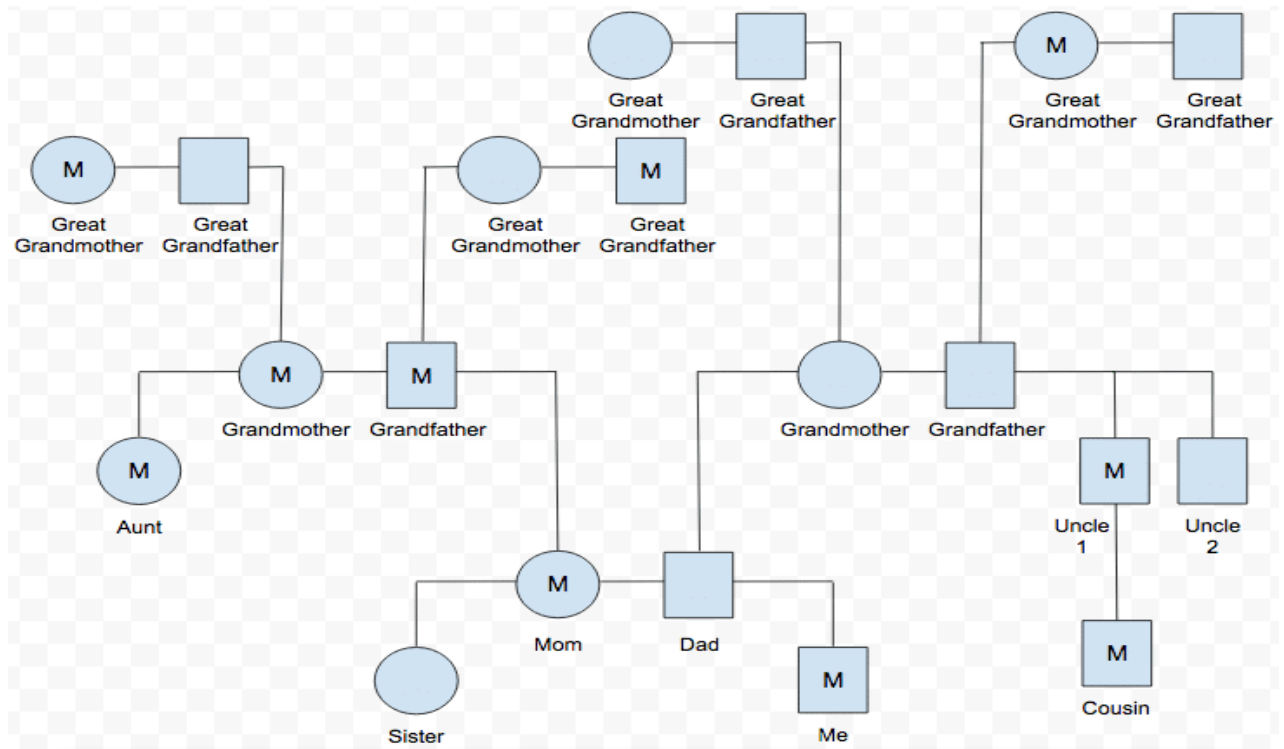


Now let's add aunts and uncles, as well as grandparents. We can also use different symbols to explain some of the relationships. Healthy relationships are marked with the solid line. Divorce can be shown with two slashes on the line:

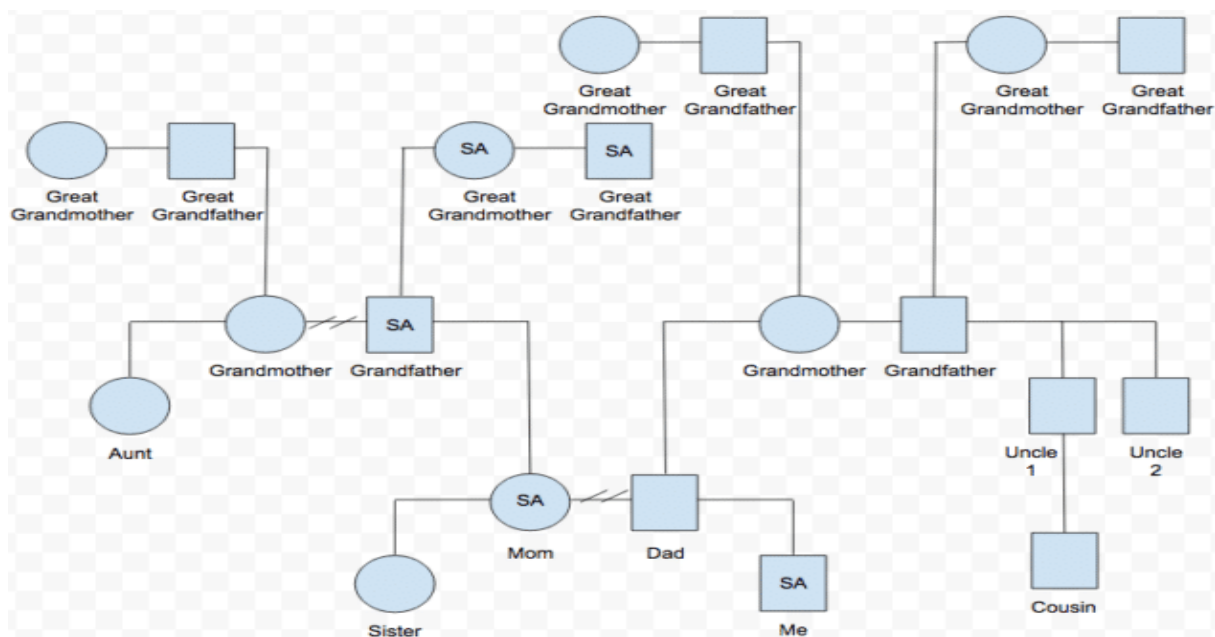


Tracking Traits

One of the things you can do with a family genogram is track how certain personality traits or talents have been passed through your family line. For example, perhaps you are a musician, and in the process of talking with family members, you realize musical ability (indicated with “M” below) runs throughout your family tree:

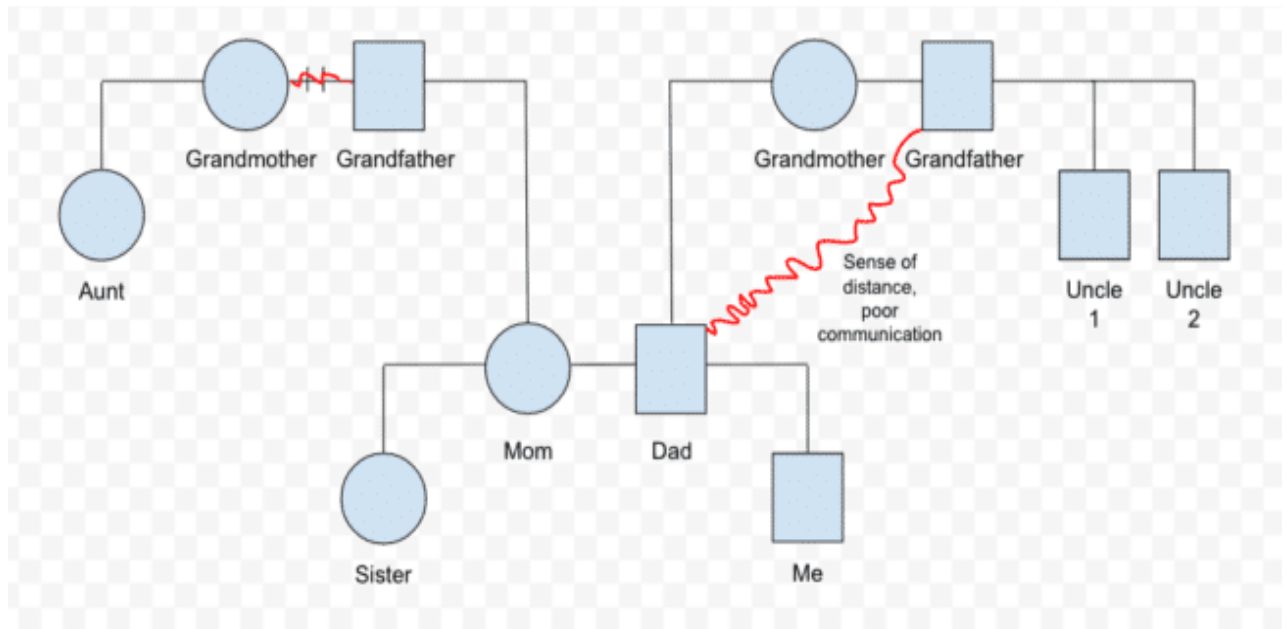


Or, perhaps you are looking for whether or not alcohol or a certain prescription medication is something you want to consume. Looking at your family history may help you understand that you could be predisposed towards certain substance abuse addictions (indicated with “SA” below) or other unhealthy vices:

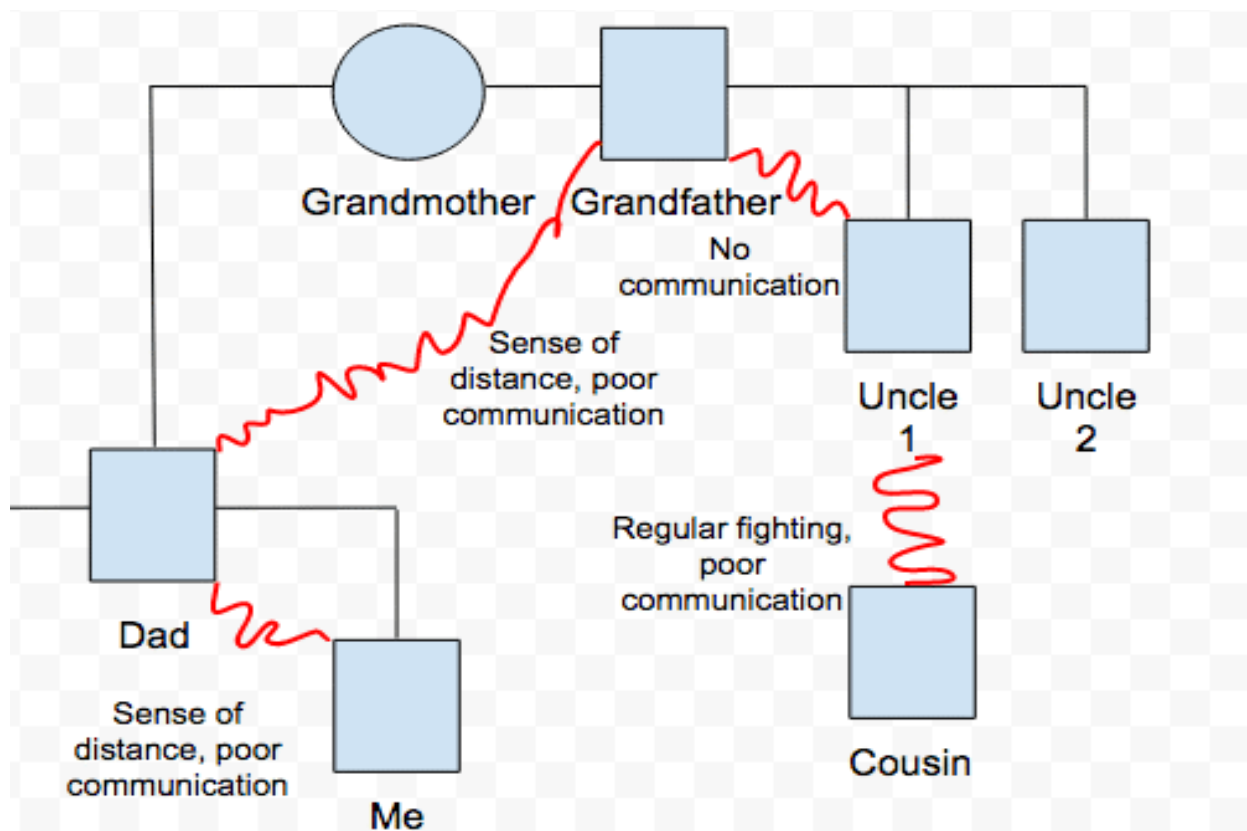


Tracking Relationships

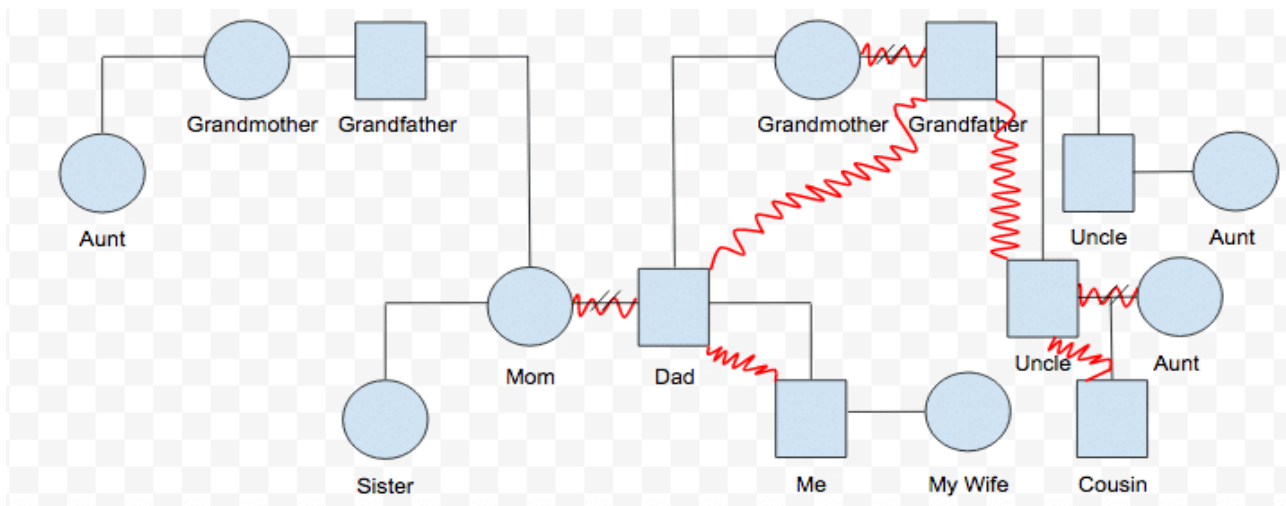
Any conflict that you want to note between family members can be marked by a squiggly line, rather than a solid one. For example, perhaps there has been ongoing conflict on your father's side between your father and grandfather. In the genogram, you would want to note this, and indicate your understanding of the conflict:



It is sometimes (though certainly not always) the case that these conflicts, if not dealt with, re-appear down the family line. As you flesh out the genogram, you may begin to notice patterns:



In the previous example, it is possible that the grandfather had a poor relationship with his father. This has created a chain of conflict among the men in the family. Recognizing this pattern would help an individual see his conflict with his father as part of a larger, systemic issue. If the man can begin to understand his father, and why his father's relationship with his father is so poor, there may be an opportunity for improvement in the relationship.



Another possibility is that this systemic conflict is the result of a divorce that did not end well. Some studies have shown that children of divorced parents have a greater risk of getting divorced themselves (called the “intergenerational transmission of divorce”). In this family system, neither the grandfather nor his children have ever really dealt with their pain and disappointment. And without doing the hard work of healing and forgiving, this conflict has had a negative effect on the children, as well as their own marriages.

There are many other possible reasons for this conflict. Abuse, mental illness, substance abuse, workaholic tendencies, etc. all can have a lasting impact on a family system. Doing a genogram is not a magic bullet to solving these problems; it does, however, present an opportunity for personal growth. By better understanding where members of your family are coming from, and what they have dealt with, you may grow in empathy for them, making healing and reconciliation easier. Genograms can also be helpful if you have a blended family, step-parents, and/or half-siblings as a result of divorce and remarriage. Understanding these networks of relationships, and the things that have shaped them, can shed light on your own place in the family system. You can do separate genograms for different family “units,” or put them all together to get a sense of the whole system around you.

Some sample questions you might want to ask family members could be:

What do you remember about growing up?

What did you like about the way your parents raised you?

What did you dislike about the way your parents raised you?

How did you meet your spouse?

If divorced, what led to that happening?

Were you close to your siblings growing up? Why or why not?

Do you feel close to your siblings now? Why or why not?

What would it take to have a better relationship with your parents? Or your siblings?

How do you feel about the way you parented me?

What do you remember about me as a child?

Possible Traits to Mark on Your Genogram

Socioeconomic Characteristics Genetic/Environmental Factors

Occupation, Education level, Community service

Genetic/Environmental Factors

Artistic, Musical, Literary abilities, Personality traits: frugality, friendliness, etc.

Genetic/Physical Characteristics

Hair/eye color, Baldness, eyesight, etc., Disease tendencies

Cultural Background

Country of origin, languages spoken, Cultural arts, practices, and traditions, Naming patterns

Religious Values

Church affiliation, Church volunteer service

Family Values

Family closeness, Desire for learning or education

Family Genogram

Individual and Group Exercise

Materials:

A piece of paper and pencil

Suggested Time:

30 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Read the Family Genogram explanation, then start 2-3 generations back if you are able, at the top of the horizontally facing paper.

For reflection time after you complete the genogram, answer the following questions:

- What is the organization of your family? Who is in it and who had/has the power?
- What patterns or themes do you see in the family? Are you repeating them?
- How was the communication among members? How has that affected how you communicate with others?
- What are the values that your family has taught you? Do you still agree with these values?
- How do your family members cope with stress (i.e., become anxious, get angry, drink, are calm and handle it well, etc.)? How do you cope with stress? Is it similar or different than members of your family?
- Are there any generational patterns that you want to break? Are there any generational values that you want to continue?

Optional Group Exercise :

After completing your genogram, share with a partner what you learned.

How much of my mother has my mother left in me?

How much of my love will be insane to some degree?

And what about this feeling that I'm never good enough?

Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?

How much of my father am I destined to become?

Will I dim the lights inside me just to satisfy someone?

Will I let this woman kill me, or do away with jealous love?

Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?

I can feel love the I want, I can feel the love I need

But it's never gonna come the way I am

Could I change it if I wanted, can I rise above the flood?

Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?

How much like my brothers, do my brothers wanna be?

Does a broken home become another broken family?

Or will we be there for each other, like nobody ever could?

Will it wash out in the water, or is it always in the blood?

John Mayer // It's In the Blood

**This section will be most effective after you have read and completed the Family Genogram section.*

Introduction

Family of Origin is a phrase and concept that is very much used in the counseling and therapy world, and for good reason. The family that we each originated from plays a very defining role in how we view, feel about, and interact with the rest of the world. Our family of origin is like a pair of glasses that we wear, custom-made just for us, and it is the lens through which we understand everything. Sometimes that lens is helpful and constructive, other times it is unhealthy and distorted. We can't know whether our lens is helping or harming us until we take a good look exploring our family of origin.

Something else that impacts families is Generational Sin, or a sin tendency that can be traced down through multiple generations. It could be something very tangible and obvious, such as addiction or abuse, or it could be more subtle, like detached mothering or cutting off relationships when they become difficult. Whatever the issue is, generational sin has an effect upon us, and it has the potential to have power over us, if we do not break the sin pattern. But it is pretty difficult to break a pattern if we do not first recognize and identify what patterns are even there.

Adult awareness is different than that of a child. As an adult, you can have the insight to recognize unhealthy and negative patterns. Once you become aware of these unhealthy patterns, you can work to address destructive patterns and behaviors that could negatively impact your relationships in your life. Awareness gives us the ability to be insightful about how our family has impacted our patterns of thought and behavior. Our core beliefs are shaped in large part by our family of origin, so it can be critical to get a handle on how our experiences have impacted us and how to make changes where necessary to create a new belief, thought pattern, or set of behaviors. Family of origin work is about growing in your understanding of how your family impacts your relationships now and how to make changes so that those experiences do not have to continually and negatively impact your current and future relationships.

Family of Origin

Group and Individual Exercise

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

30 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Take a few minutes to review your completed Family Genogram. Then reflect on the following questions and write down your answers:

1. What secrets are there in your family? They could be secrets between specific family members, or secrets between your family and outsiders. What could it look like if those secrets were made known?
2. What rules are there in your family? They could be communicated or uncommunicated, but there are expectations and standards in each family.
3. What lies do you believe about yourself, others, or the world that stem from your family? What could it look like for you to combat those lies and believe truth?
4. What tendencies or habits (both positive and negative) do you have that developed from being in your family?
5. What generational sins do you see in your family? Have any of them been broken? How did they break the pattern and who broke it? Have you continued on in any generational sin patterns? What could it look like for you to break the pattern?

Group Exercise: After responding individually to the above questions, get in groups of 2-4, or stay as one group, and discuss your findings. After each person shares the lies and negative things that they have adopted from their family of origin, allow each group member to share one truth or affirmation that they see in the person.

Goal: For people to reflect upon their family of origin and discover how they are impacted by it.

Where Have You Come From?

Where Are You Going?

Section 3

“My scars remind me that I did indeed survive my deepest wounds. That in itself is an accomplishment. And they bring to mind something else, too. They remind me that the damage life has inflicted on me has, in many places, left me stronger and more resilient. What hurt me in the past has actually made me better equipped to face the present.”

Steve Goodier

There are two fundamental spiritual formation questions that are worthy of prayerful pondering: *Where have you come from? Where are you going?* As we pursue emotional and spiritual health in our lives, we need to also identify and understand what has shaped us in the past. We also need to consider how we are moving forward in our life. The answers to these questions are not intended to be easy.

Taking the time to slow down and journal our thoughts and feelings is one way of intentionally welcoming God into the process of reflection. It allows you to pay attention to the things that provoke you, and to uncover areas of sorrow, shame, guilt, or regret. Perhaps you have been unwilling or unable to confront painful things from your past, and this is the opportunity you need to go back to the past, as difficult as that might be. God will gently reveal areas of discomfort, pain, and agitation — not to cause you harm, but so that you can identify where it hurts and turn to him for comfort and healing. God comes into our lives to redeem our pain and set us free, as He is our Counselor and Comforter.

We begin our journey to freedom when we go back to the places where we were spiritually, emotionally, and mentally wounded. But this time we go with God’s presence, help, and strength.

Where Have You Come From? Where Are You Going?

Individual Exercise

**The following exercise is adapted from Sharon Garlough Brown's Sensible Shoes¹⁴.*

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

1 hour

Procedure:

Before you begin to write your responses, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the people and events that have significantly shaped you.

Where have you come from? Ask God to give you courage to name not only the times when you have experienced his intimate presence, but also the times when you have felt God's absence. What are the formative moments that have shaped your life with God?

Where are you going? Consider the invitations God is currently giving you. How is God leading and guiding you into a deeper awareness of his love and care for you? What promises of God are giving you hope for the future? How will you continue to be with the God who is always with you?

You may wish to journal a timeline of your life, identifying significant and formative events and influences. What has shaped you? Where have you perceived God's presence or felt God's absence? What are the significant moments of experiencing and knowing God? This is a chance to see how everything fits together in the larger picture of your life.

Goal:

To give people time and space to be able to go back into past memories and invite God into the process for healing and restoration.

¹⁴ Brown, Sharon Garlough, *Sensible Shoes*.

“Anger makes you smaller, while forgiveness forces you to grow beyond what you are.”

Cherie Carter-Scott

People have always had, and will always have, someone in their life that they need to forgive. We live in a fallen world, where broken relationships and pain are a reality. But we do not need to live in bondage to the anger and hurt that comes from these broken relationships. There is a way of forgiveness that alleviates anger and frees you from the chains of bitterness.

It creeps in and settles within you, creating a toxic environment within your heart and mind, affecting how you think and feel. Withholding forgiveness can often feel like power: it is something you can control yourself, and it is something that you can choose. Since you could not control how someone else hurt you, to be in control of your forgiveness of them feels right and safe. But withholding forgiveness keeps you in bondage to what was done to offend you.

“People withhold their forgiveness, thinking that it makes them badass. But really, the unwillingness to forgive is merely the wishing that things were better. You wish that you had better, you wish that someone else were better so they could have treated you better... it’s you making wishes. And that’s not badass. To forgive is to be able to look at the person and say ‘I accept that you weren’t any better than what you were,’ ‘I accept what you were you and couldn’t have been what I wished you to be,’ ‘I accept that things were the way they were and weren’t any better.’ The ability to forgive is intertwined with the ability to accept the reality of the way things are/ the way a person is or was. You stop wishing things and you just accept.” C. Joybell C.

In 2014, a friend in the US told me about a pastor who travels around the world, teaching others about an emotional healing technique for people that uses an anger release prayer. I went to one of his trainings and was extremely encouraged by the materials, and I started using them with our team and community. We ended up inviting him to our city to train our whole team in using the method so that a widespread movement of emotional healing could take place in our community.

Anger Release Prayer in Action

A testimony by Andrea

“This anger release prayer has really helped both me personally and many others. When I first heard it and when I have shared it with others the simplicity tends to discourage. Most Christians will say that they have already prayed about their problems or feeling. But no matter what method they have already used, if the anger/disappointment/sadness is still there then they have not been able to let it go. For some reason I think the visualization of somehow packaging the emotions and hurts, releasing them to God, and him removing them really helps seal the deal. Also, after the negative feeling is gone and that personal sin and hardness of heart is removed, people not only feel relieved but can also communicate more clearly with God. Then I have seen and experienced that those words God speaks back to people about those broken relationships and feelings are especially influential because they are heard from the mouth of God and not man.”

Anger Release Prayer

Individual and Group Exercise

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time:

20 minutes for individuals, 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

If you are doing the prayer as an individual, read the following questions and steps to yourself, completing each one before moving on to the next. If you are doing it with a partner, read the following out loud, waiting for their responses after each step.

Is there anyone in your life that you feel anger/disappointment/sadness toward?

With God's help, are you willing to let go of that anger/disappointment/sadness today?

Say out loud, "With God's help, I choose today to give up my anger/disappointment/sadness toward _____ for..." and name out loud all of the things you are angry/disappointed/sad about.

When you are finished, close your eyes, and imagine yourself gathering up all the things that you just named, and putting them together in one place. Perhaps you could put them into a bag or a box. Any way that you choose to do it, gather them all up into one place, and imagine yourself handing them to God, and Him taking them away. Then share what you see, sense, hear, or feel.

Continue the above steps with as many people as needed.

Anger Release

Group & Individual Activity

Materials:

Relaxing music, drawing paper, markers or colored pencils or pastels

Music suggestion: Anoushka Shankar <<<https://youtu.be/c6MEhcDSfDg>>>

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Have participants get comfortable: suggest they may lay down, change chairs, lean back, whatever they have to do to get comfortable. In a slow and soothing voice, suggest the group to close their eyes and slowly breathe in and out. Ask them to focus their attention on their breath, slowly filling their lungs and then emptying them out. Have participants focus on their breathing for several minutes, reminding them if they become distracted to gently, with non-judgment, draw their attention back to their breathing (Continue for about 5 minutes).

After about 5 minutes, ask participants to visualize, “What are you breathing out? What is something you want to release from your body? Is it stress, is it fear, is it anger? What size is it? What shape is it? What color is it?”

After a few minutes of mediating on this, invite them to draw what they saw themselves breathing out.

Goals // Discussion:

How did they feel during the relaxation time? How did the music make them feel? What did they see themselves as breathing out? Ask about what they drew? Why did they pick the colors, shapes, size they chose to draw? How did it feel to breath those things out? What do they want to breath in instead of those things that have been filling their life?

Was this a helpful activity for anger, stress and fear release? How can a tool like this help them in the future when they are under attack?

“In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.”

Fred Rogers

The National Institute of Mental Health defines stress as simply “the brain’s response to any demand.” Stress can take on a variety of forms. It can be a single, isolated event, or it can be a recurring situation that is prolonged over a period of time, which is called *chronic stress*. “When someone experiences a stressful event, the amygdala, an area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing, sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus,” Harvard Health Publications of Harvard Medical School explains. “This area of the brain functions like a command center, communicating with the rest of the body through the nervous system so that the person has the energy to fight or flee.” This flight, fight or freeze response is what causes physical reactions such as increased heart rate, heightened senses, a deeper intake of oxygen and the rush of adrenaline. Finally, a hormone called cortisol is released, which helps to restore the energy lost in the response. The problem is that too much cortisol production inhibits the brain’s ability to function. So, to boil it all down, too much stress in your life will lead to you not being able to function.

What I have seen is that this inability to function, or not being able to handle or deal with things that used to be easy, is usually the warning sign for people that something is not right. When we start talking about what has been going on in their life, what tends to come out is a series of stressful things, all piling on top of each other. At that point is when I have found that this tool is helpful.

Stress Timeline in Action

A Testimony from Abbey

“My move overseas was fraught with layers of complicating factors. I dealt with the obvious stresses of a new marriage, the transition to life overseas, a new job, new community and a new language. But even beyond these major stresses were the normal, smaller changes in life, family, and relationships that really piled up over a span of 18 months. The combination of all the changes meant that my brain was working major overtime to keep up, and I was struggling. I was drained, exhausted and disappointed at how limited I felt in my capacity. The stress timeline gave me a complete picture of all the adaptations I’d had to unconsciously make in my recent history. This enabled me to fully understand my needs in life and ministry and to also make changes in my daily life that allowed me to better deal with my stress. *This process was an important step in my return to my normal working and living capacity!*”

Stress Timeline of the Past 18 Months

Individual or Group Exercise

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

20 minutes for individuals, 45 minutes - 1 hour for a group

Procedure:

Place your piece of paper horizontally and draw a line from left to right across the center of the page. On the far left-hand side, on the top of the page, write down the date it was 18 months ago. On the far right-hand side, on the top of the page, write down the current date.

Start filling in on the timeline different stressful events that come to your mind. You don't have to start at the beginning, you can add them in as you think of them, but put them in chronological order. You can write a single word or draw a small picture to represent the event.

After you are finished, take a few minutes to reflect upon the stresses that have been in your life over the past 18 months.

- Did you realize there were that many?
- Did you process each one after it happened?
- What negative coping mechanisms did you develop as a way of dealing with the stresses?
- What can you do now to process any of the unprocessed events?
- Are there any action steps you can take moving forward to relieve any of the stresses in your life?
- How have you seen the effects of these stresses on your life emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
- Look at the list of emotions from the Quick List of 10 Emotions exercise and choose 5 that describe how you feel when looking at your timeline.

Optional group exercise: In groups of 2-4, share your timeline with one another. Choose 2-3 of the most significant events to expound upon in more detail. Discuss one other's coping mechanisms or healthy responses to the stresses.

Goal:

For people to take a look at the reality of stress in their life, and examine how it has affected them emotionally, physically, and spiritually. To be able to process how they want to move forward in light of these stresses, and to consider how they can minimize current and future stresses.

The Armor of . . .

Group & Individual Activity

*To be done in conjunction with the stress timeline of the past 18 months activity

Materials:

Drawing paper (if available, a large piece of butcher paper to make a life size drawing), markers or colored pencils or pastels

Suggested Time:

30 minutes - 1 hour (depending on size of the group)

Procedure:

Start this activity by posing the question: is it healthy to have armor and actively use it? Give group members a chance to discuss for themselves. After they have discussed, explain that there are two types of armor we can use for protection and defending ourselves: the good and healthy armor of God that is used for keeping out lies, guarding us in Truth, and creating healthy relationships with God, others, and ourselves (Ephesians 6) and the unhealthy armor that we create for ourselves that closes others out and is used for self-preservation.

Ask group members to sit quietly for a minute or two and to imagine themselves getting ready for the day. As they get dressed, what are they armoring themselves with? How are they preparing themselves emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually for the day? Are there any special pieces of armor they put on? Is there a piece of armor they've been preparing for a long time and are waiting for the right moment to use?

Option 1: Lead group members in drawing out an outline of their body on the large piece of paper. Ask them to cover themselves in special armor — encourage them to use color, texture, patterns, lines, shapes to fully express the meaning and usage of their armor.

Option 2: Ask group members to draw their armor. What does it look like? How does it function?

Goals // Discussion:

Discussion focusing on how group members use defenses for specific purposes such as keeping people away, avoiding hurt, finding purpose and identity, reclaiming what they feel they have lost. Have group members share about their armor: what kind of armor did they draw? Was it large, heavy, burdensome? Did they learn anything new about themselves during this exercise or find any new freedom from defenses they've built in their life? Do they recognize any patterns of the stresses in their lives leading to the building of this armor?

A few years ago I was at a Gottman Method Marriage Counseling Training, with other Member Care staff and Counselors from a variety of organizations. I always love these kinds of trainings because I am surrounded by my people, the vast majority of whom have been doing this a whole lot longer than I have. This particular training was held at a counseling center that specifically meets the needs of cross-cultural workers. Just to be clear: *The only people they counsel are people who are doing work overseas.* And you have to imagine, if someone gets to the point where they need to leave their work, and fly to another country and stay there for any length of time to get help, it must be pretty serious. We aren't talking about popping into your weekly counseling appointment down the road here. I asked them, "What is the most important thing that people like me need to do in our role so that our people don't end up in your office?" The answer was, "Debriefing." So when the opportunity arose a few years after that to attend a debriefing training, I took advantage of the opportunity.

The number one reason people burn out is because they feel they have no ability to respond differently to a situation and do something more effectively. They believe they are ineffective and there is nothing they can do about it; they have no choice. You can imagine that this would lead to apathy (and hopefully by now I have convinced you that emotions are a good thing). Debriefing is a tool that helps people to discover, think about, and emotionally process any of these types of situations in their lives. It helps them to create meaning out of experiences. It tells them that what they have experienced is important. The role of the debriefer is to listen as someone shares the stories that need to be shared. Their commitment is to suspend judgment and not try to "fix" the person.

Debriefing can look several different ways, but it always has one consistent element: it is not counseling, and it is not the debriefer trying to fix all of the problems of the person being debriefed. It is a scheduled time of listening, so that the person can have the safe space where they can share anything that they need to share. It might happen after a traumatic event, or it might be a scheduled annual opportunity. It is highly encouraged that teams have an annual debrief with their members. It is best that it is not facilitated by the team leader, rather by the member care person or even someone outside the organization who is trained in debriefing and willing to set aside the time to meet with each person individually. That person can then communicate any important, agreed upon information to the relevant staff members.

Debriefing in Action

Testimony from Carl

“As my initial year-long overseas commitment came to a close, I honestly had no plan to reflect on the past year: the ways I had grown, the struggles I experienced, lessons to be learned, or even a coherent way to explain my experience to others. Debriefing allowed me the space to voice my experience. It allowed me to see the many unhealthy ways that I learned to cope with struggles of full time ministry, and it gave me action steps to grow in these areas. As I went through the debriefing process, I did not feel like I was being counseled or force-fed advice. It simply gave me the space to think through the negatives, as well as the positives, in order to grow toward being the worker God intends me to be. Without being properly debriefed, I believe I would have left my position with all sorts of learned lessons that would have had no words to them. Negative habits would have continued to be so, and positive experiences would have had no way of being passed on. Debriefing is essential to responsibly handling existing and exiting staff.”

Debriefing

Activity to be done by a debriefer and an individual person

Materials:

Paper and pen to take notes with

Suggested Time:

1 - 2 hours (depending on reason for debrief)

Procedure:

The following sample debrief is intended to be used as an annual debrief. If the debrief is intended for other purposes, the questions would need to be changed accordingly. Set up the debrief meeting to be done in a quiet place that will be free of distractions and interruptions. The debriefer can read the following to the person being debriefed, then proceed with the questions:

What you have experienced is important to us. My role in this is to listen as you share the stories that you need to share. My commitment is to suspend judgment and not try to “fix” you. At the end of our time, I will write down some general notes about what we have talked about to share with the executive team if necessary. I will show you these notes for you to approve. I will not share anything that is not written on the notes or that you do not approve of me sharing. The number one reason people burn out is because they feel they have no ability to respond differently to a situation and do something more effectively. They believe they are ineffective and there is nothing they can do about it; they have no choice. This leads to apathy. I am here to help you to discover, think about, and emotionally process any of these types of situations in your life. I am also here to equip you, if necessary, to be more effective in doing something about your situations.

1. Is there anything specific you would like to talk about? Or would you like me to ask you specific questions?
2. What significant things have you learned this past year?
3. Have you felt overwhelmed or defeated? What does that look like for you?
4. How do you cope when you are feeling overwhelmed?
5. What words would you use to describe your role? Do you believe you are an important member of your team?
6. Are there any difficult relationships you have on your team? Conflicts?
7. Do you see anyone struggling and not getting the help they need?
8. Do you feel that your voice is heard? If not, can you tell me a story of how it was not heard?
9. What is the most frequent unpleasant emotion(s) that you're experiencing? How have you been responding to that emotion(s)?
10. What are the biggest challenges and obstacles that you're facing?
11. How is your spiritual walk? How is your prayer life and time with God?

Summary of Debriefing

Date_____

Person debriefed:

Areas of concern:

Comments:

Suggestions:

Signature:_____

From the person being debriefed-things you would like the director to know:

Goals // Discussion:

For the person being debriefed to have a place where they can process and speak their thoughts and feelings, without judgment. For the team leaders to be able to get a concise, approved report of the condition of their team.



Chapter 4

Looking to the Future

Introduction

We've done a lot to help better understand, navigate, feel, and heal from the past. Now we can look to the future, and explore some tools intended to help with goal-setting and values-understanding, as well as some activities intended to help release the creative spirit in you.

“Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Theresa, Leonardo daVinci, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Einstein.”

H. Jackson Brown

My good friend Joy Wong is a busy homeschooling mom of three young kids, wife of a husband who struggles with Chron’s disease, and is an active leader at her church. Needless to say, she needs to spend her free time wisely, and she does this by investing deeply in the lives of people around her, shepherding them in very intentional ways. One of those ways is taking people through her Life Management Plan, which she shared with me, and I am so thankful that she did. It took me a few weeks to work through it, although you could make it take less time. You would be hard-pressed to do it all in one sitting, and I think you would reap the greatest benefit by spreading it out over at least a few days so that your reflections could have time to simmer and develop between exercises. Here is her description of this plan that she developed:

The life management plan is a tool to help you live your life more intentionally according to your God-given gifts, personality, life context, and values. Each page has a task to complete and each builds upon the next, but is not necessarily dependent on the results of the previous one. Before you complete each task, pray and ask God for guidance. For some of the tasks, you may consider asking for input from someone who knows you well: a spouse, trusted friend, mentor or spiritual director. This life management plan contains the following tasks:

1. Assess your key life areas
2. Assess your overall balance in the key life areas
3. Assess your strengths and spiritual gifts
4. List your dreams that have already come true
5. List your dreams for the future
6. Identify your core values
7. Identify your action words
8. Create your personal mission statement
9. Develop a rule for life
10. Wrap up with a seven year letter

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 1: Assess your key life areas

Individual Activity

For each of the key life areas, list two things you are thankful for and one challenge, frustration or concern. Please use a journal or extra piece of paper if you need more space.

Family:

Finance:

Relaxation:

Ministry:

Spiritual:

Community:

Lifelong learning:

Health:

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 2: Balancing your key life areas

Individual Activity

Pray and look over your assessment of your key life areas. In addition to considering how He is showing you where He has produced fruit and where He would like you to grow, consider the overall balance.

You do not necessarily need to have equal time in each of these areas. Pray and ask God where you might be out of balance based on your thankfulness and concerns above.

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 3: Assess your strengths

Individual Activity

What specific strengths, skills, talents, gifts or abilities have you been given by God's grace?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.
- 21.
- 22.
- 23.
- 24.
- 25.

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 4: Dreams That Have Come True

Individual Activity

Make a list of your dreams that have already come true. You may include how you have seen God make true dreams you didn't know you had.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 5: Dreams For The Future

Individual Activity

What are your dreams for the future? A dream is a God-given idea, plan, or goal that leads to God-honoring results. Take into consideration the key life areas, although you do not need to have a dream for each one. Take into consideration your gifts, strengths and talents, although, again, you do not need to have a dream for each one.

What obstacles will you need to overcome for these dreams to come true?

Consider the following passages. How do they speak to your obstacles or your beliefs?

Ephesians 4:22-24

Philippians 4:8

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

1 Peter 1:13

Romans 12:1-2

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 6: Identify Your Core Values

Individual Activity

Core values are words or statements about what is important to me. They help with integrity, decision making, and communication.

Sample core values:

- *I value God as my Father, therefore I will give priority to spending time with, listening, speaking, enjoying and worshipping Him.*
- *I value purity of life therefore I will guard what my eyes see through books, magazines, tv, movies or the internet.*
- *I value freedom to choose, therefore I recognize my privilege and responsibility to receive counsel, think, plan and endeavor to make wise choices.*

As you write out your core values, consider your key life areas, strengths and gifts, and dreams.

1. I value _____,
therefore _____.
2. I value _____,
therefore _____.
3. I value _____,
therefore _____.
4. I value _____,
therefore _____.
5. I value _____,
therefore _____.
6. I value _____,
therefore _____.
7. I value _____,
therefore _____.
8. I value _____,
therefore _____.

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 7: Key Verbs

Individual Activity

Look at the list of verbs below and consider your key life areas, strengths, gifts, dreams and values. What are three or four verbs that characterize who you are, how you serve, and/or how others benefit? Ask those close to you for their input on what they see in you.

Advance	Open	Empower	Save	Involve
Brighten	Pass	Engage	Share	Light
Choose	Practice	Enlighten	Team	Manifest
Communicate	Present	Enthuse	Translate	Mediate
Compose	Promise	Express	Venture	Model
Construct	Pursue	Finance	Worship	Nurture
Create	Rebuild	Further	Appreciate	Participate
Deliver	Reflect	Give	Challenge	Persuade
Direct	Remember	Identify	Combine	Prepare
Draft	Respect	Integrate	Compliment	Progress
Educate	Satisfy	Lead	Consider	Provide
Encourage	Serve	Make	Counsel	Reclaim
Enhance	Support	Maximise	Delight	Refine
Entertain	Trade	Mentor	Develop	Release
Explore	Value	Motivate	Distribute	Renew
Facilitate	Work	Organize	Drive	Sacrifice
Foster	Affirm	Perform	Enable	Sell
Generate	Build	Praise	Engineer	Speak
Host	Collect	Produce	Enliven	Strengthen
Inspire	Complete	Promote	Excite	Understand
Launch	Continue	Receive	Extend	Volunteer
Love	Defend	Reduce	Forgive	Write
Master	Demonstrate	Reform	Gather	Uplift
Meditate	Discover	Remove	Heal	
Mold	Dream	Restore	Improve	

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 8: Your Personal Mission Statement

Individual Activity

A personal mission statement is a declaration by a person that tells who they are, why they exist, and what are to be the results of their lives.

What questions does a personal mission statement answer?

1. *Who am I? What am I?*
2. *Why do I exist?*
3. *What do I do?*
4. *How do I do it?*
5. *What are my areas of influence?*
6. *What are the results to the ones I serve?*

After you consider which verbs best display your values from Task 7, construct a sentence that includes all of the verbs and that embodies what you aspire your life to be about. Ask those close to you for their input on what they see in you. They can choose their own verbs for you, and then construct their own sentence with them. Draw from your key life areas, strengths and gifts, dreams, values, and action words to develop your personal mission statement.

My Mission Statement:

Friend's Mission Statement about Me:

Friend's Mission Statement about Me:

Friend's Mission Statement about Me:

Friend's Mission Statement about Me:

Examples of mission statements:

- My mission is to equip God's people to do His work, reflecting Jesus and His Kingdom while helping others to do the same.
- I exist to glorify God by loving Him and people; by strengthening, encouraging and building up my family, leaders, and others and to help them reach their God given potential.
- I exist to facilitate affirm, refresh and equip people in ways that will help them be more fulfilled and effective in their personal life, family, ministries and work.
- My mission is to passionately love God and my family, to enjoy His creation, to stretch and network God's people for the sake of those who have never heard of Christ.

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 9: Develop a “Rule of Life”

Individual Activity

“A rule of life is a commitment to live your life in a particular way. It is meant to be crafted with prayer and discernment, in partnership with God, as you consider the way God made you and the values He has inscribed upon your heart. Once written, it serves as a tool that can help you make decisions for your life and determine how best to order your days.

The first example of a Christian rule of life came from the Desert Fathers, a monastic community of mystics living in Egypt around the third century AD. The most well-known rule is the rule of St. Benedict, written fifteen hundred years ago, which was created to help his community of monks translate their faith into the habits and rhythms of their shared daily life. His famous rule has inspired many communities and individuals to develop their own rules with a similar intention.

Our English word *rule* is derived from the Latin *regula*, meaning “a straight piece of wood,” “a ruler,” and, by extension, “a pattern, model, or example.” Esther de Waal, a longtime student of monastic spirituality, writes that “*regula*, a feminine noun, carries gentle connotations: a signpost, a railing, something that gives me support as I move forward in my search for God.” A rule of life, then, serves as a gentle guide that keeps you trained toward God.

In this way, a rule of life is different than the goals, intentions, or resolutions we tend to set for ourselves. Those methods are task-based and measurable, and they’re often focused on what we do. A rule of life, on the other hand, helps you become. It is comprised of several simple statements that guide the posture of your life and the living of your days. It is not lived perfectly but can be lived faithfully while fostering within you an integrated and embodied life of faith.”¹⁵

You can organize your Rule of Life into different categories and place different topics within the categories based on your own situation. Taking into consideration your season of life, personality, key life areas, gifts, strengths, dreams, values, and life mission, develop a rule of life. For each item, decide on a rhythm that you would like to follow daily, weekly, monthly, and/or yearly. This is simply a tool which may assist in helping you to live intentionally in the presence of God. Fill out your Rule of Life on the next page.

¹⁵ <https://sacredordinarydays.com/pages/rule-of-life>

For example, the worship section of your Rule of Life may look like:

Worship

Silence and Solitude

Daily: each morning I will spend 5 minutes in silence with God.

Weekly: three times each week I will set aside 20 minutes to present myself to God in silence to listen and focus on Him.

Monthly: once a month I will spend 2 hours alone in nature to reflect on the month

Yearly: once a year I will plan a 2-3 day silent retreat.

Rule of Life

Worship

1. Scripture

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

2. Silence and solitude

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

3. Prayer

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

Rest

1. Sabbath
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly
2. Simplicity
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly
3. Play and Recreation
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly

Work

1. Service and mission
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly
2. Care for the church body
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly
3. Study
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Yearly

Relationships

1. Emotional health

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

2. Family

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

3. Community

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Yearly

Joy's Life Management Plan

Task 10: Wrap-Up

Individual Activity

At this point, you have learned a lot about yourself and the direction and shape you hope your life will take. To wrap-up and move forward, plan how you will use what you discovered here by imagining what your life will look like for the next seven years. Write a letter to friend or mentor imagining it is seven years from today. What will you tell him/her about how you spent your last 7 years? Let this guide you into how you will act and think as you go forth from here.

Seven year letter:

“In order to retrieve your creativity, you need to find it.”

Julia Cameron // The Artist’s Way

A few decades ago, writer Julia Cameron was struggling with alcoholism and depression. She was afraid of sobriety, however, because she knew that she could only write when she was using alcohol. Or so she thought. Through her own personal recovery, she learned that she had been numbing her emotions and experiences, and thus stifling her creativity for years. She began to realize that she was not alone in this. That in one way or another, we are all numbing — through drugs or alcohol, shopping, media, even through the appreciation of *other people’s creativity*. She believes that we are all creative people, created by a Creator, to create, and all of us have numbed and stifled our creativity to some degree and it is time for that to stop. So she developed a recovery program for creatives, a 12-week program designed to draw out the dormant creativity that lies within each of us. The weekly tasks in the program entailed thought-provoking questions and assignments, and were so successful in her classes that she wrote a book of the 12-week program, called *The Artist’s Way*¹⁶. The “morning pages” are the primary tool of her creative recovery.

¹⁶ Cameron, Julia. *The Artist’s Way*.

Creative Recovery: Morning Pages

Individual Activity

Materials:

Lined notebook paper and a pen

Suggested Time:

10-15 minutes, first thing in the morning

Procedure:

Very simply, the morning pages are just three, handwritten pages that are written first thing every morning. There is not wrong way to do them, and they are not meant to be a form of art, or to be read by anyone, or even necessarily to be re-read by you. In fact, you can throw them away as soon as you finish writing them. The morning pages are meant to let the logical left brain stand aside and allow the artist to play. The logic brain was and is our survival brain that works on known principles. Anything unknown is perceived as wrong and possibly dangerous. It is our censor and our second, third, and fourth thoughts. Artist brain is our inventor, our child; it puts things together and is holistic. Morning pages get us to the other side of our fear, of our negativity, of our moods. They take us to the place where we hear the still, small voice that is at once our Creator's and our own. You can write about what you have to do that day, or what is worrying you, or the fight you got in with your husband, or about that trip that you really hope to take next month. You can write about anything. Don't overthink the morning pages. Just put three page's worth of anything on the paper, and then do three pages again tomorrow.

Goal:

To help any artist try something creative, and to knock down the barriers to creativity. Why do we write morning pages? To get to the other side.

Creative Recovery: Buried Dreams

Individual & Group Activity

**The following exercise is taken from Julia Cameron's The Artist's Way.*

Materials:

Lined notebook paper and a pen

Suggested Time:

15 - 30 minutes, depending on size of group

Procedure:

As recovering creatives, we often have to excavate our own pasts for the shards of buried dreams and delights. Do a little digging, please. Be fast and frivolous. This is an exercise in spontaneity, so be sure to write your answers out quickly.

1. List five hobbies that sound fun.
2. List five classes that sound fun.
3. List five things you personally would *never* do that sound fun.
4. List five skills that would be fun to have.
5. List five things you used to enjoy doing.
6. List five silly things you would like to try once.

After you have written your answers, get in groups of 2-4 and discuss your findings. Ask one another the following questions:

1. Which of your answers surprised you the most? The least?
2. What is one thing that you can do this week that is related to one of your answers?

Goal:

To be able to quickly and without filtering, learn about desires and interests that we may have that we have not been paying attention to.

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