

INTENTIONAL INTIMACY

Journey towards deeper intimacy with God as you uncover the stories that shape you, embrace healing, and practice faith within a safe, supportive community.

GROUP GUIDELINES

- **Confidentiality** What is discussed in the group stays in the group.
- **Speak for Yourself** Share your own thoughts; avoid giving unsolicited advice or speaking for others.
- **Respect others** Allow everyone to share without interruptions. Limit side conversations and sharing time to ensure everyone can participate.
- **Time Management** Start and end meetings on time to respect everyone's schedule.
- **Take responsibility** If you feel uncomfortable, please express your concerns to the group, a leader, or church staff.

GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Each lesson includes readings and questions to be completed over **six weeks**. At the start of each meeting, read the **Introduction** together. Then, discuss the **Application** questions (preferably no more than four to five people in each group). These discussion groups should remain consistent for the duration of the study and can be gender-specific for comfort. Feel free to also incorporate more prayer or worship into each meeting, however you see fit!

Please indicate you have read and understand the guidelines and expectations for this group:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

LESSON OUTLINE

WEEK 1 | **Our Shared Struggle**

WEEK 2 | **Our Need for Love**

WEEK 3 | **Our Need for Healing**

WEEK 4 | **Our Need for Renewal**

WEEK 5 | **Our Need for Understanding**

WEEK 6 | **Our Shared Hope**

1 / OUR SHARED STRUGGLE

INTRODUCTION

We all come from different backgrounds and stories, but one truth unites us all—our struggle with sin. Romans reminds us:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:12-14

As followers of Christ, we live in the tension between freedom and formation. Jesus has already freed us from sin through His sacrifice, yet each day we must choose to live out that freedom, turning again toward God. The promise that “sin will have no dominion over you” means our lives are no longer bound by its power.

In this study, we will explore how love and relationships are shaped by our histories, emotions, and choices—and how these, in turn, affect our faith. Scripture teaches that God longs to dwell within us through His Spirit, yet sin and unhealthy patterns create distance from His presence.

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Corinthians 3:16-17

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

God’s holiness is no small matter. As Jackie Hill Perry writes in *Holier Than Thou*: “To say that God is holy is to say that God is God... Holiness is not an aspect of God; holy is who He is through and through.” If we long for intimacy with Him, we must recognize how easily our hearts and bodies resist His holiness — and how graciously He calls us back to Himself.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Romans 12:1

The world often teaches us to escape pain through distraction — whether with entertainment, work, substances, or relationships. Yet these cannot heal the aching spaces meant for God’s presence. True intimacy and healing are found only in Christ, who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” John 14:6

When this feels overwhelming, remember: grace makes change possible.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:7-9

To walk in the light is to live with honesty and openness before God and others. Your struggles don’t define you—His mercy does. You are loved, restored, and invited into community with others who share that same grace.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession... once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

Your truest identity is as a beloved child of God. As you draw closer to Him, you become more fully who you were created to be.

APPLICATION

We aren’t rescued by our performance, but saved only by God’s grace.

Why do you think many of us still struggle with the concept of earning grace?

Express some of your fears in sharing your struggles with others:

How do you feel about the idea of your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit? What does that mean for your daily choices and relationships?

We all have different roles we adopt at different times in our lives, especially when we hide from fear, failure or shame. We hide from feelings of worthlessness or the judgment of others. When we hide, we present a different “part” of ourselves instead. These parts become roles we play, especially around others, often as a way to protect ourselves.

In the table below, reflect on the different parts you have played and the distorted beliefs that may be associated with them. At the end, write down any additional parts you notice within.

Protective Part	Distorted Belief
• Independent part	“Asking for help is a sign of weakness. I can’t depend on others, only on myself.”
• Avoidant part	“Distance protects me from getting close to people who could hurt me. Or hurt me again.”
• Controlling part	“I need to be in control so I won’t get hurt.”
• Superior part	“If I look better than others, I will be accepted.”
• Critical part	“I can’t make a mistake, or I’m a failure. If I’m a failure I may be rejected by others.”
• People-pleasing part	“I cannot say ‘no’ because I won’t be liked if I’m not needed.” Or “I want to feel accepted.”
• Vanity part	“I feel more valuable when I look good outwardly, or when I am pursued by others.”
• Rescuer part	“I feel responsible for making others happy.”
• Performer part	“My value is based on my performance and how well I measure up or compare to others.”
• Positivity part	“People only like me when I’m happy.”
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Notice the underlying needs tied to distorted beliefs. Some parts seek alternative ways to feel loved, powerful, or important. They may actually need to be known, seen and accepted. Like the woman at the well in John 4, we may end up confused, lonely, and craving more of the wrong things when we can’t distinguish between temporary fixes and what truly satisfies.

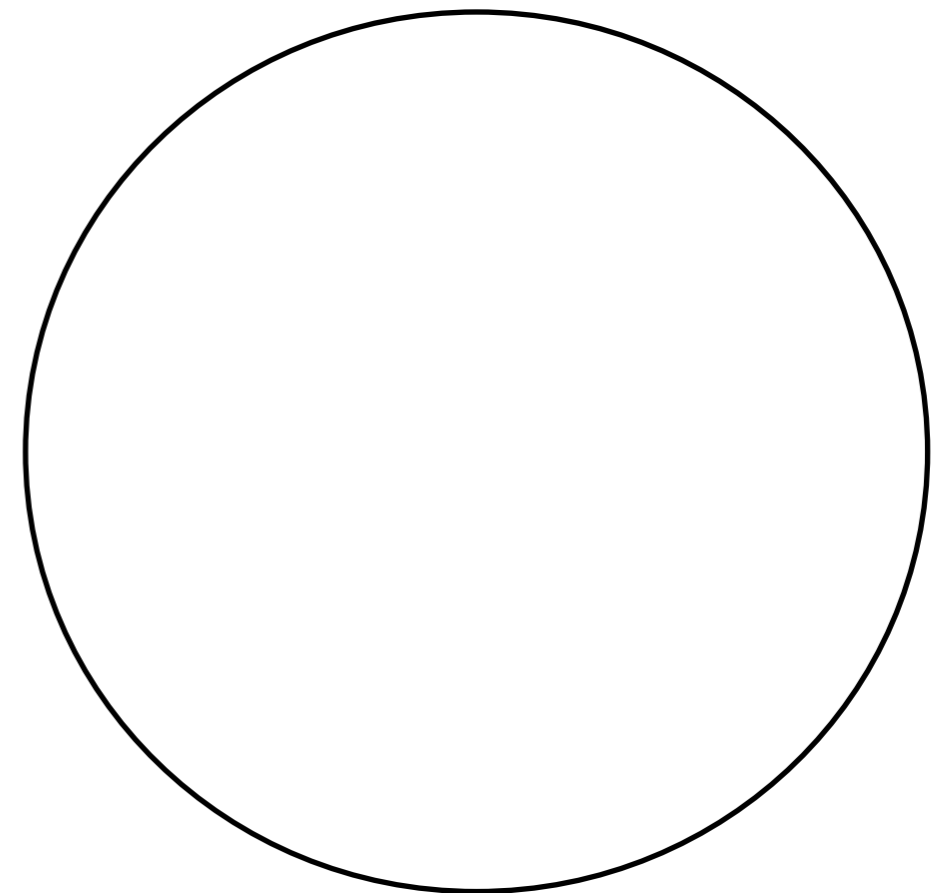
Jesus offers a more permanent solution to our struggles: life through Him.

Then Jesus told His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’ Matthew 16:24-25

In the circle below, draw a picture that represents a protective part of yourself. For example: *What do you imagine this part of yourself to look like? What image or metaphor comes to mind?*

Then, outside the circle, write the messages you hear from this part of yourself. *What would it say to you if it could speak? Does it encourage or critique? What does it want you to know?*

After writing those messages, pause and allow yourself to sense how they make you feel.



2 / OUR NEED FOR LOVE

INTRODUCTION

Our past shapes how we see others in the present and what we expect from relationships.

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth, shows that the bonds formed in early life with our caregivers shape how we connect, trust, and depend on others as adults. In simple terms, the way we were loved – or not loved – becomes the framework for how we give and receive love today. Even if we don't notice it, early experiences are stored deeply within us, influencing our sense of safety and belonging.

When we enter new relationships, our brains release chemicals like dopamine that create excitement and joy. But lasting closeness depends on oxytocin – the “bonding hormone” that helps us feel safe and connected. From infancy, oxytocin is released through gentle touch, gaze, warmth, and care. Our biological system can foster trust or trigger withdrawal, depending on whether we feel safe.

Our earliest caregivers help regulate these responses, teaching us how to manage emotions and find calm through connection. When a baby cries and a caregiver soothes him, that process of co-regulation builds a sense of security. Scripture mirrors this truth in how God calls us to love:

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.
1 John 4:11-12

When care is consistent, a child develops what psychologists call a **secure base** – an inner assurance that it's safe to explore, trust, and grow. This early security forms a pattern that echoes into adulthood, shaping both how we relate to people and how we relate to God.

But many of us didn't experience that consistency. Parents or caregivers can struggle to provide safe connection due to their own wounds or circumstances. Without that felt reliability, children may grow up anxious, avoidant, or fearful in relationships. These patterns are not just emotional; they are wired into the body, influencing our reactions to stress and closeness throughout life. And often, these same attachment styles show up in our spiritual lives.

Psychologist Richard Beck explored this in his writing on God as a Secure Base.¹ He found that:

- Those with **secure** attachment often see God as loving and dependable.
- Those with **anxious** attachment may view God as loving but feel unworthy of His affection, trying to “earn” His approval.
- Those with **avoidant** attachment might see themselves as strong but struggle to trust or depend on God.
- Those with **fearful** attachment can desire closeness with God yet fear rejection or abandonment.

Understanding how attachment works helps us see why loving and trusting God, and others, can be difficult at times. Yet this awareness is not meant to condemn us; it's an invitation to healing. In Christ, we find the perfect secure base: a relationship not rooted in our performance but in His steadfast love.

Throughout this study, let these truths about God guide you:

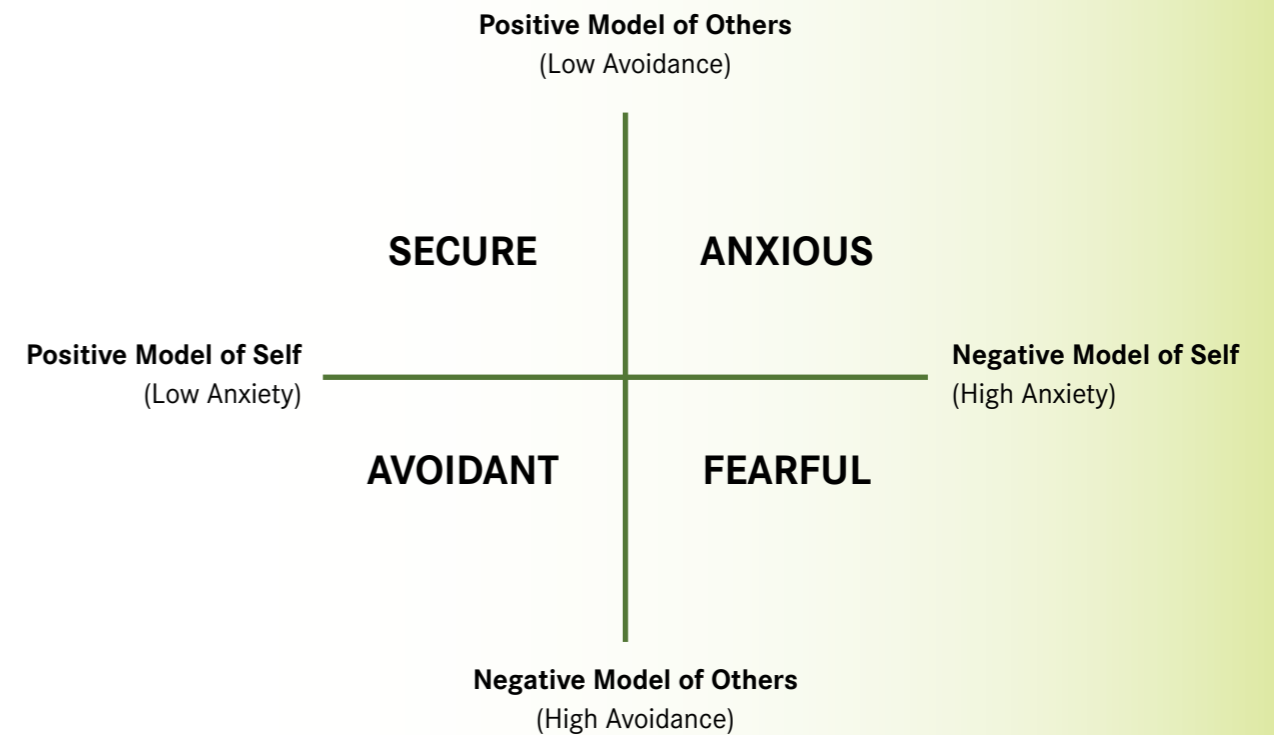
- He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Numbers 14:18).
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).
- He is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6).
- He renews the strength of those who hope in Him (Isaiah 40:31).
- He saved us...not because of our works but because of His purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:9).
- His grace is sufficient, and His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The love that once felt uncertain is now anchored in His faithfulness. In Him, we find both the safety to rest and the courage to love.

¹ Beck, R. (2006). God as a secure base: Attachment to God and theological exploration. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34(2), 125-132.

APPLICATION

Below is a graph that demonstrates how our attachment frameworks may influence our view of self and others. Don't forget, God is included in that “others” category!



Attachment styles are not fixed – they can change and grow based on our relationships and experiences. Our minds and bodies respond differently to different people, learning over time what feels safe or unsafe. Attachment exists on a spectrum, meaning we can strengthen our sense of security through trust and connection. Even if we lacked secure bonds in childhood, it's possible to earn secure attachment as adults by forming consistent, meaningful relationships in the present.

What adjectives or words would you use to describe your caregivers when you were young? Why do you believe they behaved the way they did?

Your parents helped form your inner “relationship template.” How do you think your early experiences with caregivers shaped the way you relate to others now?

Below is a chart that lists some characteristics of both secure and insecure attachment styles.

Autonomous (Secure)	Preoccupied (Anxious)	Dismissive (Avoidant)	Fearful-Avoidant (Disorganized)
Interdependent and able to connect with others and themselves.	Desire validation and closeness. Are most afraid of abandonment.	Self-reliant. Afraid of feeling “engulfed” by other people.	Desire to connect to others but fear being used and hurt.
Can acknowledge their own faults while also hearing their partners’ concerns.	Are typically triggered by conflict and react by wanting more closeness.	Are emotionally disconnected. Tend to be more critical of others and less of themselves.	Tend to see themselves as defective and others as scary.
Are able to stay emotionally regulated in everyday situations involving relationships.	Tend to be emotionally dysregulated, when fearing relational disconnection.	Typically triggered by conflict; react by isolating to try to self-regulate.	Tend to be emotionally dysregulated, which may result in dissociation.
Able to more accurately assess whether a person is safe or reliable based on previous experiences.	Hypercritical of self but more apt to see others as “good”. May appear controlling or demanding of others.	May feel uncomfortable providing emotional support to others, or feel less obligated to do so.	In relationships, may experience feelings similar to terror felt in childhood.

Which statements above best describe how you feel in your current close relationships?

When children experience neglect, inconsistency, or mistreatment without repair, their sense of safety can be shaken. They may feel they must manage life alone, like appearing strong while hiding pain, avoiding mistakes, or striving endlessly for love. This “white-knuckling” approach to life often leads to exhaustion and loneliness rather than true connection.

Yet at the heart of attachment is a universal truth: every person has a deep need to love and be loved. We were created for relationship, with one another and with God Himself. And we flourish when our connections reflect God’s nature: marked by calm, curiosity, care, courage, creativity and closeness.

Our Heavenly Father invites us to experience His love fully, letting it reshape how we see ourselves and others. As we trust Jesus and live out the kind of relationship He modelled, we open the door for healing, allowing His love to restore what fear or pain once fractured.

In what ways might your small group or church community provide a “secure base” for spiritual growth and healing?

We love because God first loved us. We heal as we continue to experience the love He intended for us.

To close this lesson, please read 1 Corinthians 13 together.

3 / OUR NEED FOR HEALING

INTRODUCTION

It's natural for us to adapt to survive life's challenges. We shift as we move through the weight of pain, fear, loss, or stress. This quiet way of adapting to hardship is what we ultimately call resilience.

Resilience is what helps us recover, but it isn't a trait we either have or lack; it's something we can build. As we grow in resilience, we expand our **window of tolerance** (the range of emotional and physical stress we can handle without becoming overwhelmed). The question isn't if we change, but *how* we change.

This change can look like replacing the heavy weight of self-shame with a quiet, compassionate grace for yourself. Or it can be moving away from a constant state of 'high alert' and toward a hard-won ability to be truly present and at peace with those you love.

We all carry the experiences that have shaped us, but for many, those experiences include the deep reality of trauma. More than just an event in the past, trauma is an experience that leaves an imprint on the mind, brain, and body, shaping how we survive in the present. It shifts how we perceive danger, how we process emotions, and even how clearly we think. While some trauma stems from a single event – like an accident or sudden loss – complex trauma is often forged through ongoing exposure to fear, neglect, or abuse. Understanding these echoes of the past is essential as we take stock of how trauma may be influencing our journey of transformation in Christ.

Repeated trauma creates what researchers call toxic stress – a biological alarm that keeps ringing, warning us that danger is near even when the threat has passed. This internal alarm leads children, and later adults, to live in constant survival mode: fighting, fleeing, freezing, or appeasing to stay safe. Living this way can make it hard to relax, trust, or feel present. Sometimes these effects emerge immediately; other times, they surface gradually as we process painful memories.

Trauma can appear in many forms:

- **Physically:** headaches, tension, fatigue, or trouble breathing.
- **Emotionally:** fear, anger, shame, or numbness.
- **Mentally:** racing thoughts, intrusive memories, or self-criticism.
- **Socially:** isolation, mistrust, or repeating harmful relational patterns.
- **Spiritually:** disconnection from God, confusion about good and evil, or striving to feel "enough" through spiritual performance.

In essence, trauma is not only what happened to you – it's what remains inside you. When something in the present reminds your body of past pain, that **trigger** can activate survival responses. The body may react as if danger is still real. These instinctive reactions are the danger part of God's design to help us endure a broken world. But when negative coping or old survival patterns go unrecognized, they can affect our relationships and spiritual growth.

That's why awareness and compassion for ourselves are vital steps toward healing. Scripture reminds us that the Holy Spirit can bear new fruit within us, transforming how we respond to pain:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-25

Growth alongside the Spirit means we no longer live from old habits of fear or control but from new capacities for love, peace, and gentle strength. Healing doesn't mean ignoring the past – it means letting God's presence meet us in the places that still hurt.

Struggling mentally or emotionally is part of being human, not a sign of failure. For that reason, creating safe, supportive spaces – within trusted relationships and a caring church family – is essential for recovery. In community and through the Spirit, we learn to **move from survival toward wholeness**.

APPLICATION

We want to connect with God just like we connect with friends and family. But our current relationships are shaped by what we've gone through in the past. Even our relationship with God can be affected by previous trauma or grief that we haven't dealt with.

Is there a past experience that comes to mind when you read this lesson?

If yes, what do you remember thinking or feeling back then? How do you feel or think about that experience now?

What new messages or beliefs would you like to give yourself now? What new insights do you have, based on how you have grown or what you have learned since then?

We continue to adjust to the people and situations around us. Sometimes, the ways we cope with past experiences can stick around until we have a safe place to work through and heal that pain.

Take time to meditate on the Scriptures below. Which verse personally speaks to you?

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:2-3

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6-7

4 / OUR NEED FOR RENEWAL

INTRODUCTION

Despite our complexity, one truth stands firm: **we are wired for connection**. Science confirms what Scripture has always proclaimed: God created us for loving relationship. True intimacy, however, goes beyond proximity; it requires trust, humility, and emotional safety.

From the moment we are born, our minds and hearts are shaped by family, friends, culture, media, and life experiences. Our brains absorb these influences to help us survive and relate to the world. The amazing truth is that God designed our bodies and minds to be adaptable, equipping us for growth and transformation throughout this sanctifying journey of life.

Still, we can't ignore how much our thinking has already been shaped by a world touched by sin. Paul reminds us:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Our brains have a remarkable, God-given capacity to change – what science calls **neuroplasticity**. Each new experience, thought, or habit physically reshapes the brain.² When you first learned to ride a bike or play an instrument, new neural pathways formed through repetition. The same process happens with whatever we regularly practice, whether healthy or harmful.

The brain, however, doesn't automatically choose what is good. For example, repeated exposure to damaging influences (such as pornography or hyper-sexualized media) can distort our natural desires for intimacy, training the brain to seek fake pleasure while dulling the beauty of real love.³ Understanding how the brain adapts helps us recognize how old patterns influence our present capacity for intimacy and faithfulness.

From early life, when caregivers lovingly attune to us, we learn that we are worthy of care. But if love felt conditional or absent, we might internalize the belief that we're unlovable. Many carry that lie into adulthood, hoping that romantic love or affirmation will make us whole, a message sometimes reinforced by culture and even church communities. Yet the truth is this: **no human relationship can fill the space designed for God's unconditional love**.

It seems our very nervous system was created by God for connection and protection. The vagus nerve, which connects the brain to almost every major organ, is like the information superhighway of the body. It is constantly shifting us towards a posture of safety or defence. When danger feels near, heart rate rises, breathing quickens, and attention narrows. When safety returns, our nervous system relaxes and reopens for calm, curiosity, and connection.

Sin, fear, and trauma can interfere with that natural rhythm. Many intimacy struggles come from a body that learned to stay guarded because love once felt unsafe. Yet through the renewing work of the Spirit, both our minds and bodies can be gently retrained to rest in God's peace. Healing is not about trying harder, but surrendering to grace – allowing God to reshape our patterns and teach our bodies what safety in love feels like again.

We need not carry shame for how we've coped or survived. Many of these patterns were born out of unmet needs or painful histories. But as we grow in Christ, we are invited to lay down false comforts and turn toward the One who truly satisfies. This process of renewal requires reflection – considering who we are, what stories we carry, and how we choose to live them out in love.

Real transformation happens as we turn from false idols and empty habits toward our true identity: **beloved children of God, deeply known and fully secure in Christ**.

² Pace, S. (2014). Acquiring Tastes through Online Activity: Neuroplasticity and the Flow Experiences of Web Users. *M/C Journal*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.773>

³ Hilton D. L., Jr (2013). Pornography addiction - a supranormal stimulus considered in the context of neuroplasticity. *Socioaffective neuroscience & psychology*, 3, 20767. <https://doi.org/10.3402/snp.v3i0.20767>

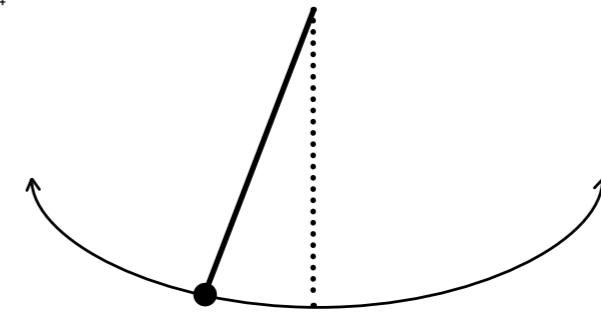
APPLICATION

What are some ways you feel personally loved by God?

What was the emotional climate in your home growing up? What sort of messages or beliefs about emotion did you receive from adults and peers?

What sort of messages about sexuality did you receive while growing up? How old were you at the time, and how do those messages continue to impact you today?

The Pendulum of Sexual Health⁴



Over-Control	Sexual Health	Out-of-Control
Rigid	Structure	Chaotic
Excessive	Boundaries	Collapse
Isolation	Intimacy	Emotionally Absent
Depression	Expressing Needs	Excess
Fear	Sharing Needs	Anger
Obsession	Taking Responsibility	Defiant

Sexual health is defined by manageable sexual behaviours. It involves honest communication, vulnerability, and realistic expectations about love and sex. It focuses on building intimacy through commitment, trust, and healthy boundaries.

In contrast, **over-controlling** traits may include avoiding anything sexual or having rigid, judgemental views about sex. This can lead to extreme shame and self-loathing tied to past experiences or negative self-perceptions.

Out-of-control traits might include excessive masturbation, pornography use, fantasy, multiple sexual partners, or a compulsive need for sexual satisfaction. These behaviours often seek quick fixes or instant gratification to mask uncomfortable emotions.

Sexual aversion stems from the belief that “sex is bad and dirty,” while sexual addiction arises from the belief that “sex is my most important need.” However, sexual health embraces the belief that “I am created in God’s image, and I am lovable. My needs can be met through an intimate, loving relationship. Sex is part of God’s design.”

Ask yourself: which behaviors do you relate with most?

⁴ Adapted from International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals CSAT Certification Training Day Two: Module One.

5 / OUR NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION

Our stories matter – because they shape what we believe is possible. The way we explain our past becomes the framework through which we imagine our future. God, however, meets us right in those stories with unshakable hope:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

Some of us developed inner narratives that whisper, “you are loved and safe, even when you are imperfect.” Others live under stories that say, “you are not enough; you must earn love.” These hidden beliefs influence how we relate to God and one another.

Psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Siegel explains that what matters most for a child’s security isn’t what happened to their parents, but how the parents made sense of their own experiences. Similarly, researcher Dr. Mary Main found that when parents tell clear, emotionally honest stories about their past, their children grow up feeling more secure and loved. It’s not perfection that heals relationships – it’s coherence, choosing to truthfully **understand our own stories in light of grace.**

Trauma often interrupts this coherence. It scrambles memory and emotion, leaving us confused or disconnected. The brain’s amygdala stores strong emotional reactions like fear, while the hippocampus (which organizes memories) can become overwhelmed. As a result, traumatic memories often stay in the body as sensations or feelings, not words or timelines. When triggered by reminders of old pain, our hearts and bodies react as if danger is happening again.

This is why we sometimes feel unlovable even when we know God loves us. Our “emotional brain” holds pain that our “thinking brain” can’t yet explain. But when we gently make sense of our stories, our minds and bodies can begin to align with the truth of God’s love.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

1 Peter 5:10

Healing begins as we approach our stories – not with shame, but with compassion. By allowing the Holy Spirit to illuminate our past, we can see evidence of God’s presence even in pain. The same grace that restores our relationship with Him also restores how we see ourselves and others.

True transformation doesn’t happen apart from struggle; it unfolds within it.

Intimacy, with God and with others, is intentional. It grows through honesty, grace, and the courage to trust that even our most painful stories can be redeemed.

APPLICATION

Begin narrating your personal timeline. Choose 3 significant moments or impactful seasons from your past. These can be positive or challenging experiences, relationships, transitions, or milestones. Mark each event on the timeline and also note your age at that time:

A horizontal timeline with three numbered markers (1, 2, 3) in green circles. Vertical dotted lines connect each marker to a set of horizontal lines for notes. There are also horizontal lines above the timeline for general notes.

How did that event or season shape what you believe about yourself, others, or God?

What familiar protective parts or patterns do you recognize from these moments in your life?

Can you identify ways God was at work – even in small or hidden ways – during that time?

6 / OUR SHARED HOPE

INTRODUCTION

Being healthy means that our daily choices align with our deepest values. Feeling guilt when our actions oppose our faith or harm others reminds us to return to what's true. But when guilt turns into shame, we lose sight of grace. Scripture invites us to reconnect and restore, reminding us that our hope is not in our own willpower but in Christ's faithfulness.

It's important to honour how our hearts and minds adapt to a fallen world. God designed these responses to protect us, yet how we care for and use our bodies still shapes our spiritual lives. Hebrews reminds us of this sacred connection between body, spirit, and endurance:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful...

Hebrews 10:19–23

Our minds and bodies are capable of transformation. Although attachment styles and emotional patterns form early, they continue to change as we experience safety and belonging. God invites us to participate in this renewing work:

All of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death...in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:3–4

Lasting change requires more than rejecting unhealthy habits — it means replacing them with what nourishes and sustains us. Since we often rely on these old ways to cope with pain and support ourselves emotionally, it's not as simple as just saying, "I'm done with this!" It's never that easy. We still need effective ways to cope and support ourselves.

Consider these new anchors for renewal:

1. **The spiritual practices of Jesus**
2. **Trusted encouragement and exposure from a committed, consistent community following after Christ**
3. **To abide in the Holy Spirit as much or as often as you can**

Because the world is broken by sin, our nervous systems often stay on guard against pain. Patterns of anxiety, withdrawal, or control are our bodies' ways of surviving — but they can make it hard to fully rest in love. The good news of the gospel is that Christ meets us even in those defensive places. God's Spirit renews not just our hearts but the embodied patterns through which we seek safety and trust. Every moment of peace we experience now is a glimpse of the restoration that awaits us. This renewal, however, is only the beginning. Our present bodies (fragile, weary, shaped by hardship) are not our final home. We long for the transformation God has promised:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:1

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body.

Philippians 3:20–21

Just as creation itself will be renewed —

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

Isaiah 65:17

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...

Revelation 21:1

According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:13

As we better understand our human fragility (our biology, our coping, our longing) we also hold on to eternal hope: what is fragile now will not remain so forever. The same God who designed our bodies for survival will one day restore them for perfect communion. Paul captures this hope so beautifully when he writes to the church in Corinth:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:42–49

Until that day, we live as **people of hope** — caring for our bodies, tending to our hearts, and trusting that the Redeemer who began this work within us will bring it to completion.

APPLICATION

Checklist of Relational Struggles

Below is a brief inventory of relational struggles lingering in our hearts, bodies, and minds. Feel free to share with your group members, or use this list as a personal reference to identify deeper areas of your life that you want to bring closer to God. If struggles come to mind that are not listed, please add them at the end in the blank sections.

Check the items you struggle with on this list, either in the past or present.

- I am driven by one or more compulsions (sex, food, alcohol, shopping, etc.)
- I go from over- to out-of-control in certain areas (sex, food, alcohol, shopping, etc.)
- I think my self-esteem is low
- I think that my happiness depends on having a loving relationship
- I often fantasize or mentally escape to avoid reality or loneliness
- I feel I need to be “good” enough to earn love from others
- I will do almost anything for that desired loving relationship
- I find it difficult to say “no” and set healthy boundaries
- I keep looking for a relationship to fill what is missing or lacking in my life
- I find myself thinking that things will (or would) be better in this new relationship
- I have always felt a distance and/or lack of love from my dad and/or mom
- I have difficulty having an intimate relationship with God
- I crave and fear intimacy at the same time
- I take responsibility for people/tasks/situations that I am not responsible for
- I often blame others for things they are not responsible for
- I have stayed in relationships after they became emotionally/physically abusive
- I have hurt others emotionally because of my behaviour
- I have worried about people finding out about my sexual activities
- I feel controlled or preoccupied by desire or fantasies of romance
- The internet has created dating or intimacy problems for me
- I spend too much time online or with other materials for dating or sexual purposes
- I have been romantically involved with inappropriate people (i.e. boss, married, etc.)
- I have become emotionally or sexually involved with people I don’t know
- I have had multiple romantic or sexual relationships at the same time
- Sometimes, my desire or fears feel stronger than I am
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

As you take inventory of these struggles, remember that the urge to dismiss, avoid, or hide them is nothing new—it’s been part of human behaviour since the beginning. In Genesis 3, we see this when the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Afterward, “their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness” (Gen. 3:7, NLT). When God came looking for them, they hid in fear. **Their shame led them into isolation.**

But hiding struggles only makes them stronger. To find our own strength, we bring our challenges into the light. Becoming more like Christ and embracing your true identity in Him is a lifelong journey – one we are meant to walk together.

My thoughts, feelings, and reactions when filling out this checklist:

Below is a list of spiritual practices taken from Dallas Willard’s book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. These activities engage and impact our whole self, giving us alternative actions to the struggles noted previously.

Pick two practices to incorporate into your weekly routine for at least one month.

Disciplines of Abstinence (Self-Denial)	Disciplines of Engagement (Christ in Community)
Solitude: Refraining from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God and be found by Him.	Bible Reading: Trusting the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Scripture as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life.
Silence: Not speaking in a quiet place in order to quiet our minds and whole self and attend to God’s presence. Also, not speaking so that we can listen to others and bless them.	Worship: Praising God’s greatness, goodness, and beauty in words, music, ritual, or silence (privately or in community).
Fasting: Going without food for a period of intensive prayer – may be complete or partial.	Prayer: Conversing with God about what we’re experiencing and doing together, asking for intercession, or confession.
Sabbath: Doing no work to rest in God’s person and provision; praying and playing with God and others (can try one day a week or shorter periods of time).	Soul Friendship: Engaging fellow Christians in prayerful conversation, celebrating together, or even having a regular meal together.
Secrecy: Not making our good deeds or qualities known to let God or others receive attention (see Matthew 6).	Personal Reflection: Paying attention to our inner self in order to grow in love and understanding for God, others, and self.
Submission: Not asserting ourselves in order to come under the authority, wisdom, and power of Jesus Christ as our Lord, King, and Master.	Service: Humbly serving God by overflowing with his love and compassion to others, especially those in need (can include tithing and giving).

Name a person who will support you in these new practices and hold you accountable:

Define what a “healthy you” looks like. Imagine the version of you that God intended, the one whose physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met fully in Christ:

In prayer, invite God’s healing and wisdom over your story, thanking Him for the ways He moves in your life, even through difficult moments. Think about what might be preventing you from walking more closely with Him or your community. Ask God for continued support on this journey towards intentional intimacy with Him, as you reflect on the following verses together:

For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. Psalm 139:13-14

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, thank You for creating us with bodies and minds able to feel, protect, and heal.

In a broken world, You remain our safety and source of peace.

Where our patterns have been shaped by fear, restore them through Your Spirit.

Where our hearts carry shame, cover us with Your grace.

Teach us to walk in newness of life, to abide in Your love,

and to trust that even our fragile bodies are part of Your redemptive story.

We place our hope in the promise that one day,

what is sown in brokenness will be raised whole in glory,

as all creation will be made new in You.

Until then, help us live as people of Christ –

redeemed, connected, and growing in love.

In Jesus name.

Amen.

This study was written by Emily Kusunoki, a Certified Counsellor serving in Hong Kong. It includes various Scriptures and mental health tools designed to help participants navigate personal and sometimes challenging subjects. If you complete this study and wish to explore further, consider joining a Pure Desire group or a Care Group at the church, or reach out to a Christian therapist to continue your healing journey.
