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# GUIDELINES FOR GROUP FACILITATORS FOR CORE HEALING (FROM SEXUAL ABUSE): A JOURNEY OF HOPE

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## Guidelines for *Core Healing* Group Facilitators

**Thank you** for being willing to facilitate a *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* group! This facilitators' workbook is written at the request of people who currently facilitate *Core Healing* groups because they know some of the challenges you'll face—and want you to be equipped to effectively help people heal from sexual trauma. Thank you to Rosaura Zeghir, Nilce Moraes, and Agnes Bradbury-Almeida for encouraging this project. This contains only guidelines and is not intended as a master class.

*Group Facilitators:* your first step could be to find a prayer team, people who will commit to pray diligently for you and your *Core Healing* group throughout its “journey of hope.” Due to confidentiality concerns, you will not be able to share details about your group members' concerns, but you can ask your prayer team to pray specific Scripture, asking God to protect each person traveling through this healing journey. Prayer is so important that it will be mentioned several times in this preparatory workbook.

If you haven't completed training in helping people heal from trauma, now would be a good time to do so. Two of the many courses available include: “Evidence-Based Trauma Treatments and Interventions” and “The 10 Competencies of Trauma, PTSD, Grief & Loss,” by Robert Rhoton, PsyD, and Eric Gentry, PhD, available through the International Trauma Training Institute at <http://traumaonline.net/online-training>.

Please read books that can broaden your understanding of how trauma impacts the human mind, soul, and body. Two of many books respected by trauma experts are “The Body Remembers” by Babette Rothschild, and “The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma,” by Bessel van der Kolk, MD. Because of the complexity of trauma work, *Core Healing* seeks to help individuals move through healing carefully and intentionally. Even so, each person is different; working with individuals in group necessitates paying careful attention to each person's needs, body language, and concerns. That is one of many reasons you need a co-facilitator!

***Core Healing* includes eight stages.** You don't need to explain the stages in group, but it's good for you to have a sense of the direction you're going. The first stage of *Core Healing* is **Stabilization**, which includes cognitive (thinking) and coping training, which you'll find in chapters one, two and three. *Stabilization* is vital in order to avoid re-traumatizing group members who might not be ready to either talk about or hear trauma stories at the beginning of the *Core Healing* work. This stage allows participants to develop essential coping skills so they can manage ramifications of their own past trauma. Therefore, we do not allow people to begin talking about specific trauma stories until we've completed the three Stabilization chapters. Please pray that the people in your group will be safe enough to know healing is possible, hopeful enough to know they aren't defined by sexual trauma, and prepared to move forward in life!

According to Onno van der Hart and Kathy Steele, “directly addressing traumatic memories is not always helpful and can sometimes be damaging to our clients.” When groups allow people to discuss details of their trauma before preparing them to cope with such information, individuals can become overwhelmed, sometimes even retraumatized by the group itself. We can avoid causing such harm when we steadily, purposefully allow the group to focus on healing and moving forward in life.

Stage Two, **Competence**, is covered in chapter four.

**Security**, Stage Three, is thoroughly discussed in chapter five.

**Forgiveness** is Stage Four and—due to its complexity—includes chapters six and seven. During this chapter’s discussion, group members should be ready to hear others’ stories. Even so, both co-facilitators need to observe group members’ body language and be sure people aren’t dissociating, or being emotionally and/or mentally taken back into their own trauma experiences.

Do repeated grounding exercises (see pages 181-182), if needed.

**Identity**, Stage Five, is explained in chapter eight.

**Purpose**, Stage Six, is covered in chapter nine.

**Belonging**, Stage Seven, is in chapter ten.

**Living as a Victor**, Stage Eight, includes chapters eleven and twelve. Chapter twelve, by the way, is one groups don’t usually complete together. Designed to provide ongoing encouragement after the course work is completed, chapter 12 provides an opportunity to briefly summarize the course. Many groups use that week for sharing individual projects—anything from a poem, collage, song, or a craft—something showing their group how they’ve grown during the journey through *Core Healing*.

Your group could meet for either 90 minutes or two hours; because of the amount of material to discuss and time needed for people to bond with one another, two hours is definitely the recommended group session length! In any case, you won’t likely be able to discuss everything in any given week’s chapter. As you prepare each week’s lesson, take time to highlight points you want to be sure to discuss—and ask your group members to do the same as they prepare for the week’s discussion. [Always emphasize as your group ends that it’s vital for everyone to get going on the next week’s chapter by the day after your group meets. You might tell them something like: “spending time preparing each lesson can accelerate your healing!”]

### **Qualifications of Facilitators**

- Before facilitating/leading a *Core Healing* group, all leaders should have gone through the *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* workbook at least once and be confident that they not only understand\* the material but are prepared to help others apply it. [\*Keep in mind that it’s sometimes necessary to read something several times before you understand it!]
- All facilitators/leaders need to be at least 18 years old.
- Because the workbook integrates biblical concepts with proven counseling methods, we recommend that facilitators be believers in Jesus Christ as described in John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8-9, etc., people who are walking in fellowship with God as described in 1 Corinthians 1:4-10, 1 John 1:7, etc. Please note: *facilitators need to be careful not to impose their personal beliefs on group members, many of whom may not even have an interest in God. However, by being assured of their own beliefs, facilitators should be better prepared to answer questions group members might raise during the week’s discussion.*

- If facilitators are survivors of sexual abuse, they need to have completed enough of their own healing work that they won't be "triggered" when observing group members' traumatic stressors during group discussions. We want to avoid both transference and counter-transference.
- If facilitators haven't experienced sexual abuse, they need to have worked with survivors of sexual abuse in either a professional or lay counseling capacity\* to the point that they understand the basics of working with trauma and helping people heal. [\*However, if one facilitator is experienced, he or she can help train the other facilitator, as long as that facilitator has other experience working with groups.]
- Group leaders agree to pray for each group member and to diligently protect the confidentiality of group members' concerns.
- Each facilitator is familiar with chapter eleven and agrees to avoid being a "Rescuer" of group members and will instead be available to "Coach" them in their unique healing journeys, setting appropriate boundaries regarding time, etc.
- Since group work is designed to help each group member heal, it is imperative that group facilitators encourage *each* person to participate in discussion, which includes group leaders being careful not to talk more than group members.
- Group facilitators agree to spend adequate time preparing for each week's group meeting, which could include writing your insights, ideas, and applications in a journal or notebook to bring with you. That way, each time you facilitate a new *Core Healing* group, you can either begin a new journal of fresh ideas and insights, or use your completed notebook.
- Each group member needs to have a copy of *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope*. Because this is copyrighted material, it's not OK for you to make copies of the book, unless you've received written permission from the author. Encourage everyone to bring a Bible, notebook or journal, pen, or pencil each week to maximize the time together.
- If possible, offer groups for teenagers [being sure to get a signed release from parents or guardians of minors] that meet separately from groups of older adults. Of course, there are exceptions to this. Just as God offers an original, wonderful plan for each life (see Ephesians 2:10), your group can include multiple ages if those group members will work well together.
- Group members need to be old enough to understand the concepts described in *Core Healing*; for most people, that would be age 16 and older, but there could be exceptions. It is possible that a parent and adolescent will want to attend a group together. If their communication is healthy, if both agree to group guidelines, and both are aware of the course content, group facilitators could allow them to participate together. This, though, is up to each facilitator's awareness and discernment.
- Offer distinct, separate men's groups and women's groups—with men facilitating men's groups and women facilitating women's groups—both to avoid difficult situations and so group members will feel comfortable discussing issues related to sexual trauma. A vital goal of facilitators is to create a comfortable environment conducive to maximum healing!

## Stages of Group Development

In 1965, Dr. Bruce Tuckman delineated four stages of group development; he later added a fifth stage. According to Tuckman, as a group begins, it's in the stage known as **Forming**. During Forming, you'll accomplish the basics of understanding how the group works together, learn each other's names, and begin to get acquainted with one another. Some group members will be nervous about how the *Core Healing* journey will begin; others will be excited. During this initial stage, it's vital for facilitators to set the tone—a strong, loving, hopeful tone—for the group! During *Forming*, do not allow group members to discuss their specific trauma stories (see Stage One).

Be prepared to graciously answer members' questions. For example, if someone says, "I notice there's a lot of Bible verses in this workbook—and I don't believe the Bible," you could simply note that secular colleges and universities offer courses such as one entitled, "The Bible as Literature." Verses cited in *Core Healing* could objectively represent historically-respected literature. [That doesn't minimize the importance of God's Word; instead, it offers an opportunity for someone to develop a new, unbiased perspective while reading portions of the Bible—perhaps for the first time.]

The next stage, **Storming**, could be a bit turbulent as everyone gets used to working together. Don't be discouraged during the *Storming* phase! But do *lead* the group! Sometimes people will try to take over leadership at this point, changing the subject, steering the discussion to topics that aren't in the workbook. Because *Core Healing* has been carefully written to avoid topics and triggers that could derail members' progress while steadily, carefully moving forward into healing, it's important for facilitators to keep the group's discussion "on track."

While prayerfully noticing group members' concerns, the group should readily move into the third stage, **Norming**. This is when group discussions pick up and people begin feeling comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. The group will begin responding to workbook content and to one another during *Norming*.

In the fourth stage, **Performing**, group members build each other up as they interact, helping one another steadily grasp each of *Core Healing's* twelve goals, as their lives are rebuilding, renewing, and being restored, from the inside out.

The fifth and final stage of group development is known as **Adjourning**, during which you'll help group members recognize their progress—and see themselves as prepared to live beyond being victims or even as survivors but as "more than conquerors," people who thrive in Christ.

## General Group Guidelines

**Atmosphere:** if you can, have background music playing as people arrive and until it's time for the discussion to begin. This is a great job to delegate to someone comfortable with technology. [When the music stops could be the "cue" for group members to know it's time to begin.] Be sure the music is peaceful, with lyrics reflecting God's hope and love. Following are just a few ideas—from thousands of options—for background music [obviously, you'll know your group preferences and can tailor music to meet their needs/wants]:

Audrey Assad, Sparrow Record *Show Me*

Avalon *Orphans of God*

Family Church Worship *Anchor*

Keith & Kristyn Getty *In Christ Alone*

Natalie Grant *Held | Awaken*

Mercy Me *The Hurt & The Healer*

Michael O'Brien (with album titles following song titles)

*Yours to Keep* (Conviction)

*Be Still My Soul* (Be Still My Soul)

*Herein is Love* (Be Still My Soul)

*Contentment* (Be Still My Soul)

*I Want to Know you More* (Be Still My Soul)

Rend Collective (with album titles following song titles)

*More Than Conquerors* (The Art of Celebration)

*Joy* (The Art of Celebration)

*Finally Free* (The Art of Celebration)

*Strength of my Heart* (The Art of Celebration)

*My Light House* (The Art of Celebration)

Selah *Bless the Broken Road | Gentle Healer*

John Michael Talbot (with album titles following song titles)

*Sofia* (Pathways to Wisdom)

*Eloquentia* (Pathways to Wisdom)

*Be Not Afraid* (Table of Plenty)

*Holy Darkness* (Table of Plenty)

*Table of Plenty* (Table of Plenty)

Tenth Avenue North

*Healing Begins*

*You Are More*

*Satisfy My Soul*

*It is Well*

**Confidentiality:** Please stress the necessity of confidentiality at your first *Core Healing* group meeting and during subsequent meetings, if indicated. When a person finally feels safe enough to share his or her pain and someone in the group talks about it outside of group, it will result in a horrible sense of betrayal. At the beginning of your first meeting, please have everyone sign a simple agreement, stating they will not talk about group members or anything discussed during the group's time together. [A Sample Agreement is included in the Guidelines after notes explaining the Introduction Week] If you want to send group emails or texts, be sure to ask all members' permission before including them on a group mailing or text list, or before adding their contact information to a list you hand out to the group. Professional therapists: be sure your email is HIPAA compliant. Even so, do not share confidential information in group emails or texts.

**Pace:** As you begin the first session, tell the group it's important to **wait** to talk about their trauma until everyone has attended at least three group sessions, or long enough to develop specific skills to help with trauma management. If people begin sharing their stories too soon, you'll risk causing more trauma than you resolve. Hearing about others' experiences can actually cause survivors to feel like their own trauma is happening all over again. [You'll notice I'm repeating this concern. That is because I have met with many clients who have been re-traumatized in other groups, with leaders who do not understand these concerns. I want each of us to do everything we can to keep people safe.] If possible, meet for a total of thirteen weeks, using the first week to sign confidentiality agreements, introduce each other, etc. The group can decide if they'd like to add a "celebration session" after completing the course material.

**Co-Facilitators:** *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* groups benefit from having co-facilitators. If your group has four or more people, a co-facilitator is imperative. If at all possible, have the same person co-lead with you each week. You can alternate weeks, with one facilitating the discussion one week while the other carefully observes group members' body language and brings up concerns or questions the lead facilitator might miss. For example, the co-leader might notice one person begin to speak while another person "talks over" that person. When that occurs, the co-leader could wait for the "talk-over" second speaker to finish a sentence or two, then gently interrupt, looking at the person who initially began to speak, stating something like, "I heard [name of person] begin to say something. Then, turning to that person, using her name, say something like, "Please say more..." [The reason for doing this is that many people have great difficulty saying *anything* in a group context. If someone interrupts them, they might not have courage to try again. The facilitator can help alleviate that concern.]

**Closing group membership:** for your group to function productively, it needs to be "closed" to new members by either the second or third week. Explain what week your group will "close" to the group the first time you meet, then stick to what you announced. If a group continually adds new members, it's impossible for people to feel safe with one another, or to learn how to work together.

**On time:** encourage all group members to arrive on time, and be sure to begin and end on time. You can schedule the group 15 minutes before discussion is scheduled to begin to allow time for people to get a cup of coffee, bottle of water, get acquainted, find their seats, etc.

**Check-in:** begin each week's group by briefly checking in—with the emphasis on **brief**: no more than one minute per person. Ask each person to state how last week's group helped them throughout the week, or ask how they're doing with practicing relaxation exercises, etc.

**Be positive:** It's the group facilitators' job to ensure that the group stays positive and on track. If someone criticizes another group member's comments, or talks "over" another person, the facilitator can interrupt and say something like, "For healing to occur, we need to be sure this is a safe place and that our group interaction builds each other." Observe group members' body language. If there is observable tension, pause and do a relaxation or grounding exercise; don't be afraid of healthy conflict. Instead, address conflict in healthy ways.

**Prayer partners:** encourage each group member to have two to three prayer partners throughout the weeks the group meets. If someone doesn't know someone "safe" to ask for prayer, assure him/her that the facilitators will diligently be in prayer. [When you invite group members to find prayer partners, remind them to share only their own concerns, not other group members' confidential concerns.]

**Grounding:** Begin each week's discussion with a grounding exercise [see Grounding Exercises, pages 181-182]. By the third or fourth week, you could ask group members to bring their own grounding ideas, sharing with the group what they've found helpful to keep themselves grounded between group meetings. If you observe group members becoming agitated, pause to do a grounding exercise during the group discussion.

**Time to share:** When it becomes clear that everyone understands grounding, allow time for participants to openly share, making sure other group members are attentive and responsive to their concerns. Feedback from the group should include comments indicating affirmation and understanding. Please do NOT interrupt discussion when healthy, proactive interaction is occurring.

**"Over-sharing":** At times, a group member might bring up ideas—sometimes with great "authority"—that takes the discussion away from what it's designed to do. When someone continually dominates the discussion, gently interrupt with something like, "Thanks for sharing, [name of person]. We need to continue with this week's lesson." Or, "We have so much to cover that we need to move on to the next page [thought, idea, etc.]" You could turn to the person you've interrupted, smiling, and say, "I'd be happy to meet with you one-to-one to hear more about this." If one or two members' dominance becomes a repeated concern, you could do the **penny exercise**, giving each group member two pennies at the beginning of group, stating, "We want to be sure everyone gets to participate in our discussion this week. Each time you speak; put one of your pennies at the center of the table [or on a coffee table, etc.]. When you've 'spent' both pennies, your part of the discussion is to carefully continue listening while other group members share their thoughts and ideas."

**Stimulate learning during group discussion:** help group members become at ease, modeling how to deeply interact with one another. Don't stop with one person's comment, question or answer. Ask, "What do the rest of you think? Any other ideas?" encouraging several group members to participate.

**Encourage:** build the group by affirming people's answers and contributions. Never blatantly reject someone's response. If it's clearly out of line, you could gently ask something like, "How did you come to that conclusion?" or graciously turn to the group and ask, "Any other thoughts on this?"

**Summary statements:** use the last ten minutes of your group session to summarize the group's discussion. [If possible, schedule 90 to 120 minutes for each week's Core Healing group session. Because of the amount of material to cover, two hours is the "preferred" meeting length. However, many groups simply don't have that much time to meet, in which case 90 minutes is fine!]

**Homework:** Before ending on time, remind the group when you'll be meeting again and what chapter you'll be discussing. Congratulate them for the great work they're doing! If indicated, remind the group occasionally that they'll get as much out of the time together as they invest in the work throughout the week.

### Introduction Week

If desired, you could have each member make a name tent. For this, have large index cards (e.g. 5 x 8") or card stock of similar size, and have each person's "name tent" folded in half vertically before you meet for group. Provide wide-tip markers and an example of tents, with co-facilitators' names written in large letters. [If you're short on time, you could have members' names on their tents when they arrive.] If you have time, you could ask each person to draw something (or have stickers available for those who are uncomfortable with the idea of trying to draw something) on the card that will help the group get to know one another. Then, have all group members place their cards facing away from them so others can easily see their names. If you can, it's best to be seated around a large table. If a table isn't available where you meet, your group can be seated in a circle and place the cards on the floor, again so that they are easily visible to others to reduce the tension of trying to remember names.

Allow adequate time for group members to get acquainted and complete paperwork during your first week together. If your group is meeting for 13 weeks, the first week can include a discussion of the Introduction, time to get acquainted, and time for each person to fill out and sign a group agreement emphasizing confidentiality. Give group members your contact information.

During your first group meeting, ask group members if they're willing to have their contact information on a list that will be either emailed or handed out to all group members. Usually everyone is comfortable doing this, but be sure no one feels *forced* to put his or her names on a group list. [Even in small ways like this, your group will realize you value their personal freedom and choice. Someone who has been abused might feel happily surprised to be respectfully asked for permission.]

For all who say "yes" to the list, ask them to put their names, addresses, email address, phone #, etc. on a sign-up sheet which you'll have ready to go before you arrive at group, with columns for name, address, email and phone numbers. You could ask your co-facilitator or another trusted group member to compile the list to be sent to everyone via email before your next meeting, or—if your group prefers a paper list, to be printed and given to everyone at your next meeting.

Page ii of the *Core Healing* Introduction explains that each of the twelve chapters has five sections; each section is designed to take about 30 minutes daily to complete. Some will find it takes less time than that; in some chapters, though, some days might take a little longer. The main point to make here is that each person will get as much or as little out of the workbook as the effort put into it. Even when they don't feel like working on it, just doing the chapter can help their healing journey succeed. In fact,

it might be helpful to explain that it can feel hard to face the pain of the past—but not to let that belief stop anyone from opening the workbook between our times together.

If indicated, you can remind the group that the workbook “is for your healing, not to hurt you.” You might say something like, “You’ve already been hurt enough; every page of this workbook is designed to keep you safe and help you go forward in life.”

This week, you could remind group members to ask two or three people to pray for them throughout their journey of hope, keeping other group members’ comments and concerns confidential

Please modify the Core Healing Group Therapy Agreement on the next page to adhere to your state or country’s laws. **Note:** *This is only a sample form*; the form you design will need to follow your own area’s laws and rules. Please have each group participant complete your form, and return the completed forms to you before the end of your first group session.

As your group meets each week, this leaders’ guide offers *ideas* to utilize during group discussion of each chapter of *Core Healing*. You won’t have time to implement all of the ideas mentioned, nor will all the suggestions necessarily be what your group needs to accomplish during a given week. Prayerfully ask God to lead the group you’re facilitating into His original design—and to the unique discussion that can be a catalyst for growth in the lives of each person present. And, be sure you take time to study *Core Healing* so that you’re prepared for people’s unique questions and concerns. However, don’t be afraid if someone asks a question you can’t answer. You could respond with something like, “That’s an excellent question. Let me think about it and get back with you.” If it’s a question that really can’t be answered, it’s OK to simply state that, without getting defensive. At other times, it could be appropriate to say, “Our work in *Core Healing* will continually offer information and perspective to address these concerns; can we look at this question again later?”

## Sample Core Healing Group and Data Collection Agreement

*Add Name of Your Group/Location, etc. Here*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ am participating in a Core Healing group with \_\_\_\_\_

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I understand that any comments made by group members will be confidential and will not be shared with people who are not part of our group.

*In this section, include your state/country's specific laws:* I understand that if, during the course of treatment, the counselor/facilitator determines that a threat of physical harm (including child or elder abuse) to me or to another person is imminent, by law, the appropriate authorities must be notified, in accordance with the following Florida Statutes: (FS 39.201; FS 39.202; FS 39.204; FS 490.0147; FS 491.0147).

I agree to indemnify and hold harmless my group facilitators \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ as well as the sponsoring organization (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_, its agents, volunteers or employees from any claim for damages of any nature arising out of or allegedly due to any counseling, instruction or advice rendered in my *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* group or from any activity related thereto. I accept full responsibility for any decisions I make regarding my life.

**I have read the above information carefully, understand its contents, and agree, under these Conditions, to participate in a Core Healing group. I also give my permission for my name and contact information to be given to group members.**

*If my group chooses to participate in a brief Posttraumatic Growth Inventory at the end of the course, I give permission for my anonymous responses to be included for the purpose of evidence-based research*

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

*(If participant is a minor, signature of parent/guardian is required)*

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Since many people have never addressed their concerns related to sexual trauma, emotions related to those concerns sometimes increase as this course begins. Even though *Core Healing* is designed to help people gain coping skills to face trauma in healthy ways, in rare cases someone might come to your group who has such complex mental health issues that they are unable to thrive in a group context.

How might that look? Someone could be so depressed or anxious he or she cannot engage with others. Please don't dismiss that person; instead try to build him or her up by encouraging doing the homework, etc. In other cases, the person's thoughts could be tangential, meaning he or she is unable to focus or participate in the group discussion. He or she could seem detached from reality, fly into rages, or be generally disruptive to the group. Please realize this is rare [after leading MANY groups, I haven't experienced anyone like this in a small group]. You need to be available to the entire group and able to facilitate group discussion. Before asking someone to leave your group, though, please talk to that person privately and try to help facilitate the person's group participation.

Group facilitators should refer individuals to appropriate counseling when indicated. Have a list of professional counselors in your area available, to provide to participants when needed.

Encourage everyone to take time throughout the week to complete chapter one before meeting together to discuss it. Please gently remind them that they'll get much more out of the course if they take time, at least five days each week, to think about and complete what they can in that week's chapter.

## **Discussion for Week One**

### **The Core Five**

If your group is completing the workbook in twelve weeks, you'll need to have group participants complete/sign the group agreement prior to beginning the discussion of chapter one. The agreement not only is designed to meet guidelines for professional counselors who lead the group but to assure each group member that their comments in group will be kept in strict confidence by everyone there. After completing the paperwork, do a brief grounding exercise (see pages 181-182).

If you are combining the **Introduction** and **Chapter One**, you can do a brief, succinct summary of the Introduction and then rapidly move into discussing Chapter One, encouraging people to spend time studying both in detail at home, since "we're not able to discuss everything during group." You could have name tents ready to go [see explanation of name tents in Introduction section] to save time in Week One.

Be sure to discuss the Core Five and the chapter's goal (page 1) during group time.

### **Core Healing Goal: to understand the scope of sexual abuse.**

The Core Five, five core areas affected by sexual abuse, include one's sense of Competence, Security, Identity, Purpose, and Belonging. After briefly explaining each, ask your group "what core area do you sense impacting your current life?"

### **Day One: Defining the Challenge**

Page 2 states, “Sexual abuse is an act of power and control that takes a sexual form.” It is important to emphasize (page 2) “sexual abuse is not about love, healthy sexuality or intimacy.”

On page 3, explain that many behaviors are considered sexual abuse and that they can impact people’s lives in significant ways, even when penetration does not occur. If you think it would be helpful, you could ask your group if they are aware of any other forms of molestation not listed here.

CAUTION: do not ask that question if you think someone in your group will take over the group at this point with his or her own trauma story. At this point, your group is not ready to hear personal abuse stories! Carefully, wisely guide the discussion into healing. If someone begins to share a trauma story at this point, say something like, “I hear your pain [sadness, suffering, etc.]. I can meet with you privately to listen to your story, but for now, our group needs to focus on the workbook. Hearing each other’s stories at this point could cause more trauma than we’ve yet prepared to address. OK?”

### Day Two: **Possible Results of Sexual Abuse**

If you have time, please review at least some of the items listed on pages 4-6. Encourage your group by beginning with the three paragraphs on page 4, and be prepared to do another grounding exercise if people become agitated during this section. Let the group process how many items they identify with, if indicated.

### Day Three: **Why Core Healing?**

Today’s study includes what damage at the core of one’s being looks like.

It also provides an opportunity (pages 7 and 8) for participants to wonder about how the core areas of their lives were affected by sexual abuse.

### Day Four: **A New Perspective**

This section is important in helping to develop a biblical perspective of life. Please take time to read Matthew 18:5-6, emphasizing how much God hates abuse—and how much He loves each person present.

### Day Five: **Psychosocial Development**

This section begins to develop insight and awareness into specific ways that various developmental disruptions of abuse can continue throughout life. When introducing this topic, be sure to encourage everyone that the damage done “then” does not need to continue defining them for the rest of their lives!

Prayerfully highlight other items from the rest of chapter one that you want to be sure to address during your first week. Thank God that He knows each person—and that He will guide you in how to effectively lead!

[Have everyone leave their name tents behind so you can be sure to have them there for your next group session! You could ask each person to bring something—such as a sticker, drawing, or something else— to your next group meeting to add to their name tents to help people get to know them.]

## **Discussion for Week Two**

## Five Growth Areas

If desired, you could have Tenth Avenue North's "Healing Begins" playing as your group arrives and gets settled (see pull-out quote and lyrics from that song on page 13).

Have name tents ready from the previous week for people to place around the table or room after they arrive.

After your group is seated, welcome everyone and begin with prayer.

Next, do a brief (one minute per person) grounding exercise. [If you decided to use the name tent exercise—with people bringing or drawing something to help people get to know them—describing that could actually be this week's grounding exercise.]

### **Core Healing Goal: "to recognize potential for growth and choices you can make in five distinct areas of your life."**

As you introduce this week's goal, remain alert to gently guide your group into solution-focused thoughts about growing beyond the pain of abuse.

Day One: **Emotional Growth.** Your discussion can help group participants recognize and describe emotions they're currently feeling or experiencing. Be aware that many participants could still have "frozen" or numb emotions and not yet be able to recognize or express their feelings. Reassure them that their feelings will come—and that consistent, daily work in Core Healing can help them learn how to feel so they can heal.

Read the Henri Nouwen quote on page 14, asking the group to describe how they relate to it.

If indicated, you could have someone read Proverbs 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life," relating that to the Nouwen quote.

As you prepare for Day Two: **Intellectual Growth**, think of how your own intellectual growth continues, and wonder how to encourage group members to continue growing intellectually.

If you have a Feelings Chart, such as The Color of Feelings [available at [www.feelingsunlimited.com](http://www.feelingsunlimited.com)], you could show that and explain that how we think can determine how we feel and then how we act [giving a basic overview of cognitive behavioral therapy, which will be explained in depth in chapter three next week].

You might briefly ask your group what books they've read that have helped them grow mentally and give time for two or three people to comment on that. [Each week, you'll notice how to manage time so that you spend adequate time—but not "too much time"—on questions God leads you to address. Don't be discouraged during the process of finding the right pace for your group!]

Be careful to avoid diagnostic or clinical language, using words that are familiar to group members.

Day Three: **Physical Growth** could reveal someone who has physical sensations such as nausea, dizziness, fainting, pain, fatigue, etc., which can *sometimes* be related to the trauma of sexual abuse. Be alert, listening to see if anyone in your group is struggling with a possible somatic symptom disorder [an extreme focus on physical symptoms like pain or fatigue causing emotional distress], with

problems functioning, etc. Your job is not to diagnose anyone during group but to be aware of complex concerns that could mean someone needs to be referred to a professional to help them develop coping skills.

Others could be struggling with eating disorders, which often are comorbid (co-occurring) with sexual abuse—one explanation for that is that, when life feels out of control, one human response is to try to “over-control,” which is an internal “motivator” for some eating disorders. If that topic comes up, remember it’s too big of a concern to address in group. However, it’s too big of a concern to ignore, too. Therefore, you could recommend a book, such as “Hope, Help & Healing for Eating Disorders,” by Gregory L. Jantz, PhD (WaterBrook Press). You can also refer someone who is struggling with eating disorders to a counselor who specializes in treating them. Some eating disorders can be life threatening, so be alert for this concern.

Another mental disorder that some abuse survivors experience is called factitious disorder, during which the person consciously creates symptoms of a physical or mental illness. As a group facilitator, your job is to steadily steer your group into healing and not into anyone’s mental disorder. If it seems like your group is being manipulated or dominated by someone who wants to focus on his/her problems, pause and do a grounding exercise. Or you could do a “distraction exercise,” such as seeming to “accidentally” drop your pen or notebook on the floor, then taking time to slowly pick it up, in order to subtly bring the group’s focus back on track. As you pick up your item, you could say, “Let’s see, I think we were discussing…” and go back to the workbook, moving the discussion forward.

Of course, anyone with physical complaints should see a physician to rule out medical issues! Please talk privately with that person; never “single out” anyone during group for referral to a physician, psychiatrist, psychotherapist, counselor, etc. Since most of us group facilitators are not physicians, we need to refrain from giving any form of medical advice.

When your group discusses their answers describing how they would like to be able to look at their bodies [bottom of page 15], it can be helpful to read Psalm 139:14, emphasizing that God sees each person as “fearfully and wonderfully made” [etc.].

Read the rest of Day Three to decide what you want to be sure to discuss with your group. It’s important to ask the “Do you still feel powerless? Why or why not?” questions on page 16.

Address some of the questions people ask about God [see page 16].

Remember to ask your group what helped them in this section.

Read through the “Life—Embezzled!” section on page 17. Help your group realize that they can choose to quit allowing their bodies to be controlled by anyone who made horrible choices rather than good ones.

Consider physical vitality per Galatians 2:20.

**Day Four: Spiritual Growth**

Take time to carefully consider pages 18-22, prayerfully asking God to show you what verses to emphasize. He knows the needs of your group, and He promises to be your Good Shepherd as you address people's concerns about spiritual life and growth.

During this day's discussion, it's important to transition to seeing God as the Good Shepherd (page 19) and to consider how people can become His children.

On pages 19 and 20, it can be freeing to emphasize John 10:10, explaining how Jesus wants to provide abundant life—and rebuild trust that abuse eroded.

Allow time to discuss Growth Goals on page 22.

### Day Five: **Social Growth**

Discuss answers on page 23-24

Ask final question on page 24: “Will you allow God to create a new pattern...?”

If there is time, discuss bonus work on pages 24-26.

At the conclusion of the group, you could allow time for group members to write prayer requests on sticky notes they will each pass to one other group member, rotating each week so all group members eventually pray for each other.

Before ending on time, remind everyone to begin work tomorrow on chapter three so that they can be sure to get to the journaling section in Day Five. Point out that there is an extra section at the back of the workbook, Appendix A: “Replacing Distorted Thoughts with Biblical Perspectives,” on pages 172-177. Explain that this section is there because many people have enormous difficulty finding healthy thoughts to replace cognitive distortions, and Appendix A offers some practical, healing ideas.

### **Sample Follow-up Email**

Each week, perhaps on the day after your group meets, you could send group members an email (*if* they have given you written permission to send emails). Following is a sample message, sent after one group's discussion of chapter two:

Dear [Healing Group],

What a great discussion we enjoyed together last night! I am praying for each of you.

If possible, if you haven't already done so, you could ask two or three people you trust to pray for your spiritual protection and healing throughout this course. If you can't think of two or three people you feel safe asking for prayer, that's OK; if that's the case, please let [your group facilitators] know so we can increase our prayer time for you. The enemy who inspired trauma and abuse in the first place will “fight” your healing journey. I am praying now that we all will continually grow in the confident assurance that “greater is He Who is in you than He who is in the world” (1 John 4:4b).

As I mentioned last night, it's important for all of us to get started on chapter three **today**. Please spend time each day working on the corresponding “Day” in your workbook so you're prepared to discuss chapter 3 when we get together next week. Your thoughts and ideas are important to all of us!

It's helpful if you highlight or mark questions or concerns you notice as you work, so you can bring them up in our group discussion. You'll get as much out of this workbook as the time you spend not only completing each day's work but thinking about it throughout your day. [A class I took at Purdue University many years ago explained that we have to read something five times before we even begin to "get" it!]

Our grounding exercise next week is "art," which for our purposes is bringing something to let our group know something about who you are by adding a drawing, sticker or something else to your name tent. That could be your "check-in" at the beginning of next week's group, if you wish. Or, you could be prepared with something else you want to share in your one minute "check-in" at the beginning of our discussion next week. That could be what you're learning in your Core Healing work at home, a new insight you gained at group last night, or a prayer request.

"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2). May you sense the Good Shepherd nourishing, nurturing and healing your soul today.

I look forward to seeing you soon! God bless you.

In His Unfailing Love,

[name of facilitator]

\* \* \* \* \*

Please realize that the above sample email is just that, a sample. Please write your own email with personal remarks and ideas specific to your own group, dear people you've been given the privilege to know and help.

## **Discussion for Week Three**

### **Don't Believe Everything You Think**

Facilitators need to arrive early, to be sure tables/chairs are ready and that the room's atmosphere is relaxing. Have the week's grounding exercise ready (organized so that it will only take one to two minutes of your group's time to do). If you plan to serve water, coffee, etc., make sure it's ready, too; and have name tents set out and readily available for participants to take to their tables/chairs. Please don't set name tents at certain places on the tables [unless your group members have told you they want to sit in the same place every week]. Why? *Core Healing* groups emphasize freedom and choice, so even in seemingly-small things like choosing where to sit, it's important to leave that choice to each individual. Because we value each person, we create an atmosphere to exhibit that!

**Core Healing Goal: to identify and replace distorted thoughts.**

**Day One: Identifying Recurring Thoughts**

As you continue preparing to facilitate chapter three, pay attention to your own recurring thoughts and resultant moods, per page 27. Take time to prayerfully be open to changing the way you think (page 28), and to noticing and replacing any cognitive distortions you're experiencing (see pages 29-30). When the group meets, it will help you be focused on their needs and concerns rather than your own if you have successfully replaced your own cognitive distortions with healthy, healing thoughts!

And, remember that during group discussion, the focus needs to be on helping group members engage in the discussion, with facilitators being careful not to dominate the discussion. Facilitators can and should clarify, guide, help, and illumine, being attentive to the imperative of leading group discussion into new, healing directions each week.

#### Day Two: **Changing the Way You Think**

If anyone in your group has lived in another country and had to learn a new language there, you could ask what that experience was like. Or, ask your group what stood out to them on day two.

To promote group participation, continually seek to ask questions that do not have a "yes" or "no" answer but that will encourage further response.

#### Day Three: **Automatic Thoughts**

Prayerfully consider what to highlight here. All of us have distorted thoughts at times; these are a result of the fall. Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) says "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Our goal here is not to make anyone feel guilty about having cognitive distortions but to offer a better way to think, which, of course, we can find in God's Word. Consider the importance of diligently and repeatedly replacing cognitive distortions; this process is something that needs to be repeated throughout life.

What happens with cognitive distortions is that they become so automatic we don't even recognize their presence. [Dr. Daniel Amen calls them "mind ants: Automatic Negative Thoughts."]

This exercise is freeing and hope-building; as people begin to see they truly can change how they think! Incredible research has been done in this area, showing that changing one's thoughts can reduce depression, anxiety, etc., in clinically significant ways.

#### Day Four: **Moving from Blaming to Aiming**

The SIGECAPS questions on pages 34-36 are standard psychiatric questions for recognizing the presence of clinical depression. As usual, we aren't trying to diagnose anyone with a major depressive disorder or any other emotional concern. However, these questions will help you be aware if serious concerns exist. On page 36, in the "Suicide" section, watch for anyone who indicates suicidal ideation, especially if that person is having thoughts about *how* he/she would commit suicide. Your job if that [people knowing how they want to kill themselves] occurs is to talk with the person privately and refer them for help **immediately!** Whenever someone is thinking of HOW to kill oneself, this is a very serious concern.

#### Day Five: **Journaling to Freedom & Joy**

Be sure to allow adequate time to get to day five and encourage your group members to do regular journaling. Ask people if they're willing to share with the group how they applied this exercise—and how replacing distorted thoughts helped them. Remind your group that it's helpful to use a separate journal or notebook to apply the three-step process indicated on page 37.

If you have time, discuss chapter three's weekend bonus work. If you don't have enough time to discuss that, please remind the group that it can be helpful to do this section on their own.

As you conclude the discussion of chapter three, be sure to encourage your group to begin working through chapter four—tomorrow, or as soon as possible!

Leaders' FYI: continue being alert for times someone might need to be referred either for a psychiatric evaluation or professional counseling. Survivors of sexual abuse often experience eating disorders, self-harm, or addictive behaviors. Several books addressing those and other concerns are listed at the end of the leaders' guide. Unless you are a professional counselor, please refer group members experiencing significant mental health challenges for appropriate professional help, steadily offering encouragement and compassionate support.

If someone is unable to replace racing, distorted, and/or obsessive thoughts; if severe depression is indicated [professional counselors often administer the Beck Depression Inventory for an accurate assessment of clinical depression]; if a group member describes thinking about suicide, be alert for bipolar spectrum disorders. As stated before, your job is NOT to diagnose anyone in group but to simply be aware if someone's concern is beyond the scope of group work and indicates a need for individual treatment.

With bipolar spectrum disorders, a person's mood can fluctuate from depression to mania or hypomania; from violent outbursts to hyperactivity, sleeplessness, or bizarre behavior. No two people experience bipolar, in its various forms such as Bipolar I and Bipolar II, in exactly the same way. Some stay depressed; others rapidly fluctuate from one mood to another; still others take extreme risks with money, behavior, sex, or activities. Regardless of how bipolar looks in a person's life, it's important to know this is a genetic condition, not due to lack of effort or some sort of personal failure.

According to Paul Meier, M.D., approximately 300 million people throughout the world live with bipolar spectrum disorders. Many are either undiagnosed or untreated, which can wreak havoc not only in their own lives but also in the lives of their family, friends, or business associates. Meier says that people, when diagnosed, usually ask, "Will I ever be normal again?" His response typically is, "I hope not." He continues, "You can be better than normal!" He says, "In dozens of years of treating thousands of people for bipolar illness, we do not know of a single case that God chose to heal. But a large number of them are having a huge impact on the world for Christ while taking medications to balance their brain chemicals" (pages 124 and 197, *Blue Genes*).

For anyone with neurochemical disruptions in normal brain functioning, the result could be despair. If someone in your group is currently experiencing numb or out-of-control emotions; mood swings; suicidal ideation; is isolating from others; has manic episodes, or is self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, sex, or other addictive behaviors, it could be time to refer that person for appropriate medical

care. It is important for leaders to be aware that “the lifetime risk of suicide in individuals with bipolar disorder is estimated to be at least 15 times that of the general population. In fact, bipolar disorder may account for one-quarter of all completed suicides” (DSM-5). Dr. Paul Meier’s book, *Blue Genes*, offers additional information about “breaking free from the chemical imbalances that affect your moods, your mind, your life, and your loved ones.”

There is great hope in knowing that our brains can change throughout life; current research in neuroplasticity underscores that we can live in confidence that “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). However, if someone is missing essential neurochemicals, the struggle is not about a faith failure; it could mean that person’s brain’s chemicals need to be adjusted, whether through medication, and/or appropriate diet, exercise, healthy thinking, positive relationships, etc. Since we are emotional, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual, it’s vital to point people to the importance of wisely attending to each area of life. Encourage group members that it’s not embarrassing to find appropriate professional help and proactive “tools” for living the meaningful life Jesus promised in John 10:10.

Why does a handbook for *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* include diverse diagnostic information? Even with everything that has been said so far, this is only *touching* on various complex mental health concerns that could be present in the lives of sexual abuse survivors. Although our groups aren’t designed to treat significant mental health issues, it’s important for facilitators to be aware of possible mental health concerns experienced by some survivors. Conditions that are frequently comorbid (co-occurring) with sexual abuse include anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, etc.

As you become aware of various complex issues faced by your group members, you’ll realize how essential it is for you to stay focused on the workbook throughout group time! It’s your job to gently, calmly, clearly, and wisely keep the group on track. If you allow someone to “take over” the discussion, driving it away from the week’s lesson and into their own issues or concerns, you have just allowed each group member to lose potentially important gains. For example, if one person sidetracks a group for just ten minutes—and if your group has 12 people in it—you’ve just allowed a cumulative “loss” of two hours [that is, 10 minutes for each person in attendance].

It is far better to be KIND than “nice.” A “nice” facilitator allows anyone to steer the discussion anywhere he or she wants to go; a “kind” facilitator realizes he or she is responsible to guide *each* group member into maximum healing, focusing on what will help throughout the workbook discussion. Sometimes it might feel like you’re trying to guide a team of wild horses, bent on going anywhere but where you’re trying to guide them. Jeremiah 33:3 reminds us all to “call upon the LORD, and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do now know.” Ultimately, He—our God Who heals—is our group facilitator. In John 15:5, Jesus explains: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” Galatians 5:22-23 describes the amazing fruit He can produce in and through you!

Either during this week’s discussion or next week, please talk to your group about the possibility of them experiencing **intrusive memories**, including nightmares, since beginning this course. Page four defines nightmares as “intrusive dreams with either specific trauma content or unclear, troubling content.”

Tailor your explanation to your group, but include something like this: “One characteristic result of traumatic stress is a ‘flooding’ of repressed memories, sometimes in the form of nightmares, or, without warning, at any time, an experience of ‘recalling’ or ‘feeling’ something from your old trauma. Why does this happen? Since approximately 80% of our thinking is in our subconscious, trauma memories stored there can be metaphorically ‘awakened’ as healing begins. Chapter eight will go into detail about defense mechanisms that keep trauma memories suppressed (see pages 102-103). But for now, it could be helpful to know that nightmares are common when one is beginning to address old trauma concerns. Thoughts that might have been suppressed or repressed for years—or decades—can feel debilitating when they come out of their ‘hiding places’ in various forms. When this happens, it’s important that you **manage** those terrifying sensations instead of going back to old ways of numbing/freezing your emotions.”

Here are ten healing ideas for you to share with your group, when needed:

1. Even a full-fledged panic attack *physiologically* only lasts two to three minutes. Explain the following: **IF** you manage physical sensations you experience as soon as those sensations (such as shortness of breath, chest pains, tingling fingers) begin. A basic breathing exercise can help. Practice this when you’re awake so you’re ready to implement it as soon as an intrusive thought occurs during the day, or if awakened suddenly, terrified by a nightmare.
2. Working on healing from trauma could activate old feelings of being in danger, emotions fueled by past or present experiences. To help you live beyond the stress and anxiety present when you awaken from a nightmare, you can take a moment to simply pause, noticing how you’re breathing. Are you “chest breathing”? In other words, are you breathing in short, shallow breaths? If so, imagine that your lungs are two balloons. Got it?
3. Now, inhale through your nose, allowing the air to “inflate” your lungs, breathing in to a count of three, four, or five seconds, whatever is comfortable for you. Then, pause, holding that air in your lungs for about two seconds before you begin exhaling through your mouth, emptying the air from your lungs, to a count of four, five or six seconds—again, whatever is comfortable for you. To help you remember this technique, you could think “Inhale=Inflate; Exhale=Empty.” [Remember to pause: the reason for pausing after both inhalation and exhalation is so you don’t hyperventilate.] When you consciously relax your breathing, you’ll notice your belly going out as you inhale and receding as you exhale. Breathing with intention can help you live with intention.
4. Hear Jesus’ gentle voice reminding you “the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I am come that you might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). The thief [Satan] continually tries to cripple us with lies; Jesus always offers His free gift of abundant life! Together, we’re discovering ways for you to enjoy and live in His limitless gifts.
5. Have soothing Scriptures marked in your Bible so you can read them during the night. It can be helpful to say Scripture aloud, walking around your room, smiling as you ponder these promises, training yourself to hear them in the loving voice of your Good Shepherd. The Truth sets you free, any time, day or night!
6. If awakened, you can do grounding exercises (pages 181-182), rapidly moving yourself back to the present.
7. Have worship music ready to play if a nightmare disturbs your rest.

8. Remind group members not to allow concerns about old memories resurfacing stop them from going forward. Since fragmented trauma memories can be present in both our conscious and subconscious thoughts, their influence can actually hinder our enjoyment of life. Be aware that “bits and pieces” of memories could occur—but don’t allow them to control your life!
9. Keep journaling (per day five, chapter three), replacing distorted thoughts with new healing thoughts.
10. You can experience the wondrous freedom Christ won for you—not only now, but for the rest of your life!

### **Week Three Follow-up and Preparation for Week Four**

Please let everyone [who has the edition of “Core Healing” with “from Sexual Abuse” on the cover] know there is a correction in chapter four, on page 41 of Day Two. The fill-in-the-blank exercise should say, “Read Psalm 139 and find words or phrases describing God’s loving design of you. Describe His view of you under “God’s opinion of Me,” then record how you choose to enjoy God’s design under “My Response to God’s Design.”

After your group meets to ponder and discuss chapter three, please send an email affirming their work and encouraging them to begin studying chapter four for your next time together. Following is a sample email I sent after group three. You’ll want your message to be from your heart, with your manner of speaking, etc.—but feel free to use thoughts from my email if you think they will encourage your group members:

Good morning, Women of Hope!

What joy it was to be together last night! We missed you, [names of people who weren’t able to come] and pray you are well and enjoying God’s care for YOU. For next week, we’re considering the dreaded FUD trifecta! As you begin chapter four today, please take time to realize that you are no longer a slave to FUD! You might want to listen to Jonathan David and Melissa Helser sing “No Longer Slaves” [available on YouTube] as you begin working on this lesson.

Praying for you this morning, God led me to the Gospel of Mark, which is known for its use of the word “immediately.” May we all hear Jesus’ voice calling us to come to Him, trust in Him, and keep following Him. Instead of allowing our lives to be dominated by the FUD of fear, uncertainty, and doubt, we can immediately experience freedom, hope, and joy as we entrust ourselves, not to changing feelings, but to our unchanging, loving Savior.

As we discussed last night, our feelings can easily be distorted, unreliable indicators of reality, due to automatic negative thoughts, known as cognitive distortions. Often we’re unaware that we’re even thinking in distortions! Please keep reviewing chapter three to ensure you’re moving forward, beyond old negative thought patterns that keep you stuck in past pain. As we rely on the Truth rather than our feelings, our feelings can be transformed by the renewing of our minds, per Romans 12:1-2. What an incredible renewable resource we have been given in God’s Word!

May we daily live in this reality: “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18). Then, instead of being dominated by a painful past, a difficult present, or the

uncertain future, we train ourselves to IMMEDIATELY entrust ourselves to the One Who loves each of us perfectly, the One Who can never fail. Then we can immediately experience His “peace that passes understanding,” His hope that does not disappoint [see Philippians 4:4-8].

I am praying that each of us will choose to rely on the unfailing Trio of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit instead of fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

In His Unfailing Love,

Marti

## **Discussion for Week Four**

### **Are We Having FUD Yet?**

As you prepare your room for this week’s discussion, please set the mood so people feel welcomed, “embraced” by the atmosphere you set. It’s helpful to have music playing as group members arrive. One suggestion for background music this week is Audrey Assad’s “Show Me” (excerpt of the lyrics, below, by Audrey Assad, Sparrow Records):

*You could plant me like a tree beside a river*

*You could tangle me in soil and let my roots run wild*

*And I would blossom like a flower in the desert*

*But for now just let me cry*

*Let me brave the wild currents flowing to the sea*

*And I will disappear into a deeper beauty*

*But for now just stay with me God, for now just stay with me*

This song reflect the pain many survivors feel—pain often minimized, marginalized, or dismissed by people who assume that God somehow expects or demands some sort of continual state of “happiness” from His children. Happiness, however, relies on “happenings,” which are utterly unreliable, often inconstant. In *Core Healing*, instead of “happiness,” we’re considering JOY, a renewable gift from God, the Lover of our souls! Jesus says, “BLESSED [emphasis mine] are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:3, 4). As we continue this healing journey, it’s important to let our fellow travelers know it’s OK to grieve and suffer, while simultaneously hoping they are able to keep moving forward as whole people, despite their suffering.

Seasons of grief will eventually end. As Nehemiah 8:10 declares, “...Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Until people see God cares, it will be difficult for them to rely on His strength, or to allow Him to provide comfort for their grief amidst their losses. As facilitators, we can trust God to lead each person beyond “dead places” in their lives and into the hope the Good Shepherd freely gives those who entrust their souls to His good care.

Before beginning to discuss chapter four, please begin group time with prayer. Then, allow each person one minute to “check-in,” giving ideas for how that might look. If needed, here are a few ideas:

1. Ask everyone to share something from last week’s discussion or this or a previous chapter that’s helping in daily life.
2. Affirm each person’s “check-in” with a word of affirmation, smile, nod, etc.
3. People could pass a brief prayer request to the person seated next to them. These could be written ahead of time.
4. Another idea/option for this week’s prayer time: during Day One, you could give everyone a sticky note, asking them to write down three words (from the list at the bottom of page 40) that, as they begin to apply them, would help them live in new ways. Then, have everyone pass that list to the person seated next to them and pray for that person throughout the week, perhaps even writing down a specific verse to bring his/her prayer partner at the next group session.

Explain the meaning of FUD: “fear, uncertainty, and doubt.”

**Core Healing Goal: to establish new beliefs which  
result in self-respect and competence.**

**Day One: Investigating**

Highlight and discuss the bottom of page 40, asking something like, “What new names could you use to describe yourself that can help you develop hope and joy?”

Remind the group of last week’s work in identifying and replacing distorted thought processes. Wonder together how this exercise is a continuation of that work.

**Day Two: Discovering Truth**

As discussion of day two begins, remind everyone that the fill-in-the-blank exercise on page 41 should be corrected to say, “Read Psalm 139 and find words or phrases describing God’s loving design of you. Describe His view of you under “God’s opinion of Me,” then record how you choose to enjoy God’s design under “My Response to God’s Design.”

This might be a good time to briefly emphasize that *Core Healing* continually offers an opportunity to reclaim God’s original design of life. He can take the fractured, shattered past—every sorrow, regret, and loss—and put life together again, creating a beautiful new mosaic that displays His love and light. In other words, we are not dismissing anyone’s pain; rather, we’re helping them moving beyond

**Day Three: Examining Competency from God’s Perspective**

Today, we look at specific ways God creates His new design. Continuing to realize that everyone’s life is “broken” in some ways, we could continue the analogy of stained glass (if there is time to do so). For example, in medieval times, stained glass windows were used in cathedrals for beauty and to portray biblical Truth in each window’s narrative. With exquisite craftsmanship, each small pieces of colored glass helped convey a message.

Be sure to make time to have someone read 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (page 42), and to discuss the questions related to it.

On page 43, emphasize the idea that we can learn to doubt our doubts instead of doubting God. That concept is extremely freeing to many! How does that look in practical life? When our minds go back to old patterns of fear, uncertainty, or doubt, we can choose not to believe those doubts. Instead, we can consciously choose to focus on the Truth that sets us free.

To focus on Truth, we need to continually learn Truth—spending time daily renewing our minds as we think about God’s character, His promises, and his hope.

#### **Day Four: Living in Competence Today**

Ask God to show you which Scriptures to emphasize from Day Four; then discuss “imagine what your healing could look like” (page 44).

If there is time, ask your group if anyone wants to share their notes of gratitude to God (bottom of page 44).

#### **Day Five: Journaling to Freedom & Joy**

If you didn’t have time to clarify the journaling process last week, be sure you make time to do so during this group session. Remind the group that Appendix B can help them find new healthy thoughts, as needed, for the journaling process.

Try to make time for one or two people to share insights they’ve gained through journaling.

Remind the group to invest at least 20 minutes each day for journaling, spending the major portion of that time on “new healing thoughts.” *The reason to spend more time on healing thoughts than automatic negative thoughts is so people can create new neural pathways that take them forward in life. Everyone already has enough “Mind ANTs [automatic negative thoughts] to last a lifetime!*

If you have time, discuss Weekend Bonus Work. If not, remind them to check it out.

## **Discussion for Week Five**

### **Name Your Tyrant**

Take time to explain why the focus of this chapter is **Security**, per page 47, asking one or two people to share their experience of security or insecurity.

Your grounding exercise this week could be “taste,” celebrating group members’ birthdays with cupcakes or some other treat, if desired.

Note: in this chapter, a sexual predator is referred to as a tyrant or dictator because of having taken control over someone else.

This week’s work helps people move beyond their predator’s domination while becoming aware of areas in which current thinking, feeling, and actions are still being dictated by past sexual assault.

**Core Healing Goal: to move from attitudes or actions shaped by abuse into**

## **the safety and security God provides by making healing choices each day.**

As you consider the goal, take a moment to be alert to guiding your group into “healing choices each day.” That means you’ll carefully avoid letting someone “hijack” the group with other topics—even good ones. In this work, “good is the enemy of the best.” The “best” is offering a steady stream of opportunities for each group participant to heal and grow.

Often people want to bring up current legislation, current events, etc. during group sessions. Please avoid doing this! Why? While we want to do all we can to bring justice to those who have been wounded through abuse, this group doesn’t exist for that purpose. In fact, it’s important for you to know that, when abuse survivors go to court—e.g. to seek justice by bringing their rapist to trial—the healing process can be delayed by months or years. Why does that occur? A perpetrator is quite unlikely to admit the egregious nature of his/her crime; even those who actually admit their guilt often try to foist blame on their victim(s) in court, which becomes both complex and confusing for survivors.

In court, a perpetrator’s attorney(s) will do everything/anything possible to make the victim look guilty. When a survivor of abuse has to retell his/her story during a deposition and/or face the perpetrator in court, he or she is also re-experiencing the horrors of the trauma. That’s why we avoid those discussions in *Core Healing* groups. When someone does decide to seek legal repercussions for a violent crime, he or she needs to be in individual counseling to have essential, excellent support throughout what is generally an extremely difficult process.

In group, let’s do all we can to help people continually move “from insecurity to security,” focusing on healing.

### **Day One: From Insecurity to Security**

To invite discussion, ask an open-ended question, such as “Who would like to discuss your rankings on page 48?”

Then, ask the question following the rankings, “What circumstances....trigger insecurities in you now?”

Allow time to process the first section on page 49, discussing “what might change if you felt safe in everyday life.”

Ask someone who generally doesn’t participate in discussion if he or she would feel comfortable reading Psalm 91:1-6.

Discuss group members’ “key words” on page 49, asking “Who identifies with that?” when one person volunteers a “key word,” helping facilitate open communication/conversation.

Because this chapter contains numerous vital concepts, you’ll need to be alert to the timing/pacing of your group’s discussion. Keep moving it along to ensure that the group gains the essential skills for moving out of past “tyrants” control of their lives.

### **Day Two: ID Your Tyrant**

Allow sufficient time to clarify that sexual abuse is about power and control (etc.), per page 49 and 50.

On page 50, emphasize the hope of learning “a completely different way of thinking and living now that will free you...”

Have group discuss the “rational lies” they noticed while working on Day Two.

On page 51, discuss frozen emotions, then ask if anyone thought “of anything you are doing or have done to silence the pain of your abuse?”

Encourage one another with Psalm 142:4-7 (page 52). Per page 52, ask and discuss: “Will you make the choice to stop shutting out or numbing emotions....?”

Be sure you allow more time to “park” on healing concepts than painful ones. Everyone is thoroughly familiar with his or her anguish. However, do not dismiss anyone’s pain, either. Just be sure you’re steadily offering alternatives to ongoing suffering. Day Three can help with that!

Don’t skip the first two paragraphs on page 53; if you have time, have someone read them aloud.

### **Day Three: New Choices, Not Old Tyrants**

This day’s work helps people move beyond their “tyrants” control in everyday life.

Ask your group what helped them in this day’s work. On page 54, emphasize that each person now has the tools to kick out old tyrants when they try to “take over” their thought processes today.

As you study, ask God to lead you into what needs to be emphasized for your unique group. You might want to ask them (see paragraph 3) what is helping them be determined to move into freedom.

At each step of this healing journey, be alert for anyone who could be experiencing old feelings of guilt or shame. Even the thought of being free of old tyrants can cripple those who feel like the abuse was somehow their fault. Remind them that sexual abuse is criminal behavior.

If someone says, “But I was the initiator sometimes,” don’t minimize that concern. Instead, go to Psalm 103 or 1 John 1:9 and gently, lovingly point out that they can move beyond even things they wish they hadn’t done or chosen.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 in whatever version of the Bible you prefer, allowing the group time to discuss and apply these important concepts, especially considering how they’ll use the “tools of our trade” to combat their tyrants’ lies and control.

### **Day Four: A New Way of Living**

Be sure to allow time to discuss Isaiah 49:24-25 and Matthew 11:28-30, emphasizing that God offers strength to move away from a tyrant’s control—to live in His strength instead of trauma-focused weakness.

Ask the question (middle of page 56), “What would change in your life today if you rely on God to give you the security and rest He promises?”

Allow time for people to discuss proactive changes, then continue through Day Four, helping clarify that “there are no tyrants in God’s presence.”

This is a good time to remind everyone that living in peace is not a process—it’s a gift they can experience now, and each time they apply Truth to their legitimate concerns. It’s not that we’re

denying or ignoring the painful past; it's that we're literally moving beyond it, into God's gift of new life in our ordinary and in difficult experiences.

#### **Day Five: Journaling to Freedom & Joy**

Try to allow time for one or two people to share this week's journal entries. Be sure you spend more time focusing on "New Healing Thoughts" than on ANTs, with the goal of profoundly helping people feel safe and secure when they leave this group meeting.

#### **Weekend Bonus Work**

If you have time, it can be helpful to discuss possible ramifications of abuse that happened during this stage of psychosocial development. Remember that abuse occurring during earlier stages of development can have repercussions that continue into subsequent stages of development. You can encourage your group to review various stages of psychosocial development for the purpose of simply noticing any concerns that could be lingering in their lives today—not for the purpose of dwelling on those concerns but to remind themselves to move into Philippians 4:8 thinking and behavior (see page 60).

When you remind everyone to begin work on chapter six, please encourage them to remember to do grounding exercises, if needed, as they read Elizabeth's story on Day Two (beginning on page 63).

### **Discussion for Week Six**

#### **Forgive, Forget and Move On?**

Pay special attention to the first paragraph on page 61. People *do* feel brutalized when they feel defective even in their ability to forgive. Gently guide your group through each section of this week, being careful not to allow anyone to derail progress by venting his or her own bitterness. Keep offering hope, focusing on healing, even as members discuss their forgiveness challenges.

Following is one idea for this week's grounding exercise (this is only an idea; you know your own group and are free to use your own unique grounding ideas to help people learn to live in the moment): you could bring a long piece of yarn, string, or ribbon that can extend around the entire area where your group is seated. Allow the group a moment to pass the yarn/ribbon to one another, until it forms a circle, with each person holding onto it, "connected" to one another. [Tie the ends together to complete the circle.] Then remind your group of the incredible connection we have in this journey of healing. This incorporates the sense of touch, "grounding" people as they touch the yarn/ribbon and are also "touching" each other. Have a short length of yarn prepared for each person to take home, to remind everyone of the connection—and that they can "ground," using their sense of touch to be mindful, rapidly moving back to the present whenever they experience an amygdala hijacking.

Remember: many abuse survivors understandably hate being touched. This can be a way to introduce safe touch.

## **Core Healing Goal: to understand what forgiveness is and is not.**

### **Day One: What Forgiveness Is NOT**

Remember to begin your group each week with “check-in,” which is about one minute of “designated sharing” per person. This week you could have someone read the Nouwen pull-out quote on page 61 and ask each person to describe the impact that has on him/her. Or you could check-in by asking, “Did our work last week in “Name Your Tyrant” bring any new thoughts, attitudes, or actions to your life this week?”

Offer opportunities for several group members to share and discuss their answers on page 61.

Regarding page 62, here are additional thoughts to help you as a group facilitator understand intrusive memories: repressed trauma memories can surface during a season of stress or during a time of growth, such as while completing work in *Core Healing*. Repressed memories could also surface while working on forgiveness this week, which could be challenging for some survivors. Since intrusive trauma memories often occur in “fragments,” those small “pieces” of a memory can seem like puzzle pieces when they surface in one’s conscious thoughts. Group members might ask you how to know if these are actual memories—or if they need to somehow force themselves to recall what really happened.

For anyone experiencing “fragments” of memories, it can be helpful to pray Psalm 139:23-24, asking God to reveal anything that actually *needs* to be recalled. Instead of worrying whether a memory is due to something that happened or is only an imagined event, such memories can be yielded to the Lord. If a real trauma memory is surfacing, encourage the one experiencing it to avoid repressing or suppressing it and instead to briefly “feel” it, for the purpose of then releasing it into God’s perfect care, then continuing to move forward into healing.

Be sure to highlight that “the physiological reality is that it is impossible to entirely ‘forget,’” and that “forgiveness is not ‘understanding’ your abuse,” noting that we cannot wrap our minds around the evil inherent in sexual abuse.

Please have someone read the pull-out quote on page. 62. Discuss.

Help the group train themselves to “notice what you are thinking and feeling” (see both pages 62 and 63) and to “ask God to help you as you consider how to forgive—and who to forgive” (per page. 62).

If people start talking about “who,” remind them that there’s important preparatory work to do before we get to specific people.

Try to make time to ask the group whether they want the emotions of the past to define their future (see middle of page 63).

Personally, I feel that anyone who urges people to tell *everything* about their trauma story and/or try to recall all the horrors that happened is as harmful as someone who takes someone to the scene of a car crash and says, “I know you can’t remember what happened here, or why you’ve been in a coma in the ICU for the past month. So, we’ll just stand here in the intersection and wait for you to get hit by a truck again so you can remember.” I know—that sounds ridiculous—and it is! Similarly, it’s cruel and

ridiculous to “force” anyone to recall horrific trauma memories, which can be as destabilizing emotionally and mentally, and often, spiritually, as the physical ramifications of a car crash. Though many call it “cathartic” to tell detailed trauma stories, for many others it’s not cathartic at all. This doesn’t mean we don’t talk about specific stories; it does mean we wisely guide people through that process.

For example, if someone is having clear memories of something horrible that happened, it’s important to affirm that person while helping him or her regain stability through grounding, through moving back into the PNS, etc. As a person realizes that old trauma doesn’t have to continue re-traumatizing his or her life, it is amazingly possible to go forward in life.

This week, it’s important that you, dear group facilitators, understand something about the physiology of trauma. As people face the complexities inherent in forgiveness, please be prepared to help each person know how to take charge of the body’s stress response. The following copyrighted excerpt from my upcoming book, “Core Healing from Trauma,” can help.

\* \* \* \* \*

*In “The Stress of Life,” medical expert Hans Selye, M.D. defined stress as “the sum of all the wear and tear caused by any kind of vital reaction throughout the body at any one time” (page 274). Stress multiplied by trauma can increase physiological reactivity to the point that the quality of life is diminished. Here’s a basic idea of what happens during the body’s stress response: in the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), the limbic system releases hormones to prepare you for danger. This is often referred to as the “Fight or Flight” response.*

*Following either one severe or numerous long-term stressors, the ANS continues stimulating the limbic system to prepare you to deal with perceived danger. In the ANS, two almond-shaped sets of neurons known as amygdalae function as your brain’s alarm system, sending rapid-fire messages to the hypothalamus. In only a fraction of a second, in what is often referred to as an “amygdala hijacking,” your Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) can be activated, long after all threat of danger has ended. Often without your conscious awareness, SNS dominance continues repeatedly “hijacking” rational thought. That hijacking causes you to feel distressed, upset, fearful, “hot and bothered,” and activates one or more of the 5 Fs: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fornicate, or Feed. [For additional explanation of the 5Fs, see Grounding Exercises on Day Two.]*

*How can you identify when you’re being driven by an over-active SNS, steered by the brain’s “HOT” system? To help you learn to observe your body, please circle any of the following that apply to you now:*

- *Sleeping without feeling rested*
- *Persistent insomnia*
- *Overeating or undereating, binge eating or purging*
- *Muscle tension*
- *Consistently feeling anxious or fearful*
- *“Numbing out” or freezing your emotions*

- *Addictive behaviors*
- *Continually feeling angry*
- *Rage*
- *Bitterness*

*Each time you notice stress chauffeuring you into a state of SNS dominance, you can choose to move into your brain's "COOL" Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS). To establish PNS dominance, you can make healthy choices, training yourself to think calmly and biblically. However, because trauma leaves you vulnerable to repeated amygdala hijackings, moving to PNS dominance is not a one-time choice. Therefore, it's important to work on Core Healing techniques when you're feeling fine so you remember how to move into PNS dominance when your body is demanding that you "heat up" in your SNS.*

*Rather than simply learning "coping techniques," you can manage your stress response now. In as little as one second of conscious relaxation, like deep breathing, you can immediately move out of SNS dominance and into your PNS. Proverbs 14:30 explains, "A heart at peace brings life to the body," and that is true! When we breathe deeply, we're delivering life-giving oxygen, allowing our bodies to relax and be at peace. Take a deep breath now, focusing on enjoying this moment...*

\* \* \* \* \*

This week, as your group discusses forgiveness—especially when they review Elizabeth's numerous trauma experiences (Day Two), it might be necessary to help group members move from the "hot" SNS back to the "cool" PNS. Be prepared with ideas and practical tools you can use!

#### **Day Two: One Person's Journey to Forgiveness**

Ask the questions on page 67, giving the group time to discuss them, as well as to ask additional questions or to bring up concerns they experienced after reading Elizabeth's story.

#### **Day Three: Forgiveness Doesn't Necessarily Include Reconciliation**

Consider the first three paragraphs on page 68, emphasizing (paragraph two) "the survivor's right to be safe from further emotional, physical, spiritual, or mental harm."

Have someone read Philippians 3:10-14 (page 68), then discuss the paragraph following that passage.

Ask God to show you what to highlight on page 69, what Scripture to emphasize, what questions to discuss, etc.

On page 70, take time to consider the chart's "Causes of Discouragement" and "To Experience Hope, I can..." asking one or two people to share what they included there.

There is a lot in Day Three, so prayerfully proceed with your discussion of it!

#### **Day Four: Forgiveness, Safety and Justice**

There is great potential for getting "off-topic" here—not that justice is "off-topic," since that's the day's heading. The problem will be if someone takes over the discussion with the problems of

injustice. These are rampant—and they are horrible, but keep in mind that we’re focusing on healing and hope.

Make sure everyone notes the phone number on page 72 and understands when we have the responsibility to report suspected abuse.

Try to emphasize the point on page 73: “Many people resist forgiveness because they think it will take the offender ‘off the hook’” etc. Discuss Psalm 10:17-18 (page 73).

### Day Five: **My Forgiveness Journey**

Today, we’re emphasizing several important aspects of forgiveness, including:

1. Jesus told us to pray, “forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us” (from Luke 11:2-4). Forgiveness, then, is a command from the Lord.
2. Forgiveness protects us from carrying around rotting bitterness that festers in our souls long after someone wounds us (page 74).
3. Understanding forgiveness helps us realize that reconciliation is not always possible.
4. Forgiveness understands that abuse is so serious and damaging that choosing *not* to forgive will give abuse power over the rest of your life (page 75).

Next week’s chapter, “**Forgive and Go Forward**,” will continue to build on the important work we’re doing this week. Encourage each person to pray Psalm 139:23-24 throughout next week’s work.

Celebrate with your group that this week marks the halfway point for their healing journey. This would be a good time to announce the **Final Group Project**, if you wish to do that as part of your group process. Many groups use their final group session as an opportunity for each group member to share a creative project that expresses what they have gained during their work in *Core Healing*. You might have already explained the final project earlier. If so, this is a good time to remind everyone—or to introduce it for the first time. Individual projects can be anything from a drawing, poem, craft project, or a song—anything that helps participants uniquely express individual growth and healing throughout their journey of hope.

Many groups have a special celebration during their last group meeting. That could be a meal—with everyone bringing a salad or something else; it could be a dessert, etc. Please ask your group what they would like to do to celebrate at their last session so they can begin planning that, as well as their individual final projects.

## **Preparing to Discuss Week Seven**

### **Forgive and Go Forward**

Please remember to pray for each group member as they complete this week’s challenging work. During the week, you could send an email to remind everyone of the importance of working on forgiveness. Here is a sample email:

*Today, working on chapter seven, I’m praying for each of you. How is your forgiveness work going? This week’s work is pivotal, a turning point in your journey of hope. I am praying you’ll take time each day to move steadily through the steps of forgiveness so you can experience profound freedom from*

*everyone who wounded you.*

*We're in the second half of our healing journey now! Congratulations on all of your hard work.*

### **Important Considerations for Facilitators**

Although not every survivor of sexual abuse experiences PTSD, many do. During this aspect of *Core Healing* work, some group members will experience increased ramifications of PTSD. It's important that you be aware of how that could look. However, do NOT diagnose. If someone presents with numerous PTSD symptoms, please privately refer that person for appropriate trauma-focused mental health care.

The following indicators are included for your awareness as group facilitators, not for group discussion. [You've probably noticed by now that there is no way to cover everything in each chapter as it is! Even so, you need to be aware of these potential concerns.]

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM-5] outlines several contributing factors for PTSD, including the following:

Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways.

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event (s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend.

The DSM-5 includes numerous other possible indicators of the presence of PTSD, including:

- Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s). In children older than 6 years, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspect of the traumatic event(s) are expressed.
- Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream can be related to the traumatic event(s). In children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.
- Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring.
- Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).

The DSM-5 lists numerous other PTSD indicators, which include but are not limited to: a persistent avoidance of anything associated with the traumatic event(s); negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s); negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others or the world; a persistent negative emotional state; markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities; feelings of detachment or estrangement from others; persistent inability to experience positive emotions; irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation); reckless or self-destructive behavior; hypervigilance; exaggerated startle response; problems with concentration and/or sleep, etc.

If group members describe themselves as experiencing numerous PTSD symptoms, please encourage them *privately* to seek help—from a licensed counselor or psychologist who is trained in how to effectively help trauma survivors heal. [FYI: If a professional counselor tells them there's no help for PTSD, do not recommend that they receive counseling from that person, because there IS help and healing available!] Current research in neuroscience illustrates numerous ways in which PTSD does *not* need to continue defining person's life! Another place to avoid going for help is with anyone who helps their clients “relive” trauma experiences. Though people do need to *face* what happened, it is for the purpose of releasing past trauma, not reliving it!

Trauma's influence can be diminished through cognitive behavioral therapy, solution focused treatment, or another form of therapy such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a highly effective method of trauma treatment. Its founder, Dr. Francine Shapiro, says “EMDR helps trauma survivors reprocess disturbing thoughts and memories, providing profound and stable treatment effects in a short period of time.” Thankfully, for those whose trauma occurred months or years prior to receiving EMDR treatment, extensive improvement and reduction of trauma can be experienced.

## Discussion for Week Seven

### Forgive and Go Forward

Begin group discussion with check-in, asking each person to take one minute to share one helpful aspect of working on forgiveness. If someone indicates that nothing was helpful, help them wonder why that might be the case.

**Core Healing Goal: to understand and apply three steps of forgiveness.**

**Grounding** idea: give each person about 2 Tbs. of black Play-Doh, or a mini-can of Play-Doh, if available. If possible, bring a small picture framed in black and place that in the middle of the table, with only the back of the picture visible. Point to the picture and ask what they see.

Then, turn the picture over, noting that we often only see the “back” of our problems; this chapter's work is helping us see there is beauty ahead for us as we go forward, releasing past trauma. Have people creatively shape their Play-Doh into something that reminds them of going forward, having their lives framed in new ways, etc.

Before you transition into week seven's discussion, remind yourself that your main goal in this week's discussion is to be sure you get to Day Five: **Writing, Releasing and Renewing**. [By now, you've probably noticed how difficult it can be to make it through an entire chapter during the fast-paced time your group meets! And that's OK; we are trusting God to be original with His plan—and His guidance—for each group. This week, though, it's vital to plan to “make it” through Day Five.] Everyone who has done this homework has worked hard on this “decision to forgive” (see page 88); being sure to allow adequate discussion time confirms your respect for their work.

As you begin, encourage everyone to review this chapter as often as needed to ensure that the material is internalized and applied to their daily lives. There will be other times in life, for all of us, when we need to apply these forgiveness principles to other situations, concerns, and people.

### Day One: **Remembering to Forgive**

Begin with prayer, asking God to help each person recall only what needs to be recalled in order to release past trauma---and to entrust anything they can't recall to God, Who loves them and wants to deliver them from evil. On page 77, read Psalm 139:23-24, noting the importance of praying throughout application of chapter seven.

On page 77, where they list “people I need to forgive for molesting me” and “people I need to forgive who could have stopped the abuse but didn't,” they could also include “people I tried to tell who didn't believe me” in the second group.

Remind the group to continue using Play-Doh to ground themselves, any time it's needed, during this week's discussion.

### Day Two: **Grudges, Resentment and Other Destructive Choices**

Prayerfully prepare for this day's important discussion, highlighting anything you see that needs to be discussed.

It is important to emphasize the first line on page 78: “If you don't forgive, your abuse will continue to define you.” Ask your group what that statement means to them.

If you think the sheriff story on pages 78-79 will resonate with your group, briefly [remembering our goal to get to Day Five] consider that story, asking the question on page 79, “Do you want to take your abuser with you everywhere you go for the rest of your life?”

On page 79, note; “You don't have to ‘feel like’ releasing your offender to do so,” asking the open-ended question, “How might you feel when you choose to release your offender(s) to God?”

### Day Three: **How to Forgive**

Ask what group members noticed in Genesis 37-39 that relates to them. Be sure you've carefully read, considered, and applied the biblical principles in these chapters, as well as those in Genesis 40-46 (see pages 80-83 of the workbook). The story of Joseph provides rich examples of a person who—after being treated unfairly and abused by family members and others—continues to trust God and experience the freedom of walking in His hope, despite horrific external circumstances. In fact, there is so much in the story of Joseph that we could easily “park” here and miss getting to Day Five. So, keep going. You can always revisit Joseph's story another time—such as during the discussion of Identity, in Week Eight, or in Week Nine's “Designed with Purpose,” or even in Week Ten, “Built to Belong.”

If there is time, give group members an opportunity to share their responses on the middle of page 81, where it says, “Think of your life at this point in time. Will you entrust your current sorrows and concerns to God, accepting His gracious provision of new hope, new life, and a new beginning? Write out your response as a prayer to God.” Please note that this is an opportunity for each person to choose a response rather than being driven by old reactions.

Day Three includes a discussion of Genesis 50:15-21, which includes Joseph telling his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” You might ask them to consider ways God is using others’ evil to draw them to Himself.

It’s important to emphasize each group member’s safety (see final paragraph on page 82), being sure they understand that it is not necessary—nor is it generally recommended—that survivors be in touch with perpetrators as part of their forgiveness process.

On page 83, ask the question, “Will you entrust your suffering to God, expecting His justice, healing and hope?”**Day Four: A New Perspective**

Discuss the first paragraph on page 84, reiterating “the good news about forgiveness is that **you can** experience it...releasing your offender from your ‘hook’ to God’s ‘hook’...rather than minimizing the scope and damage inherent in sexual abuse; you have faced it. Now it’s vital to know how to go forward, being released—freed—from past trauma.”

Discuss paragraphs two and three on page 84, then ask the “How” question.

During Day Four, you’ll be considering this week’s goal, three specific steps, or principles, of forgiveness, outlined on page 87. These principles are explained in Romans 12: 14, 17 and 19:

1. Bless those who persecute you.
2. Do not repay evil for evil.
3. Leave vengeance to the LORD, resting in His promises.

Ask the group what is helping them understand and apply these three principles of forgiveness.

#### **Day Five: Writing, Releasing and Renewing:**

Ask how many group members wrote their forgiveness letters, allowing time for anyone who wants to share—either about the process of writing forgiveness letters, reading one of their letters to the group—or describing obstacles they’re experiencing in completing this chapter’s assignment.

Not everyone will be comfortable reading these letters aloud. Be sure you let people know they don’t “have to” share their letters in group; reading the letters is an opportunity for all who sense it will be helpful to their healing process.

Discuss page 88’s reference to Step One, reviewing the list of people they need to forgive, from Day One.

Step Two; also on page 88, states “remember the letters are designed to be a safe place for you to express the depth and significance of your hurt.” Emphasize the statement: “DO NOT MAIL your letters unless you have someone helping you cope with potential new hurt.”

Step Three of the forgiveness letter process is writing a letter to each person on your list, with practical steps on pages 88 and 89 to help them achieve that goal.

After you discuss these steps, ask someone to read Psalm 57:1-3 and Psalm 91:1-4, from page 89.

End this week's group discussion with prayer and with encouragement, complimenting the group for their willingness to go forward in life

After reading the statement (page 89): "many emotions can surface," ask if anyone is experiencing new or "thawing" emotions while writing their letters. Encourage the group to share what is helping them manage those emotions [e.g. praying, listening to music, reading a Psalm, working out, etc.]. Discuss.

On page 90, ask if anyone wants to share journal entries describing "how you plan to apply what God has taught you about forgiveness."

At the conclusion of week seven's discussion, affirm the group's work in forgiveness, encouraging them to continue applying the forgiveness work of chapters six and seven any time it's needed, noting that there will always be people to forgive, in numerous ways, etc.

This is also a good time to briefly begin to plan your group party and projects for week 12.

\* \* \* \* \*

A day or two after your group meets to discuss week seven, send an email, encouraging each person's work in chapter eight. Following is an excerpt of an email I sent the day after week seven's session. Perhaps you can send something similar—or something else that will relate more effectively with your unique group:

*Dear Women of Hope!*

*Today, as we begin working on chapter eight, "Who Am I?" we're considering our identity in five areas: Spiritual, Social, Emotional, Intellectual and Physical. Once we recognize who we really are--and Whose we are--our lives can go forward, with significance and joy.*

*This week's work can help identify and remove obstacles to personal growth and development. Please set aside time each day or evening to do that day's work in chapter eight.*

*Sometimes an old hymn can bring new perspective to our lives. One such hymn is the following, "He Giveth More Grace," which you can listen to on YouTube. I know many of you are experiencing various challenges as you work through "Core Healing" and pray that this song will encourage you:*

He Giveth More Grace by Annie Johnson Flint

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,<sup>[[L]]</sup>He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,<sup>[[L]]</sup>To added affliction He addeth His mercy,<sup>[[L]]</sup>To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,<sup>[[L]]</sup>His power no boundary known unto men,<sup>[[L]]</sup>For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,<sup>[[L]]</sup>He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,<sup>[[L]]</sup>When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,<sup>[[L]]</sup>When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,<sup>[[L]]</sup>Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known unto men. For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

*An essential way to experience daily encouragement and hope is through spending time with the Lord, meditating on (thinking about) His Word, the Bible. It often helps to read a devotional, too, such as the exquisite “My Utmost for His Highest,” by Oswald Chambers. Today’s “My Utmost” considers “The Vision and The Reality,” citing 1 Corinthians 1:2 “...to those who are...called to be saints.” THIS is your identity—a saint! About this, Chambers wrote:*

“Thank God for being able to see all that you have not yet been. You have had the vision, but you are not yet to the reality of it by any means. It is when we are in the valley, where we prove whether we will be the choice ones, that most of us turn back. We are not quite prepared for the bumps and bruises that must come if we are going to be turned into the shape of the vision. We have seen what we are not, and what God wants us to be, but are we willing to be battered into the shape of the vision to be used by God? The beatings will always come in the most common, everyday ways and through common, everyday people.

There are times when we do know what God’s purpose is; whether we will let the vision be turned into actual character depends on us, not on God. If we prefer to relax on the mountaintop and live in the memory of the vision, then we will be of no real use in the ordinary things of which human life is made. We have to learn to live in reliance upon what we saw in the vision, not simply live in ecstatic delight and conscious reflection upon God. This means living the realities of our lives in the light of the vision until the truth of the vision is actually realized in us. Every bit of our training is in that direction. Learn to thank God for making His demands known.

Our little “I am” always sulks and pouts when God says *do*. Let your little “I am” be shriveled up in God’s wrath and indignation— “I AM WHO I AM...has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). He must dominate. Isn’t it piercing to realize that God not only knows where we live, but also knows the gutters into which we crawl! He will hunt us down as fast as a flash of lightning. No human being knows human beings as God does.”

*May you richly experience the identity and the LIFE our Good Shepherd designed for YOU!*

## **Discussion for Week Eight**

### **Who Am I?**

One idea for group “check-in” this week: ask each person to state their response to the question “Who Am I?” at the beginning of page 91. When people know *who* they are, they can live with renewed hope and confidence in any situation. Therefore, developing a biblical sense of identity is vital for *Core Healing!*

Continue with a grounding exercise, designed to help your group learn how to *anchor* in the present. This week, you could try grounding with art. You might have everyone draw something basic that helps the group know one another. If you wish, this week’s grounding exercise could be your group’s

check-in instead of the idea in paragraph one. Or, their simple drawings could illustrate what they wrote.

Facilitator's FYI: by this point in the course, you've probably had at least one group member say, "Grounding doesn't work for me." You can gently disagree with that statement, using it as a teaching opportunity. Grounding does work—but it must be done repeatedly, often literally hundreds of times per day. The body has learned to react to reminders of trauma [activated unconsciously by all five senses]—and grounding requires time and repetition to help the body "unlearn" hurtful lessons. Grounding, then, isn't "do it once and you're done." Instead, it is consciously training the body to relax *every* time it's reminded of past trauma. When an intrusive memory occurs—whether it impacts the mind, body or emotions—a person cannot "stay" in the ramifications of that memory if they'll pay attention to their five senses and consciously switch focus, moving from Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) dominance to a relaxed state of Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) dominance

We teach new grounding exercises every week, offering numerous options so people can choose the exercises they prefer. Please remind your group to practice grounding when they don't feel like they need to do so—such as when they're feeling calm and happy, so that they know how to apply these techniques whenever their minds, bodies, or emotions re-experience old trauma memories. How can someone know when it's time to "ground"? Noticing the presence of one or more of the 5Fs (Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fornicate, Feed), it's time to practice grounding. It's grounding time whenever one is experiencing "hot" sympathetic system (SNS) dominance. SNS behaviors and emotions might include being aggressive, bossy, defensive, hostile, reactive, impulsive, inattentive, sudden angry outbursts, anxiety, irritability, feeling tense, frustrated "up-tight," etc. Being in one's "hot" system is not an indication of failure; instead, it's an indication that the body is trying to heal. Similarly, intrusive dreams (nightmares) and flashbacks are the mind and body's attempt to heal from trauma.

Since time doesn't heal trauma wounds, it's vital for facilitators to consistently offer hope paired with practical skills so people can confidently know how to move beyond trauma's repercussions, as well as how to respond rather than react to both real and perceived danger. With a mere ten to fifteen seconds of conscious relaxation, it's possible to enjoy living in the body's "cool" PNS. That transition can occur through a simple mental exercise such as math, to physical grounding techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing or intentionally relaxing various muscles, or via soothing grounding [positive self-talk]. It's possible to displace SNS hypervigilance by choosing a PNS state of relaxed attentiveness.

Now, back to Week Eight!

**Core Healing Goal: to recognize five areas of identity and learn how to grow in each area.**

The five growth areas—spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical—are illustrated on the graph on page 92 of *Core Healing*.

From page 92, ask if anyone has been "shutting down" in any of the five areas.

**Day One: Discovering a Spiritual Identity**

During this day's discussion, emphasize how we can find ourselves in God, asking people to read excerpts from this day's discussion, including Matthew 11:28 and John 14:6.

Take time to discuss the quotes on page 93, as well as people's responses to Jesus, Augustine and C.S. Lewis.

**Be sure to spend adequate time exploring spiritual identity**—because this is where we truly discover who we are!

On page 94, address the question wondering about God's mission for your life.

Take time to consider obstacles people experience in regard to trusting God; page 94 mentions two of them:

1. Difficulty trusting anyone, including God
2. An attitude of stubborn rebellion or passive indifference toward God

Have someone read 1 John 4:10-11, on page 95, then discuss the Good News, that Jesus is God's provision for our sins.

Take time to have someone read John 8:1-11 aloud, then discuss the question and "impressions" following that passage on page 95.

Help your group imagine Jesus' love (see page 96); help people learn to be alert for the "voice" they're hearing when they read or listen to God's Word. Read the section on pages 96-97 that clarifies God's authentic Voice of love and compassion for the afflicted, considering Psalm 72:12-14, and Psalm 37:4.

Prayerfully ask if anyone wants to accept Jesus' loving payment for sins and begin "moving forward into a new future and new hope" (see page 97). If indicated, review John 14:6, John 3:16, etc.

## Day Two: **Social Identity**

As you prepare for Day Two, highlight sections you sense will benefit your group.

From page 97, summarize that, when trauma continues defining survivors' lives, they could be voluntarily giving their perpetrators power to continue defining them.

Discuss how making "new choices every day" can help survivors change their social identity.

Have someone read the Kevin Leman quote (page 98).

Ask about internal labels—and discuss whether group members would "speak to anyone else as unkindly as you talk to yourself" (per page 98).

Consider the importance of getting rid of masks and being the same person at home, school, work, etc. (review pages 98 and 99).

From page 99, discuss how group members are choosing "not to let the past continue dictating how you relate to others."

Ask people to share positive steps they will take (page 100), beginning today.

### Day Three: **Emotional Identity**

Ask if anyone noticed old attitudes that they need to let go (page 100), or if they've believed the false idea that they have to "feel good" before they can heal. Discuss the impact of false beliefs such as that one.

Consider the significance of "adjusting how you think" (paragraph two in Day Three, page 100).

Have someone read Ephesians 4:26-27. Discuss its application (page 101).

Consider the pull-out quote on page 101; discuss the Continuum of Emotions and how to apply the concepts it introduces.

As you discuss defense mechanisms as potential obstacles to healing (see page 102), note paragraph 3: "since you are no longer facing the stressors that activated these defense mechanisms" and think of how to integrate that idea into yet another reminder to continually "ground" oneself in the present. For those whose bodies are continually up-regulated by old trauma memories into a state of SNS dominance, they likely are also governed by debilitating defense mechanisms, which prevents core healing. Group time can help people see that it's possible to move from old, defeating habits to new freedom—to profound core healing!

On page 104, read "God has something better for you than anything the world offers," asking someone to read John 15:9-12.

Ask the question in paragraph two on page 104.

Realizing that many people stay stuck in trauma because of guilt, pay special attention to the rest of page 104.

### Day Four: **Intellectual Identity**

As with each day's work, consider and highlight sections for your group discussion. On page 105, you could have someone read Galatians 5:1 and the David Benner quote.

Pages 106 -108 include six Scripture passages that are significant for core healing. Ask God which of the following to emphasize: Luke 18:14, Zephaniah 3:17, Colossians 3:1-4, Philippians 3:7-10a, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, and Jeremiah 17:9-10. Prayerfully consider which of this day's questions to discuss.

### Day Five: **Physical Identity**

If you have time, discuss the Hans Selye quote on page 109, and the question following it.

Discuss the question at the end of page 110 and other points in this section, if you have time.

**Weekend Bonus Work:** this week, we're considering the sixth stage of psychosocial development, Later Adolescence, and the potential life impact of sexual abuse occurring either in this stage or before.

The true story of "Sabrina" illustrates one way in which childhood sexual abuse can impact a young adult's life. Sabrina could have easily experienced ongoing gender confusion, but she did not. Her

story illustrates how powerful a friend’s suggestion can be.

Pause and wonder what “suggestions” are influencing your life, being diligent to listen to Truth as you prepare to lead the discussion of this important chapter on identity. What a privilege it is to help people know WHO they are in Christ!

## Discussion for Week Nine

### Designed with Purpose

Dear Facilitators,

Isn’t it an amazing privilege to contemplate that our lives have meaning and purpose? As you prepare to facilitate the discussion of chapter nine, prayerfully consider what to highlight from each day’s work, allowing time to cover important points, such as Day Four’s “You Are More Than a Conqueror!”

You’ve noticed by now that we don’t emphasize “victimhood” in *Core Healing*, using the term “survivor” instead of “victim” to describe someone who has experienced sexual abuse. This chapter’s discussion underscores another clear distinction—people aren’t defined by their abuse! You can encourage your group to cultivate solution-focused thinking by helping them understand and apply the Bible’s vital lessons about life’s purpose and meaning.

Why do we integrate proven counseling methods with Scripture in *Core Healing*? We carefully utilize evidence-based therapeutic methods that can help people build new life skills, coping strategies, and healthy thought patterns. God’s Word illumines numerous coping strategies and thought processes while simultaneously offering transformative, soul-quenching hope along with practical new ways to live. Have you ever had a massage? If so, your massage therapist likely told you afterwards to “drink lots of water today so that the toxins released during your massage will be voided from your body.” Just as water helps the body remove toxins, so the Living Water of God’s Word helps us remove “toxins” like the lies inherent in sexual molestation and learn how to live in fresh hope and victory. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

\* \* \* \* \*

### On with Week Nine!

Have group members check-in, asking them to take one minute each to describe how they connect with the first paragraph’s statement, “Throughout this book, you have learned that you are valuable and that you are no longer defined by the abuse that damaged your innermost being.”

**Grounding:** Perhaps a bit of levity will help your group relax before you begin this week’s important consideration of **Purpose**. Presenting the 4-D [four direction] physical grounding exercise usually elicits laughter while offering a versatile grounding tool. A 4-D can help people rapidly move into their

PNS (parasympathetic nervous system) and can be implemented in numerous ways: a “full-on” 4-D is completed standing up, taking time to fully stretch your body north, south, east, and then west. I recommend you help your group do a “full-on” 4D! Please tell them, too, that this exercise can easily be modified so others don’t notice you’re doing it. When you feel anxious at work or in a social situation, you can complete an “under-desk” or “under-the-table” 4-D, gently moving a foot, hand, or finger slightly in each of the four directions.

Have someone read Rick Warren’s statement on page 113.

### **Core Healing Goal: to understand and articulate your life purpose.**

#### **Day One: Finding Focus**

As God leads, discuss the Myles Munroe quote on page 113, and then have someone read the last three lines on page 113. [It’s vital to see past trauma as “interruptions to the purpose for which you were born” so people have hope that they can truly move beyond their abuse!]

On page 114, you could ask if anyone wants to share insights from Psalm 139, or you could explore Matthew 6 on pages 114-115, or the thoughts from Viktor Frankl’s “Man’s Search for Meaning” on page 115, discussing what specific choices group members wrote about having “a purposeful attitude” on page 116.

Continuing the discussion of choice, explore Romans 12:1-2 on page 116, focusing on how to choose to walk in God’s will and strength instead of conforming to the world’s purpose.

#### **Day Two: Doing Small Things Instead of Great Things**

On page 117, ask if anyone took time to “simply notice the people around you” (etc.) and what doing that was like. Continue, asking what they listed as ways they could begin giving others a “cup of cold water.”

Discuss Viktor Frankl’s explanation of three ways we can discover meaning in life (page. 118).

Depending on how the discussion is going and the time you have left, you could have someone read 1 Peter 4:1-11, on page 119 (or from their own preferred version of Scripture). Continuing on page 119, ask what three steps people listed that can help them experience God’s purpose.

#### **Day Three: Avoiding Disruptions to a Life of Purpose**

Ask how being focused on past or present hurts or injustices hinders people from living in God’s purpose (bottom of page 119).

On page 120, give people time to discuss ways they’ve seen God restoring their lives and working in and through them.

If there’s sufficient time, have someone read the Frankl quote on page 120.

On page 121, the first question is important: “How will you entrust your fears and difficulties to God?” That accomplishes two things—it allows people to know it’s OK to have fears and difficulties, even after they’ve healed from sexual trauma. It also reminds us that we can entrust those challenges to the God Who loves each of us.

Share ways the CHAFF Chart (page 121) can be consistently utilized to help identify distractions to a God-focused life while learning to live in God's provision instead of the world's temporary satisfaction.

#### Day Four: **You Are More Than a Conqueror!**

Ask God to guide your group into a life-changing discussion of Romans 8:31-39. Take time to be sure people understand how to apply these amazing promises to their lives so they can live, now, as "more than a conqueror." Point out that we can live as "more than conquerors," not because we have somehow "arrived" but because Jesus' death and resurrection provided this "surpassing victory" (verse 17) for us.

Continue with Ephesians 6:10-18, explaining/discussing each piece of the armor God provides for the battles His children face.

#### Day Five: **Your Personal Vision Statement**

If you don't have time to discuss day five, don't worry. There is ample explanation in the workbook for people to do this exercise individually. Just remind everyone to take time to do it! If possible, though, have one or two people share their vision and mission statement (pages 126 and 127).

**Weekend Bonus Work:** discuss as time allows.

## **Discussion for Week Ten**

### **Built to Belong**

Psalm 147:3 promises, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." What a wonderful opportunity we have again this week, to offer God's healing balm to souls wounded by sexual trauma. Although *we* are not able to heal human souls, God is profoundly able to accomplish just that! Many find comfort and hope for healing when they train themselves to observe God's power and magnificence in nature, realizing He is the one who "counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. Great is our LORD and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite. The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground." God actually "delights in those...who hope in his unfailing love" (Psalm 147:4-6, NASU).

It's important to help your group see that God deeply cares about each of them—as individuals. Only when people realize that He loves them will they want to "sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praises to our God..." (Psalm 147:7). Beginning to grasp that the God of all creation sees them—and wants to heal their wounds—brings hope, not only of belonging to His family, but of living as someone who is fully alive in this moment.

It is likely there will be people in your group who have no caring friends or family, who have no place where they experience a sense of home. It is vital you listen to them—and present authentic hope. This chapter offers numerous proactive ideas for building healthy relationships, starting from the inside out (see pages 133-134). It also offers ideas (page 142) for how people can learn to reach out to others. For some who have no human connection, it can be helpful to connect with a pet such as a dog or cat. For

others, who cannot have pets, even visualizing how it would feel to touch a caring animal can be comforting in times of loneliness—and in everyday life.

It is helpful to be aware of attachment styles as you prepare for this week’s discussion, even though it’s not a topic to explore with you group due to time limitations. Attachment theory is based on the research of Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, who defines our ability to attach with others as “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.” Current research indicates that a birth mother who has had a traumatic experience will release cortisol that then is absorbed in her unborn child through the placenta, impacting a baby’s central nervous system, limbic system, and autonomic nervous system. This can even cause an infant to have enlarged amygdalae, which could make it difficult for the baby to learn emotional regulation.

For your information, here is a brief summary of the four basic styles of attachment:

1. **Secure:** sees self as worthy and able to connect and communicate with others.
2. **Avoidant attachment:** dismissive due to a fear of either being too close or too distant from others; might seem preoccupied; doesn’t ask others for anything.
3. **Ambivalent attachment:** characterized by insecure attachment and high anxiety.
4. **Disorganized attachment:** has a fragmented internal sense of self, sometimes expressed with seemingly undirected movements, “freezing,” and contradictory patterns of interaction with others.

This week’s work in *Belonging* can be an important step to helping group members develop a secure attachment, first with God, then with others. For those who didn’t securely attach to their caregivers during infancy or childhood, finding a sense of belonging in adulthood can be extremely difficult. As group members consider “belonging,” old attachment wounds could surface. Be alert for fear-based statements or contradictory interaction styles so you can guide the discussion to safety for everyone.

FYI: During adulthood, childhood attachment wounds can make people vulnerable to developing PTSD following trauma, or to experiencing detachment, dissociation, and disconnection in their relationships. Although our work in this chapter cannot fully repair these complex wounds, it can offer new patterns coupled with hope for breaking the cycle trauma began. It is important to be sensitive to potential complications related to these concerns. [Being aware of attachment wounds provides yet another incentive to steadily remain on topic, discussing this chapter day by day, during your group session.]

**Check-in:** as your group discussion begins, you can check-in with your own original idea, or you could simply change the statement in the second paragraph on page 130 into a question, such as: “What did you notice in this week’s work about your innate worth—that God designed you to be loved, respected and valued?”

**Grounding:** try something creative this week, and let me know how it goes! Thank you!

**Core Healing Goal: to understand and identify where you belong.**

Day One: **Belonging in Church**

Since many people have been wounded in church, today’s discussion could easily derail your “journey of hope.” This week’s introductory remarks include, “Many who experience spiritual abuse in church

say it feels like emotional rape.” Numerous people have met with me, ostensibly coming to address sexual trauma but beginning their first appointment with something like this, “What happened to me at church was worse than my rape. My pastor told me I’m not healing because I’m not [forgiving enough, or willing to spend holidays with the family member who molested me, etc.]” Insensitive words from people one should be able to trust, such as a pastor or church leader, can be as devastating as sexual abuse. Even though those whose words seem callous or uncaring might not have intended them to come across that way, being unaware or uninformed of the impact of one’s words and actions isn’t acceptable behavior. That is one of many reasons to continue helping people learn how to skillfully help survivors of sexual abuse heal.

On page 131, discuss how to rely on Jesus for safety in a changing world. Wonder aloud about the statement, “Jeremiah addresses the root issue regarding why people hurt each other,” and have someone read Jeremiah 2:13. Discuss John 4:10 and the question at the bottom of page. 131.

Prayerfully support people’s stated concerns with your facial expressions, body language, and a few words, as you continually keep the discussion moving forward into healing. If indicated, reassure your group members with the statement in the first paragraph on page 130: “If you are currently being abused in church, ask God to lead you to a safe church.” Sometimes people feel they are the problem and allow themselves to remain in an unhealthy situation. Pages 131-133 offer numerous ideas about how to help people safeguard their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

“Neither your emotions nor other people are accurate indicators of reality. Both can mislead you.” Take time to address both that statement from page 132 and the question that accompanies it, because helping people learn to trust God rather than their emotions can provide an opportunity for breakthrough. [Please note, however, that we need to notice our emotions and discover what they are trying to tell us so we can address real needs they could be illuminating. For example, are we feeling depressed because we’re tired or hungry? Do we need to get more sleep so we’re rested? Are we angry because we’re being abused? Is someone experiencing depression due to a need to find relational safety?

One group member said, “We fall in love with relationships that reflect our insecurities.” This week, focus on helping people learn how to build healthy relationships, realizing their secure attachment to God and the need to consistently develop and maintain healthy thought processes. On page 132, take time to discuss, “Instead of entrusting yourself to flawed guides to help you find a place where you can belong, will you entrust yourself to God?”

## Day Two: **Fitting In**

Consider how to begin the process of finding truly safe people [see page 133] by:

1. Choosing to believe you are just as worthy as anyone else
2. Look for a place where you can serve others rather than waiting for someone to notice you.

Take time to have group members ponder what they checked on pages 133-134, and discuss improvements they might need to make so they’re prepared to have healthy relationships with others, reminding them to “look at this as a wonderful opportunity” (etc.).

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; have the group share insights they've gained from this passage.

Ask (page 135) "what statements in Colossians 3:12-17 help you understand God's love for you?" Discuss the specific positive attitudes and actions God is leading them to apply to their relationships (bottom of page 135).

Note King David's prayer in Psalm 142 and how it can be applied to life today.

### Day Three: **The Battle to Forgive in the Battle to Belong**

In editions one and two of *Core Healing*, there is an error in the first paragraph of Day Three. It should read "Chapters six and seven."

Discuss Allender and Longmans' statement, "The Evil One wants us to question God." Think about how questioning/doubting God can hinder growth and healing.

Prayerfully discuss page 137, asking God to help you know what specific sections to highlight in your group discussion.

On page 138, comfort the group with "Jesus understands the challenges you face," and "you can experience belonging in God's unfailing love." Ask if anyone wants to share the prayer written in response to Psalm 32 and John 16:33.

### Day Four: **To Trust or Not to Trust**

Today's discussion can help people understand why they feel powerless, and/or why it is still difficult to trust anyone. From page 138, emphasize that "forgiveness releases you from the clutches of the past!"

If someone in your group is an adult child of an addict, you could read and discuss possible impact regarding the three rules of the addict's home (page 138).

Encourage your group to read the entire Gospel of John during the next several weeks. Ask how they are seeing themselves as having worth when they realize they belong, in Christ (per page 139).

### Day Five: **Belonging by Being**

Prayerfully proceed with "Belonging by Being," allowing time to move into a discussion of "positive descriptions to replace past or current negative labels you have accepted about yourself" (per page 140).

Continuing on page 140, ask the question at the bottom of the page.

Have someone read the Mike Mason quote on page 141, then ask the question following it, "Do you love yourself?"

Discuss how to apply Ephesians 1:3-6.

Consider how to be proactive in regard to belonging by seeking to volunteer (pages 142, 143).

Discuss how Romans 12:4-13 can help reduce feelings of inadequacy as each person realizes his/her gifts to build the body of Christ.

Help expand people's vision by encouraging them to think about how they can intentionally develop enjoyable family traditions, looking for people they can encourage, rather than waiting for people to encourage them. One woman, who had no living family members, decided to host a Christmas party for others rather than throwing a "pity party" for herself, alone throughout the holidays. The party was a great success—and she discovered there were others who also had nowhere to go.

It might help if you point out the difference between "hospitality" [helping people feel at home by creating a relaxing environment], and "entertaining" [impressing people with your great food, great decorating, great skills as a host/hostess, etc.]. Instead, focus on creating an environment where people can thrive—a place to belong—and you won't worry about making everything "perfect" (only God is perfect, anyway, so isn't it time to give up on perfectionism?).

As people develop new traditions, gratitude can be a great catalyst for change and growth. Please read Chesterton's quote on page 145, and then ask the question following it.

**Weekend Bonus Work:** discuss as time allows.

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (page 146) and ask the group how they can apply that to their unique concerns.

At the conclusion of this week's discussion, remind your group to continue preparing their individual final projects (if your group has decided to do a final project, that is). For the groups who have chosen to have a party during their final group session, you could have a sign-up sheet this week for foods, paper goods, or other items the group wants to have for their celebration.

## Discussion for Week Eleven

### I Am a Victor!

Sometimes, as group facilitators, we can feel as though we haven't accomplished "enough," especially if group discussion veers away from where we're attempting to lead it. Or, we can grieve for the suffering group members we have experienced.

What is a healthy focus for us? Paul was a leader, too; in 1 Corinthians, he describes what helped him continually move forward:

*For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:2-5).*

Following Paul's example, our goal is not to create any sort of dependency on us or our leadership skills—but to consistently, carefully point to the hope and strength available to all group members, each beloved by God.

This week, we're beginning *Stage Eight* of our *Core Healing* journey. That stage, **Living as a Victor**, includes both chapters eleven and twelve.

Check-in: ask group members to share whether reading the title aloud helped them this week; and, if so, how? If not, why not?

**Core Healing Goal: to understand and apply living as a  
Creator/Victor instead of as a Victim.**

As you discuss this goal with your group, help them realize that this is a lifelong paradigm shift. Each person who transitions out of Victim status is moving into an entirely different way of living. A Creator has choices; a Victim does not. A Creator has authentic hope; a Victim does not. A Creator effects positive change; a Victim does not.

**Grounding:** Family Church Worship's song, "Anchor," could be this week's grounding exercise. After listening to the music, help people focus on the words of the chorus:

*You're my sustainer—You are my anchor—My confidence remains in You—And I will not be moved*

**Day One: The Victim Game**

The goal today is to motivate your group members to LOSE this game! Discuss any points from Day One that you think will help them reach this goal.

One important thought to consider is in the first paragraph of page 149. Give time for people to discuss how to recognize when they're living as Victims.

Take time to define the roles of Rescuer and Persecutor, allowing the group to explore the impact of all three roles in their lives. Note (page 150, last paragraph) that all three roles continue to shift.

Discuss how to apply Dr. Sam Peeple's statement (page 151).

**Day Two: The Power of Choice**

Shifting from Victim to Creator mode offers choice—but, keep in mind that survivors of sexual abuse often aren't used to having choices. During discussion for this day, wonder together at the gift God gives us in having the ability to choose—even our emotional, mental, and spiritual perspective of life! Then, kindly, gently, help people differentiate between times they revert (easily, rapidly) into Victim thinking and how they can (decisively, determinedly, repeatedly) move into Creator mode.

Discuss differences between Rescuers and Coaches, helping the group explore the need to look for helpful Coaches instead of enabling Rescuers.

Ask a group member to read the Milton quote on page 153; discuss.

**Day Three: New Life Choices**

Ask group members to share how they compared and contrasted the three roles in each game. Think about and discuss additional differences roles of the Victim and Choice perspectives.

**Day Four: Living in Peace**

Have a group member read John 16:33.

Ask how they answered the question following that verse.

Discuss why it's important to remember that the world is not our ultimate destiny and is insufficient to be our hope.

If you have family members of abuse survivors in your group, take time to discuss this day's "Note," on page 155.

#### Day Five: **Being Creative**

Have your group say together, "I am a Victor!"

Discuss the pull-out quote on page 155.

Read James 4:4-15, and consider what it means.

Before having someone read 1 Peter 1:3-9, ask the rhetorical question, "Is there anything in your life you are powerless to change—any relationships causing pain—any mental, emotional, or physical concerns?" Discuss: What would happen if you, realizing you are a victor, release those struggles to God? He isn't powerless—and He is able to transform you in His resurrection power!

Prayerfully highlight what to discuss in this week's **Weekend Bonus Work**. **If possible, discuss the concept "the magnetism of mediocrity."**

Remind everyone to bring their final projects next week—anything from a picture, song, poem, collage, or something else that illustrates what they've learned in *Core Healing*. If your group has decided to have a celebration party, you could have a sign-up sheet for anything they've decided to contribute for that.

Encourage the group to begin working on chapter twelve, emphasizing that it will likely take several weeks for them to complete the journaling exercises. Next week's discussion will look at the week's highlights, while group members can continue working on the journaling exercises at a leisurely—but steady—pace.

## **Discussion for Week Twelve**

### **Continuing to Heal**

Chapter twelve is designed to provide ongoing encouragement long after *Core Healing* course work is completed, offering journaling opportunities that summarize and provide ongoing application of *Core Healing*.

Point out the ideas in Appendices B (page 178) and D (page 180); both can help participants successfully apply their *Core Healing* work.

Read and discuss the pull-out quote on page 159.

Commend group members' progress—and remind them of God's provision and hope for their futures! Encourage them to continually apply this week's Scripture references, keep reviewing *Core Healing* goals, daily allowing God to continue His transformative work in every area of their lives.

**Grounding:** ask several volunteers to share their favorite grounding exercises, and do one or two of those together as you begin.

**Check-in this week** with John 15:1-2, and have people share how knowing Jesus is the Vine and we are His branches empowers us to live as Creators each day.

Since this week is a review chapter, the **goals** of all five areas of *Core Healing* are included in the corresponding day's work.

Day One: **Competence**

**Core Healing Goal: to establish new beliefs which result in self-respect and competence.**

Today's work reviews the imperative to continue a habit of positive self-talk and offers questions to serve as guides into the assignment to journal and apply Scripture.

- What do I see?
- What does it mean?
- How can I apply it to my life?
- Are there promises for me to claim?
- Are there sins for me to confess?

Following the questions, discuss (if you have time) the sample journaling exercise on pages 161-162.

Day Two: **Security**

**Core Healing Goal: to move from attitudes or actions shaped by abuse into the safety and security God provides by making healing choices each day.**

Read the first paragraph, noting the quotes by Oswald Chambers and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Look at the "mini-vacation" exercise on page 164.

Day Three: **Identity**

**Core Healing Goal: to recognize five areas of identity and learn how to grow in each area.**

Compare and contrast the differences in lives controlled by either the flesh or the Holy Spirit, per Galatians 5:17-21 and Galatians 5:22-23. Ask several to share what they wrote in response to, "Using Galatians 5 as a litmus test..." on page 166.

Day Four: **Purpose**

**Core Healing Goal: to understand and articulate your life purpose.**

You could ask if anyone in the group has discovered new meaning and purpose during *Core Healing's Journey of Hope*.

If indicated, read the Martyn Lloyd-Jones quote on page 167.

## Day Five: **Belonging**

### **Core Healing Goal: to understand and identify where you belong.**

Remind group members that people cannot define who we are—unless we allow them to do so. For eternity, God’s children belong to Him. All earthly sorrows will disappear in His love. But while we’re still in this world (yet not “of” it), we can entrust our sorrows to the God who cares. As we realize our limitless worth—and recall we’re part of His body, we’ll be able to move forward in hope.

Read the Spurgeon quote on page 168.

Read Lamentations 3:22-23.

The upcoming new edition of this workbook will be entitled, “Core Healing: A Journey of Hope,” [removing “from Sexual Abuse” on the workbook cover due to people’s discomfort with having that phrase there]. Though the rest of the workbook is essentially the same (except for minor edits in punctuation, etc.), there is a change on page 169 of this chapter, where I’ve deleted the section beginning with “Clients often ask me if I were sexually abused.” After talking with family members who knew the eccentric relative cited in editions one and two, I have concluded that he was just that—eccentric, his stories of a pet monkey *not* related to sexual abuse at all. Because I don’t want to unfairly accuse even an unnamed relative, I felt led to omit this section in the third edition.

That section will be replaced with the following information, included as practical help for survivors of sexual trauma:

People often feel concerned if they have only fleeting memories—or no memories at all—of certain time periods of their lives. Because trauma memories are often stored in “fragments,” it’s quite common to be able to only recall a fraction of a traumatic event or series of events.

Trauma survivors might also experience random, unclear memories either when awake or emerging as intrusive disturbing, or indistinct dreams. If you’re unable to retrieve clear memories of life events, months, or years, it could be because trauma has prevented your mind and emotions from processing what happened to you during that season.

Rather than being frustrated by forgotten details, you can ask God to show you anything you *need* to know, praying Psalm 139:23-24.

If someone is profoundly concerned about irretrievable memories, even after the above reassurance, you could recommend he or she find a therapist trained in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), a therapeutic method that allows the person to be fully conscious while reducing trauma’s current influence. Sometimes people will recall traumatic events during EMDR; at other

times, they do not. Usually, though, the sense of trauma associated even with forgotten periods of time is significantly reduced.

**As you conclude your journey, have someone read 1 Corinthians 15:53-57 (page 170). Each person can live in the limitless victory God provides!**



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To participate anonymously in evidence-based research exploring the effectiveness of *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope*, the PTGI assessment is included on the next two pages, with gratitude to its creators L. G. Calhoun and R. G. Tedeschi.

If you are willing to give a few moments of your time to help with this research project, please email your PTGI Factor scores [per the following instructions] to:

corehealingtrauma@gmail.com

*Thank you!*



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Instructions:

Please complete the first page of the PTGI (on the next page) before

utilizing the scoring information on page 52, the page following the inventory. Group facilitators: please collect scoring information for all group members willing to participate (being sure that each participant has signed the release form at the beginning of the course), then either scan and send the factor analysis (page 52) pages of each group member or email the *totals* for each of the five columns on that page to: corehealingtrauma@gmail.com. Be sure to indicate that your data is for *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope*.

Note: individuals who have completed the workbook and who wish to participate in this research project are certainly welcome to do so! Please email either your factor analysis page or your totals for the five columns to corehealingtrauma@gmail.com, stating, “I give my permission to add my data for the purposes of evidence-based research for *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope*.”

THANK YOU! I appreciate your help and participation. God bless you.

*Because of His Love,*

*Marti*

## POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH INVENTORY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the crisis/disaster, using the following scale.

- 0 = *I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.*
- 1 = *I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 2 = *I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 3 = *I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 4 = *I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 5 = *I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.*

POSSIBLE AREAS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE		0	1	2	3	4	5
1	I changed my priorities about what is important in life.						
2	I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.						
3	I developed new interests.						
4	I have a greater feeling of self-reliance						
5	I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.						
6	I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of						
7	I established a new path for my life.						
8	I have a greater sense of closeness with others.						
9	I am more willing to express my emotions.						
10	I know better that I can handle difficulties.						
11	I am able to do better things with my life.						
12	I am better able to accept the way things work out.						
13	I can better appreciate each day.						
14	New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been						
15	I have more compassion for others.						
16	I put more effort into my relationships.						
17	I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.						
18	I have a stronger religious faith.						
19	I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.						
20	I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.						
21	I better accept needing others.						

## POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH INVENTORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

After completing the inventory on the previous page, transfer **only** the **numbers** found in the corresponding white squares below. Then, add up the each column and divide by the number in bold at the bottom of the corresponding column. To help with research to validate the efficacy of *Core Healing: A Journey of Hope*, scan this page (or, in the content of your email, list numerical results from each column) and email to: corehealingtrauma@gmail.com. Thank you! Your input will be confidential, used only in the process of evidence-based research.

<b>Factor Analysis &gt; &gt; &gt;</b>		<b>Relating to others</b>	<b>New possibilities</b>	<b>Personal strength</b>	<b>Spiritual Change</b>	<b>Appreciation of life</b>
1	I changed my priorities about what is important in life.					
2	I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.					
3	I developed new interests.					
4	I have a greater feeling of self-reliance					
5	I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.					
6	I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.					
7	I established a new path for my life.					
8	I have a greater sense of closeness with others.					
9	I am more willing to express my emotions.					
10	I know better that I can handle difficulties.					
11	I am able to do better things with my life.					
12	I am better able to accept the way things work out.					
13	I can better appreciate each day.					
14	New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.					
15	I have more compassion for others.					
16	I put more effort into my relationships.					
17	I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.					
18	I have a stronger religious faith.					
19	I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.					
20	I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.					
21	I better accept needing others.					
<b>Total of each column</b>						
<b>Divide by</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Score</b>						

Note: the higher the numbers, the greater the posttraumatic growth.

## References

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Najavits, Lisa M. (2002). *Seeking Safety A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse*. New York: The Guilford Press.

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## Books to Consider for Your Library

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Since many complex concerns can result from traumatic stress, following are a few of the many books that can be helpful for individuals on a healing journey.

### Teaching Children Personal Safety

*My Body Is Special and Belongs to Me* by Sally Berenzweig, Med, MA and Cherie Benjoseph, LCSW, KidSafe Foundation

*I Said NO! A kid-to-kid guide to keeping private parts private* by Zack and Kimberly King, Boulden Publishing

*My Body Is Private* by Linda Walvoord Girard

## **Bibliotherapeutic Novels to help people heal from abuse, abortion, trauma, and neglect**

*Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers, Multnomah

*Secrets Behind the Door* by Marti Wibbels, on Amazon

*Sound of Light* by Marti Wibbels, on Amazon

*Tilly*, by Frank E. Peretti, Crossway Books

## **Workbooks for Healing from Trauma**

*Core Healing: A Journey of Hope* [formerly known as *Core Healing from Sexual Abuse: A Journey of Hope*] by Marti Wibbels, Loring Gate Productions, order on Amazon.com

*Core Healing from Trauma* by Marti Wibbels, order on Amazon.com

*Santidad del Nucleo Del Abuso Sexual: Un Viaje de Esperanza* by Marti Wibbels, traducido por Rosauara Zeghir, Loring Gate Productions, order on Amazon.com

*Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse* by Lisa M. Najavits, The Guilford Press

*Surrendering the Secret: Healing the Heartbreak of Abortion* [available as a workbook, leaders' guide and DVD series] by Pat Layton, LifeWay

*The Wounded Heart* [available as a book and workbook], by Dan Allender, NavPress

## **Reclaiming God's Design**

*The DNA of Relationships: Discover How You Are Designed for Satisfying Relationships*, by Dr. Gary Smalley, Tyndale House Publishers

*The Sacred Search*, by Gary Thomas, David C. Cook

*Sacred Marriage*, by Gary Thomas, Zondervan

*A Celebration of Sex: A Christian Couple's Manual [A guide to enjoying god's gift of married sexual pleasure]*, by Dr. Douglas E. Rosenau, Thomas Nelson Publishers

*Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage* by Ed Wheat, M.D. and Gaye Wheat, Revell

## **Eating Disorders**

*Hope, Help and Healing for Eating Disorders: A Whole-Person Approach to Treatment of Anorexia, Bulimia, and Disordered Eating*, by Gregory L. Jantz, PhD with Ann McMurray, WaterBrook Press

## **When Emotional, Mental, or Spiritual Pain Is Expressed in Self-Harm**

*Inside a Cutter's Mind* by Jerusha Clark with Dr. Earl Henslin, NavPress

## **Help and Prevention for Addictive Behaviors**

*Addictions A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel* by Edward T. Welch, CCEF, PR Publishing

*No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction* by Marnie C. Ferree, IVP Books

*Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex Is Affecting Our Children* by Joe S. Mcilhaney, Jr., MD and Freda McKissic Bush, MD, Northfield Publishing

*Clean: A Proven Plan for Men Committed to Sexual Integrity* by Douglas Weiss, PhD

*When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography* by Vickie Tiede, New Growth Press