

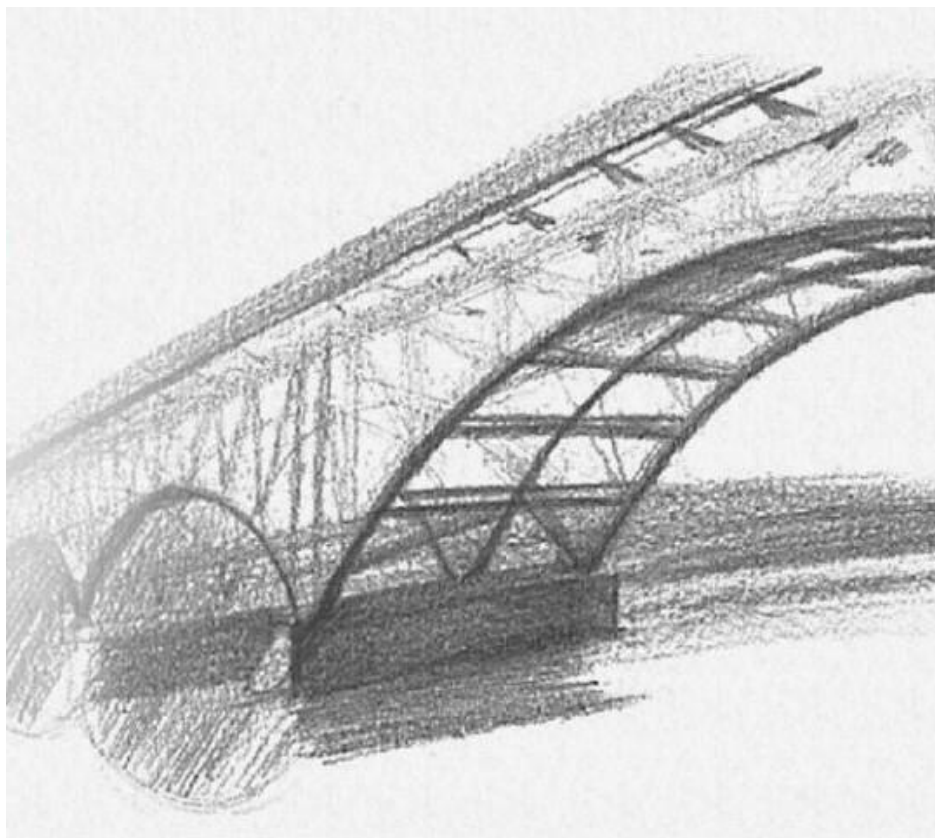
LEADER'S GUIDE

Version 09/11/24

Chris & Rahnella Adsit

BRIDGES TO HEALING – ARMENIA –

A self-guided curriculum for soldiers
journeying across the rivers of war-related trauma
to a place of strength and stability



REBOOT RECOVERY
OVERCOMING TRAUMA TOGETHER

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LEADER'S GUIDE

BRIDGES TO HEALING

– Armenian Edition –

A self-guided curriculum for soldiers journeying across the rivers of war-related trauma to a place of strength and stability

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A LITTLE ABOUT REBOOT RECOVERY...

REBOOT Recovery is a US-based ministry to those who have experienced the devastating effects of trauma. When REBOOT began in 2011, we focused on combat trauma. Within a few years, we branched out to address first-responder trauma (fire, law enforcement, emergency medicine, etc.). Now we have expanded to include *all* types of trauma, regardless of its origin. We have combined the best practices of the medical and mental health communities with timeless principles from the Bible to help people construct a personal environment that gives God optimal access to their body, soul, and spirit for the purpose of healing.

Trauma was your personal intersection with the brokenness of the world. But *recovery* is your personal intersection with the loving and powerful heart of God.

REBOOT first came to Ukraine in 2015, and in 2019 we conducted a REBOOT Leader Training Conference in Kyiv. Now there are REBOOT leaders and REBOOT groups in many places around Ukraine. This manual represents our first mission to Armenia – the first of many, we hope, to bring hope and healing from God to Armenians.

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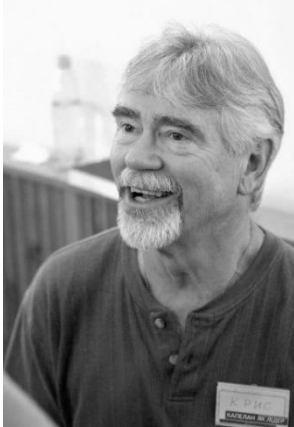
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Authors of *Bridges to Healing*



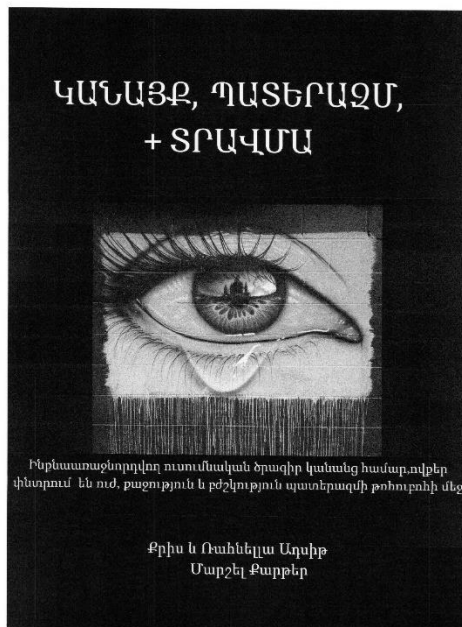
Chris Adsit

International Resource Coordinator for REBOOT Recovery; national & international speaker, author/co-author of many books, manuals, and training curricula on trauma: *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual*, *When War Comes Home*, *The First Responder Healing Manual*, *REBOOT First Responder* curriculum, *Bridges to Healing: Ukraine*, *Bridges to Healing: Africa*, and others. Chris has been in full-time Christian work since 1974. Since 2008, he and Rahnella have trained hundreds of chaplains, counselors, pastors, and military personnel all over the world in the REBOOT approach to trauma healing. He has been married to Rahnella for 46 years at this writing, living in Eugene, Oregon.



Rahnella Adsit

International Coordinator for REBOOT Recovery; national & international speaker, author/co-author, including *When War Comes Home* and *The Combat Trauma Healing Manual* (both translated into Ukrainian & Russian), *First Responder Healing Manual* and *REBOOT First Responder*. For many years she had a private pastoral counseling practice for those who have been traumatized. She's a grandmother of four and mother of four, including a US Army combat veteran, a firefighter, the wife of a Marine combat veteran Lt. Colonel, and the widow of a husband who died suddenly. Rahnella is a cancer survivor, brain hemorrhage survivor, twin birth survivor (!), and watched her home burn to the ground. Our family has known its share of trauma!



Companion Book for Women

The women of Armenia have experienced extensive trauma because of the current war too. It's different from what soldiers and support personnel in war zones have experienced, but it can be just as devastating. As they say goodbye to their husbands who go to the front to fight, they must try to hold their families together as they flee to safety – perhaps even to a foreign country, and perhaps experiencing danger, assault, and death themselves. Partnering with Marshéle Carter – who was married to a US Navy SEAL for 25 years – the Adsits have constructed a survival manual for Armenian women that will help them understand many issues such as: true and false guilt, facing fear with faith, the sacrifice of separation, how trauma has affected you, grieving your losses, parenting in times of war, constructing a healing environment, rebuilding your traumatized identity, and more.

General Principles for Leaders

[Be sure to read this section before your first meeting!]

Overall philosophy for these manuals

Even though the best environment in which to address trauma and to facilitate healing is in a small group situation, these manuals were originally written for a “solo” application. When a country is at war, we can't expect people to gather in small groups for multiple weeks when they are being bombed, fleeing the country, in combat, or experiencing electrical blackouts. Therefore, we wrote these so that people could work through them on their own as they had the opportunity. We made the manuals available in both print and electronically, so people could download them to their phones or computers. But we also know that it is possible for some people to meet in small groups on a consistent basis. So this “Leader's Guide” is meant to aid those who would like to lead a small group through the manuals.

Who is doing the teaching?

You, as the group leader, are not the *only* source of wisdom and knowledge for the group! Keep in mind that there are five learning dynamics that we hope to see in a group study like this. Participants can learn...

1. From the manuals.
2. From the group leader.
3. From each other during discussion times.
4. From the Word of God as scripture is presented in the manuals.
5. From the direct action of the Spirit of God on the participants' hearts and minds.

There are hundreds of approaches to dealing with Post-traumatic Stress, and virtually every one of them involves “talk therapy,” that is, helping the trauma sufferer to remember their traumatic experiences, to not stuff them down, but instead to talk about them in an environment where they feel safe, unjudged, and understood. This is why we want our leaders to avoid taking up too much time “sermonizing,” and try to motivate the group members to talk. **If they are talking, you're winning!**

Most of the actual content that we hope to get to the participants is contained in the manual. Let the curriculum do the work! But we could go even further and point out that it is God and His Word which are actually going to do the healing and transforming. So count on the Word to do the true work! Any time the curriculum takes you to a place where you can get the participants to read and consider Scripture, be sure to do it! It's profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness! (2 Timothy 3:16)

My job versus God's job

As it says in Exodus 15:26, “I, the LORD, am your Healer.” This should be a great relief to us as group leaders. The healing of the participants is not our responsibility! It's God's! He's the only one who can do it anyway! We're not The Healer, but we can be “bridges” to The Healer. Our job is to create an environment that will give God optimal access to the participants' body, mind, and soul for the purpose of healing. Then God does the healing.

Every chance you get, try to help them shift their hope and expectations to God – not to you, or to the group, or to the manuals, or to medicine, or to counselors. Sure, those things all help to make a positive environment for healing. But help them see that God is the One who will make the biggest differences in their life.

An important note about discussion times

As was mentioned before, group members can teach each other and learn from each other. They have specific experiences and insights that can benefit other members of the group. This – and the fact that talking about their experiences is therapeutic – is why we put so much emphasis on the discussion times. Most of what you'll find in this Leader's Guide are questions that are designed to stimulate discussion. And whenever a group member shares something that others find beneficial and insightful, it helps to restore a sense of usefulness and honor in the one who shared – something that many traumatized people need.

When you notice group members starting to get involved in the discussion, and there is animated give-and-take between them, and you find yourself not having to say much to guide the discussion, again, things are going perfectly!

Share your life

While we don't want the group leaders dominating the discussion times, we DO want you to share your life and the insights you've gained when the time seems right. We also encourage you to be a good example in terms of vulnerability. Be willing to share the difficulties you have experienced in the past – or are presently experiencing. Show them that it's OK to not be totally OK. God can do great things in and through a person despite their weaknesses. We are ALL in-process.

Being a good listener

Since we are encouraging you NOT to talk too much and trying to motivate the group members to talk more, it would be helpful if you were skilled at *listening*! If you are a good *listener*, it shows that you value the opinions and input of the group, and they will respond by becoming good *talkers*.

- Be an **ACTIVE** listener. Make it your goal to understand what they are saying. If you are unclear, rephrase in your own words what you think they're saying.
- Be an **ENCOURAGING** listener. Give affirmation to their comments. "Excellent insight!" "I think that was a truly *profound* thought." "Great answer!" "Thanks for sharing that – I want to write that down."
- Be a **TOTAL BODY** listener. Believe it or not, a *large* part of your communication is non-verbal. So watch your body language!
 - **Negative:** crossing your arms or legs, leaning back in your chair, reading something else (even the manual!) while they speak, checking your watch or phone.
 - **Positive:** leaning forward, nodding your head at appropriate moments, jotting down comments they made.

LEAD the group – don't just read the manual

- Even though we have formulated several great discussion questions in this manual, don't be lazy and just read them to the group. Take time before the class to become so familiar with the chapter and each question that all you need to do is to glance at the question and then ask it in your own words. It's FINE if your group members think that you thought up the questions on your own! We (the authors) don't mind! The people in your group need to see you as their leader – not as a simple question-reader. They want to know that (a) you are familiar with the content and (b) you are leading them somewhere you've been before.

- If you are working through a translator, you might think that it would save time to just have the translator read the questions as you point them out in your manual. But that makes your group members wonder how invested *you* are in the material. Go ahead and share the questions in your own words and language, and let the translator translate them. Otherwise, the “feel” is that the translator is leading the group.

Time

- **How long should each group session last?** One hour is pretty typical. If you've got a group that is particularly unified and talkative, you might go for an hour and a half or even two hours. But it's up to you and your group. However, remember the old “entertainment” advice: “Leave them hungry and wanting more.” Alternatively, you might decide on one hour, but let the group know that you'll stay around after the meeting to talk more with anyone who wants to. This sometimes adds another 30 minutes to an hour to your time together!
- **How many sessions (weeks) should we plan on?** There are 8 “Bridges” in this study. But it is likely you will not be able to cover one chapter each week. You may need to spend two weeks on each. If your group members are ok with sticking with it for 16 weeks, they will get the most out of it. The objective is NOT that they “get through the material.” Rather, that the material “get through to them.”

Troubleshooting

- **Silence after you ask a discussion question.**
 - If it was a good question, relax. People need time to think.
 - Ask a backup question; clarify it; ask it another way.
 - DO NOT fill the silence with a sermon! If you do, each time you ask a discussion question, group members will just sit there silently, knowing that in a few seconds, YOU will launch into another sermon. So WAIT instead! Make them think, “Well, if one of us doesn't speak up, we may be here all night.”
 - Call on individuals who look like they might have something to say. “What do you think about that, Joseph?”
- **When someone gives a “wrong” or strange answer.**

Without criticizing the person or saying he or she is “wrong” (this could shut down future participation from that person, and perhaps from other group members too), steer the discussion back to solid ground by saying something like:

 - That's a very interesting point of view...
 - I hadn't thought of it in those terms before. I'll have to give that more thought...
 - What do some of the rest of you think?
 - I can see why a person might think that way (or come to that conclusion).
 - [And then transition with...]
 - Here's something I've often heard about that subject... or
 - Let me share something I've often heard about that subject... or
 - I would love to look deeper into that idea, but we need to get back on track here – could you and I talk about it some after the meeting?

- **The difficult question**
 - Admit that you don't have an answer, but that you'll research it.
 - Ask if other group members might have some insight into it.
 - Ask if someone in the group (or even the questioner) would research it and report back next week.
- **The non-stop talker; discussion dominator**
 - Direct your questions to other members of the group. "Let's hear what Daniel has to say about that."
 - Sit next to the talkative one and minimize eye contact.
 - Go to him/her privately and say, "You are really a pacesetter when it comes to the discussion times. But we need to figure out a way to draw some of the more shy ones out. What would you suggest we do?" Hopefully it will occur to him/her that, if he/she talks *less*, others might talk *more*.
- **The non-talker**
 - Ask direct, low-risk questions of him/her that could be answered comfortably.
 - Sit where you can maintain good, encouraging eye contact with them.
 - Give positive feedback whenever they DO speak.
- **Going on discussion tangents**
 - First, make sure it really is a tangent, and not the Holy Spirit taking the discussion where HE wants it to go.
 - Say something like, "This is an interesting topic, but since we are focusing on "Identity" today, let's get back to that. If we have time later, we'll return to it."
- **Disagreements and Conflict**
 - Don't let the conflict make you worried. Often, they aid learning.
 - Identify the two opposing views and discuss the pros and cons of each. But always bring it back to, "Let's see what the Bible says about it..."

A few more practical tips

- Pray for every member of your group every day. You'll be amazed at how their responsiveness to your leadership and teaching improves.
- Come early and welcome people in.
- Honor your group participants by starting and finishing on time.
- Be the last one to leave, making time to talk with those who need to talk.
- Provide refreshments of some sort – even if it's only cookies and juice. But the more effort you make on this, the more the group members will appreciate it. After a few weeks, ask group members if they would volunteer to bring the refreshments.
- Schedule appointments between meetings for those who need extra attention.
- Meet with your leadership team every two or three weeks for review, troubleshooting, improvement, and prayer.

- Contact each member of your group once a week between meetings, either by phone, text, email, or a visit. Those mid-week “touches” make a big difference!
- Consider doing at least one event with your group during the weeks you are meeting. It may be a recreational event, a service project, having a special dinner, movie night, a hike, etc. Be creative!

How to begin your first meeting

- Start the meeting by first introducing yourself (if participants don't know you well). Don't go into a long biography about yourself. Otherwise, everyone in the group will do the same when it's their turn, and you'll eat up the first half of your meeting time! You might just share:
 - Your name
 - Where you live
 - What kind of work you do; occupation
 - If you are, or have been, in the military, share just a few sentences about that.
- Go around the group and ask participants to introduce themselves. Let them know you're not looking for an extensive biography, just a few sentences that follow the same points above.
- One other element of the Introduction time you should consider: ask them to also answer one “Ice-breaker” question. Here are a few suggestions (choose one that you feel would be most appropriate for your group). [Consider using these Ice-breaker questions to start each of your weekly meetings in the future.] Have each person answer the same question:
 - Who was your hero when you were growing up?
 - If you could vacation anywhere in the world, where would it be?
 - What is your favorite movie of all time?
 - What is your most valued physical possession?
 - If you could sit down and talk with anyone in the world, living or dead, who would it be?
 - What is the weirdest food you've ever eaten?
 - In one (or two) sentences, why did you decide to come to this group?
- Tell group members what to expect.
 - There are two valuable components in what we'll be doing together. One is about the information and insights you'll get from your **manuals**. The other is about the information and insights you'll get from **each other** during discussion times. BOTH are important!
 - So our basic format is that I'll ask someone to read a few paragraphs in the manual, we'll pause, and then I'll pose a discussion question that pertains to what was just read. You may feel shy at first about joining the discussion, but as you all get to know each other and feel more of a bond, it'll get much easier. Remember: what you share in the discussions could be VERY helpful to other group members!
 - Most people who have experienced trauma want to stuff down the memories of their traumatic experiences. They DON'T want to talk about them because it makes them feel very uncomfortable. That's totally understandable. But mental health professionals have recognized for years that one of the most therapeutic things a person who has experienced trauma can do – as hard as it may seem – is to talk about those experiences

in a safe place with people they know won't judge or misunderstand them. This is called "processing" those traumatic memories.

- In your manual, as you encounter blanks to fill in or exercises to respond to, I encourage you to use your pens and do the work!
- You'll receive benefits from this course based on what you are willing to put into it.
- Turn to the page that lists the "Participation Rules." *[It's up to you whether you'd like to read them to the group yourself or go around the group and have each member read one. Make sure they understand all the terms used.]*

Preface: The Devastation and Hope of War Trauma

My dear Armenian friends...

You have been through a lot: you, your family, your friends. Life is upside down and being torn apart. Things don't look good, and you may question if they will get better again. Sometimes, it's hard to believe that things will improve if you have been forced to leave your home, or you're fighting on the frontlines.

From Kosovo and Bosnia to Iraq and Afghanistan, I have seen firsthand the ravages of war. Combatants and non-combatants alike bear the wounds of battle. We all know that soldiers fighting for their cause and their families pay a high price. However, it seems that civilians, the families left behind or fleeing for their lives, pay the highest and often hidden costs of conflict.

During war, trauma can creep in, and your soul can be wounded in countless ways. Even if you never fired a round, treated a wounded countryman, or saw a dead body, war has changed you. Preparing for war may have left you suspicious, cynical, hypervigilant, and anxious. When the fighting finally commenced, you may have been displaced, forced from your home. You may have had to leave everything behind, questioning what will be left when you return – if you will ever be able to go return.

As a fighter on the front, thoughts of concern for your family have caused you to have a few more wrinkles on your face. As a first responder putting out structure fires from rockets and artillery or digging out bodies from the rubble, you now have grey hair that wasn't there before. As a civilian fleeing for your life, taking refuge in a foreign country or helping those around you in need, you now have both, more grey and more wrinkles. Your spirits may be high, but your soul has wrinkles it didn't have before.

In 2002, I watched families trickle back into Kosovo. Families from both sides and some caught in the middle began to reinhabit the rubble of war-torn towns and villages. I saw smiling children kicking around tattered and makeshift soccer balls amongst the debris. Many folks wore tired and weary expressions, but their eyes glimmered with **hope**. The **hope** of starting over. The **hope** of building their lives back.

Even after years of conflict and fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, I listened to fathers and mothers tell me of the **hope** they had for their sons and daughters. From the Balkans to the Middle East and southwestern Asia, **hope** was and still is alive. Many families realized they could not change their external situation; fighting raged all around them. However, they chose to foster peace in their hearts and minds, and in their homes. They sought healing. The strong and brave sought to stamp out hate in their hearts. Harboring hatred can keep wounding you long after the battles are over.

Reboot Recovery is a vehicle driving towards healing and fueled by **hope** – which is why we have produced this manual for you. Reboot addresses the emotional, physical, and spiritual changes that have occurred in you and in those you care the most about. Your traumatic situation required that you respond. Those were normal responses to abnormal events. Reboot teaches and equips you to process these things through a lens of faith. We believe that Jesus Christ is

the force that gives faith its power. We believe that He is the great Healer. He is always on duty. He is always alongside those in need, those fleeing, and those fighting.

Throughout this little manual, you will be challenged, and you will be equipped. It will shed light on the spiritual roots of the physical and emotional things you are experiencing – both the good and the bad. You will be encouraged to process and share your story with close friends. Reboot will give you new tools and coping strategies. Above all, Reboot will facilitate a more profound and stronger relationship with the One who made you and is responsible for healing you.

Through Christ, you can not only heal from your war-related trauma, but you can grow even stronger and more resilient. Don't be surprised when God asks you to share your healing journey with others so He can do through you what He has done to you.

Your servant in Christ,

Joseph Washburn – Reboot course leader

Former Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army Green Beret

Deployed in Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan

Introduction: There is a way . . .

Most nights, Alex has horrible nightmares. They jerk him from his sleep and he looks around wildly, trying to see who is about to attack him. He grabs the knife he keeps handy and points into the darkness, ready to slash. His wife Karina runs from their bed as fast as she can, in case he mistakes her for an enemy. Alex's heart is beating like a drum, his breath coming in rapid gasps, his eyes frantically searching the darkness for the Azerbaijani soldiers who have come to kill him . . .

But after several minutes, Alex comes to his senses and realizes he is alone. There are no enemy soldiers, no threats, just a great sadness replacing the panic that was in his heart moments earlier.

He slumps down on his bed and can't keep from weeping. His wife hesitantly re-enters the room and then sits beside him and puts a comforting arm on his shoulder. Alex thinks about how life used to be.

"We are lost," he cries. "We are so far away from the peaceful home and town we used to live in. I can't work. I can't sleep. I'm always afraid someone is coming to kill us. I'm a terrible husband to you Karina, a useless father to my children. And I can't seem to do anything about it!" With that, he kicks the chair next to the bed, sending it flying across the room.

He looks at his wife through his angry tears. "I'm sorry, Karina. I just want to go back. I want to go *back* to how things were before the fighting began, before our parents were killed and I was wounded, before God forgot about us. But I don't know how to get back there. There are too many rivers in the way that are too wide to cross. If I could only find the way back . . ."

Karina wept with Alex, because she felt the same sadness, the same hopelessness, and she had no idea what she could say to her husband to take away his pain.

Alex and Karina – like hundreds of thousands of other Armenians now scattered far from their homes – are experiencing the devastating trauma of war. You are probably reading this because you have experienced it too. With the way things are across Eastern Europe today, it's unlikely you will ever be able to go back to the way things were before war disrupted your life. But don't despair – you *can* make a journey to a *new* place of healing, strength, stability and peace. **There is a way.**

The traumas you have experienced may have robbed you of your peace, your joy, your ability to love, your hope, and many other things – at least for the moment. But despite your current circumstances, you *can* find these things again! Like Alex in the story above, you may think God has abandoned you. He has not! We know it must seem like it sometimes, but as you will read in this manual, God has been walking with you through all of the fires you have encountered. He's with you now, and He wants to help you make that journey to the place of healing.

We see eight rivers that could be keeping you from where you want to go. In this book, we will lead you to **Eight Bridges** that will help you cross those rivers and complete your journey. It won't be easy. It will require you to make decisions, to take action, and to trust God to bring you home. You will be asked to touch places in your heart, soul, and mind that may cause you anxiety at first, but will lead to strengthening and healing. There will be refreshing springs of encouragement along the way, moments of bright understanding, and triumphant crossings of streams that have denied your progress for a while. It will also be hard work sometimes – but it will be worth it!

Our brothers and sisters of Armenia, we grieve with you over all you have lost – physically, emotionally and spiritually. But take courage. Many people are praying for you as you read this. And the Spirit of God is also sitting beside you right now, eager to walk with you to your place of healing.

With Christ's love,

Chris & Rahnella Adsit – June, 2024

[Share these "Participation Rules" during the early part of your first meeting. It's up to you whether you'd like to read them yourself or go around the group and have each member read one.]

Participation Rules

1. Confidentiality

Anything said in our group stays in our group. Trust takes time to build but only moments to destroy. DO NOT talk to non-group members about who else is in the group or anything that was said.

2. Zero rank

Out there, you might be a big deal or a nobody. In this group, we are all equals, working toward a common goal, helping each other out.

3. Faith

While we don't hide that we are a Christ-centered organization, we are not affiliated with any specific church or denomination. People of any faith or no faith are welcome here. We will respect each other's faith convictions.

4. No comparisons

Each person experiences stress and trauma differently. What is traumatic for one person is just another day on the job for someone else. We are all wired differently and have unique life experiences. Comparing trauma experiences to decide if mine was better or worse than yours is unproductive and even harmful. Focus on what God is doing in your life.

5. Share your mind

Have the courage to share what's on your mind or what you're feeling – it's part of your healing process. The more you share, the safer you and everyone else will feel here, and the sooner you will experience healing.

6. Share the air

But moderate your sharing. Make an effort not to dominate discussion times; let others in. Avoid long, detailed descriptions of your experiences. Get in, make your point, get out.

7. Listen

Actively, deeply, honoring and affirming all contributions.

8. Don't criticize

Show grace and mercy to other group members – just as God has shown you.

9. Don't interrupt

You may have a valuable pearl of wisdom to share, but wait your turn.

10. Honor

Look for opportunities to honor and affirm each other during and between meetings.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 1:

UNDERSTANDING

... what happened

Field
Guide
pg. 11**Crossing the River of Confusion, Pain, and Doubt****Objectives of this Chapter:** *[This is just for your information – you don't need to read it to the group.]*

To help group members begin to identify their trauma, soul wounds, and their symptoms; to realize that PTSD is a common reaction to trauma; to understand that talking about their traumatic experiences is therapeutic; to gain the conviction that God has not caused their trauma – it has to do with men abusing the free will God has given them – and that God is working to heal them from their trauma.

*[Have someone read the story about Vahan.]***Vahan**

Since the most difficult moments of the blockade, I think that the most fears for me were caused not so much by the thought of dying, but by the idea of how I could die.

Of course, there was stress, and the first reason was that my freedom, exit and entrance were limited. Another stressful factor was the lack of food, which led to a number of health problems, as well as psychological pressure.

Nervous outbursts sometimes occurred due to the prevailing situation, as well as the thought that there was no way to escape.

The road to the Hakar Bridge was full of worry and anxiety, we constantly thought that they would suddenly change their mind and send us back, or maybe they had gathered everyone to kill them easily. I was not particularly afraid of seeing Azerbaijanis face to face; maybe I was happy that it was the last checkpoint and we were already reaching it.

-
- Did Vahan have some fears? What were some of them?
 - How did these fears and stresses show themselves in Vahan?
 - Were any of you also on the road that led to the Hakar Bridge? What were you thinking when you were there?
 - Since September of 2020 when Azerbaijan and Turkey started the current conflict, what are some of the main fears you've had? How have those fears affected you?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs. Then (you) draw the group's attention to the Trauma Spectrum graphic and have someone read the five "Condition Descriptions," asking them to think about where they fit in the spectrum as the Descriptions are being read.]

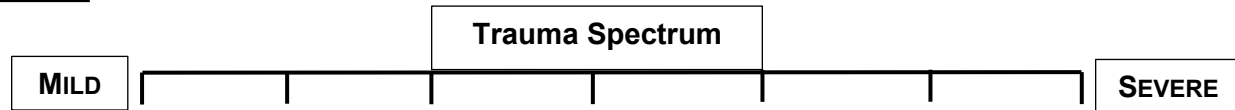
Vahan is suffering from a condition known as **War-related Trauma**.

"War-related Trauma" describes a progression of symptoms seen in those who have been exposed to a traumatic war-related event (or series of events) which involves actual or threatened death or serious injury and causes an emotional reaction involving intense fear, panic, helplessness, or horror.

The following chart presents the **spectrum of War-related Trauma**, with mild conditions on the left end, and more severe conditions on the right.



Where do you fit in this spectrum?



CONDITION DESCRIPTIONS:

Transitional Stress – (Mild end) – Difficulties getting back into a “normal” environment after trauma. Symptoms: tension; frustration with spouse, children, military, new circumstances; distracted; difficulty focusing on tasks at hand. Symptoms are mild and go away in a few hours or days.

Combat/Operational Stress Reactions – Symptoms: agitated, irritable, jumpy, poor focus, anxiety due to traumatic experiences. Symptoms go away in a few weeks.

Adjustment Disorders – Symptoms: depression, tearfulness, hopelessness, anger, fighting. Symptoms gone within six months.

Acute Stress Disorder – Symptoms: distress, fear, flashbacks, nightmares, self-isolating, insomnia; Symptoms may last up to four weeks. If they persist past that, the diagnosis is changed to...

Posttraumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) – (Severe end) – Symptoms: Paralyzing fear, panic attacks, helplessness, horror, hallucinations, amnesia, violent thoughts and actions, suicidal thoughts, hypervigilance, drug/alcohol abuse. Symptoms may last at least four weeks to many years if not treated.

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- Would a few of you share with us where you think you'd fit on that spectrum, and why? Tell us a little about when you began to experience the symptoms associated with that level, and how they are affecting you now.
- Several symptoms are mentioned in this spectrum. If you are experiencing any of them, which one or two bother you the most?

[Have someone read the NOTE below. You can preface it by saying something like, “You may have heard the term “Post-traumatic Stress Disorder” before, and you might wonder why we’re not using it here. This next paragraph tells you why we – and many others – refer to the condition as an “Injury” rather than a “Disorder.”

[NOTE: The formal term used by the majority of psychologists and psychiatrists for the most severe level of trauma reactions is **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**. However, a growing number of professionals prefer the **PTSI** term we are using. When applying the term “Disorder” to an individual, it implies that he or she merely has a psychological problem – “It’s all in your head.” Yet it has been known for many years that this condition is more than that. It is true that there are psychological components, but the root cause is actually a biological trauma that affects the nervous system, and therefore affects a person’s mindset, behavior and reactions. There are also spiritual components that we will be discussing later. Referring to someone as “disordered” can stigmatize them,

have a strong negative effect on their self-image, cause others (and themselves) to think they are “broken” beyond repair, and make them reluctant to take the initiative to heal. But an “injury” can heal – and even this most severe condition can be healed. For these reasons, we will use the term **Posttraumatic Stress Injury** throughout this manual.]

- What do you think about that? What do you see as the difference between calling someone “Injured” instead of “Disordered?”
- Which would you prefer to be called?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs.]

Each person responds differently to the traumas of war due to a variety of reasons. Vahan had a particularly severe reaction, while others who went through the exact same event might end up more to the “mild” end of the spectrum. Still others might be even more severely affected than Vahan.

Trauma sufferers toward the left end of the spectrum will usually show fewer symptoms, and they typically will improve without significant treatment. Sufferers at the right end of the spectrum exhibit very strong symptoms which will persist for at least a month, maybe years, and – if untreated – a lifetime. These symptoms may not begin to surface for months or even years after the traumatic event(s).

PTSI is a condition that has been observed in war-fighters and victims of war and described by doctors for centuries, but has only been defined and recognized in medical books since 1980. This shows that it is not unique to modern wars, but common to *all* wars.

- What do you think about the fact that the condition of PTSI has been described in literature for centuries?
- How does it make you feel regarding your own trauma responses?

[Have someone read the 7 bullet points below.]

If you are struggling with war-related trauma or PTSI, you should know . . .

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- PTSI is not rare or unusual. It is a *common* reaction to an *uncommon* event.
- Hundreds of thousands of men and women are struggling with it just as you are.
- It is *normal* to be affected negatively by combat, pain, atrocity and horror.
- Facing death changes a person – it would be *abnormal* if you were not affected. It shows that you are human and that what happens in war matters to you.
- You are not weak, crazy or strange – you are very literally *wounded*. You are *injured*.
- PTSI has been called a wound of the soul and a wound of the identity.
- If a person was shot in the foot, you wouldn't expect him to be able to run and jump any time soon. In the same way, a person with a wound to his or her *soul* will also be out of action for a while.

- Which of those statements surprises you the most?
- Which statement do you feel a strong, positive reaction to? Why?
- What do you think of that 6th bullet point – that PTSD is a “wound of the soul?” What do you think a “wound of the soul” would look like? Can you describe someone whose soul has been wounded?
- How would you compare it to a physical wound?

- Next we will see a list of nine general experiences that can cause PTSD. Let's go through them one at a time, and by a show of hands, let me ask if any of you have ever experienced any of them? You may raise your hand multiple times. You don't have to say anything or give any details about it.

[Read through this bulleted list yourself, one at a time. Wait to read the final paragraph in this section. Pause after you read each point, and give participants a chance to raise their hands, acknowledging that they have experienced it.]

What causes PTSD?

A psychological shock or any kind of horrific event that makes a person think that they could be severely injured or killed can trigger PTSD. In other words, PTSD can be produced in a number of ways besides war:

- Physical assault; carjacking
- Sexual abuse; rape
- Kidnapping; being held hostage
- Terrorism
- Torture
- Natural and man-made disasters
- Severe accident
- Receiving devastating news, such as a diagnosis of a life-threatening illness
- Witnessing threatening, mutilating, or deadly events

[Have someone – or you – read the next paragraph.]

PTSD can become especially severe or long-lasting when the trauma comes from an intentional human act, rather than from an accident or a natural disaster. In addition, enduring several traumatic events can have a building-up effect. For instance, if a person was abused as a child, then witnessed a sibling being murdered or was involved in a bad car accident, and then found himself in a combat situation, it's more likely that person will develop PTSD and it could be more severe than others who endure the same combat situation.

- Why do you think a person's symptoms would be worse if he or she had experienced multiple types of trauma?

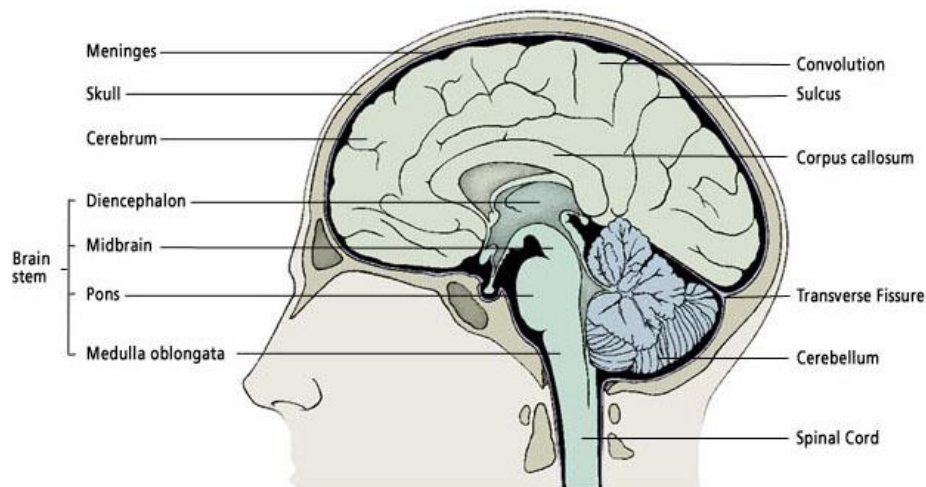
[Ask two people to read the next section, up to “But no matter who you are...”.]

A God-designed defense mechanism.

One of God's top plans when He created us was that we would be equipped to defend ourselves and survive in a wide variety of dangerous situations. To this end, He equipped us with an amazing set of danger-response mechanisms.

There is a place in our brain called the brain stem or lower brain. This part of our brain controls all automatic life functions, such as our breathing, digestion, and heartbeat. The brain stem will always override our higher brain – the part of our brain that we think with, make decisions with, etc. For instance, it doesn't matter how badly you might want to do it, you cannot make your heart stop beating just by thinking about it. You can hold your breath for a little while, but before long your lower brain once again takes over and *forces you* to breathe.

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When we encounter something that we feel threatens our life, a flood of hormones is dumped into our blood stream. Our lower brain commands our heart to beat faster, our lungs to pump harder, and gets the rest of our body ready to either fight or run. Thousands of small muscles in our arms and legs tighten up, sending blood away from our skin and into our muscles for endurance and quick movement – and so that if our extremities are wounded, we won't bleed as badly. We get a surge of energy, strength and quickness and suddenly we can run, jump, kick or punch like we never have before.

But something else happens deep inside our brains, too. It's like an alarm goes off, and drowns out our normal tendency to analyze what's happening or to get emotional about it. It screams, "*Less thinking, more action!*" Our brain starts recording very strong and clear memories of what is happening, probably so that we will remember this event and avoid it in the future.

If the danger continues to threaten us, our brain stem takes over completely. It's live-or-die time. With this part of our brain in control, nothing else matters. It automatically directs the rest of the body in very complex but focused ways to do whatever it takes to survive – sometimes in ways that the trauma sufferer may be ashamed of later.

- Without looking back at your manuals, what are some of the things God has designed for your brain and body to do whenever you encounter a threatening situation? How will these responses help you stay alive?
- Why do you think it's important for our brains to scream at us, "*Less thinking! More action!*"?
- Referring to the last paragraph, what do you think can happen when we come to "live-or-die" time? What sort of actions might a person do at this point to try to stay alive?

[Possible answers: go berserk in fighting, run away, abandon comrades in order to get to safety, freeze...]

[Have someone read the two points in this section.]

But no matter who you are, it's important to know two things:

1. God gave you this reactive pathway so that you would be able to do whatever was necessary to survive. It kept you alive. God knows that when our lives are threatened this behavior needs to come out or we could die. At that point, all the analysis, dignity, intelligence, and politeness in the world is absolutely useless.
2. No matter how hard you might have tried, you couldn't have stopped this reaction. Can you stop your heartbeat just by thinking about it? No. Neither are we able to control ourselves when our brains have clicked into this mode.

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- Let's look at these next two questions that are in your manual... *[Read the questions one at a time, and wait for one or two people (or more!) to answer.]*



- Can you remember having one (or more) of these "automatic" reactions while you were in a traumatic, life-threatening situation? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very mild and 10 very severe, how bad was it?
- Have you had any of these reactions since you got home or to a safe area in the form of a flashback? If so, how severe was it? How often has it happened?

[Have someone read the next section, up to "PTSI Symptoms."]

Getting stuck in crisis-alert mode.

You might be saying, "*OK, the crisis is over now. God's danger-response mechanism worked, and I survived. So why can't I move on? Why do I keep reliving what happened?*"

Often, a trauma survivor can go through a short period of recovery time and return pretty close to "normal." But if the traumatizing event was very violent and life-threatening, or if there were multiple events, the brain doesn't want to leave this crisis-alert mode. Your brain knows that it just had a very close call, and it is determined to be ready to react if the danger comes by again. Good idea – except if it gets *stuck* in that mode, which is essentially what PTSD is.

Whenever your brain senses that it's getting near the "scene of the crime" via some sensory trigger (such as a smell, a sound, a sight, a memory), it quickly opens up the photo album it created during the earlier traumatic event and puts on an intense show to remind you that you don't want to go there again! "Are you *nuts!*?? We almost *died* when we were there last time! Get away!"

If one doesn't process the traumatic event later in a safe place by talking about it with someone, allowing the emotions that were suppressed to come up and be experienced, analyzing it, getting angry about the injustice of the experience, but then releasing that anger and bitterness, they will stay stuck in this condition indefinitely.

- What are some of your "sensory triggers?" What sensual experiences automatically make you start thinking and responding to a traumatic event in your past?
- How many of you feel like you are "stuck" in that crisis alert mode?
- *[Here's something you can share if you feel it would be appropriate...]*

One of the main ways we can get "un-stuck" is to first of all not stuff it down, and pretend it didn't happen, or that it wasn't a big deal. Even though it can be painful and anxiety-producing, and even though we don't want to think about the traumatic event at all, it's helpful if we let the memories come back up and talk about them with a trusted friend or a counselor. Rather than to try to keep those memories in the past, bring them into the present, confront them, rob them of their power, fully realize that the threat has passed, and clear the way for a less stressful future.]

[Assign four group members to read the four clusters of symptoms. But before they start reading, say...]

- As we read through these lists of PTSI symptoms, put a mark next to any symptoms that you have experienced in the past or are currently experiencing.

PTSI symptoms

Medical experts on trauma have identified four major categories of symptoms for PTSI. Go through the list below and put a check-mark next to any symptoms that you are currently experiencing.¹

1. Intrusion Symptoms: (Re-experiencing) Memories and images of the traumatic events may spontaneously intrude into the minds of those with PTSI, causing intense or prolonged distress or physiological reactions. Sometimes the images can be so vivid a person believes the trauma is actually reoccurring.

- Nightmares
- Sleepwalking, sleep fighting
- Unwanted daytime memories, images, thoughts, daydreams
- Flashbacks, feeling like you are reliving the traumatic event
- Somatic flashbacks (physical pain or a medical condition emerges, linked to the feelings or bodily states associated with the traumatic event)
- Fixated on the traumatic event; living in the past
- Spontaneous dissociative episodes (the world vanishes and you're suddenly somewhere else, experiencing some sort of trauma)
- Panic attacks, undefined distress, dread or fear
- Phobias

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¹ These categories and symptom lists are from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* published by the American Psychiatric Association in May, 2013.

2. Avoidance Symptoms Traumatized individuals attempt to avoid situations, people or events that remind them of their trauma. They feel numb, emotionless, withdrawing into themselves trying to shut out the painful memories and feelings.

- Intentionally avoiding anyone, any place, or anything that reminds you of the traumatic event
- Physical/emotional reaction to things that remind you of the traumatic event
- Self-isolating, dread of social interaction
- Anxiety in crowds or traffic
- Very reluctant to talk about your traumatic event
- Substance abuse to “numb” yourself (drugs, alcohol, food)

3. Alterations of Thinking and Mood: They may be unable to recall key features of the traumatic event, have a very negative self-image and/or world view, strong negative emotions, and disinterest in things that interested them deeply before. They are unable to show appropriate affection and emotion which causes friends and family to feel rejected by them.

- Reduced cognitive ability (slow thinking, confusion, poor problem-solving, poor memory)
- Inability to recall key features of the traumatic event(s)
- Persistent, negative trauma-related emotions (fear, horror, anger, guilt, shame)
- Persistent, negative, distorted self-image (“I am bad.”)
- Persistent, negative, distorted view of the world (“The world is always dangerous.”)
- Persistent, distorted blame of self or others for causing the traumatic event(s)
- Lack of interest or motivation regarding employment, recreation, former hobbies, sex, exercise
- Relationships that were once close and even intimate are now strained, cold, distant, requiring too much energy to maintain, feeling detached or estranged
- Neglect/abandon personal care, hygiene, nutrition
- Emotional numbness, flat, can't get happy or sad, “dead” inside
- Inability to trust others

4. Arousal and Reactivity Alterations: Fearing further trauma, PTSD sufferers are always on the alert, on guard, jumpy, unable to sleep, angry, irritable.

- Anger, irritability, “short fuse,” fits of rage
- Hypervigilance (always on guard), always need to be armed with knife or gun; could also include “emotional” hypervigilance
- Easily startled, reacting to loud noises, jumpy
- Substance abuse to “un-numb” yourself (drugs, alcohol, food)
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, insomnia, night sweats
- Accelerated heart rate, rapid breathing, heart palpitations for no good reason
- Physical fatigue
- Question/abandon faith, feeling of being betrayed or abandoned by God, mad at God

- Becoming violent, provoking fights
- Homicidal thoughts
- Suicidal thoughts, attempts
- Anniversary reaction (become anxious nearing the monthly or yearly anniversary of the traumatic event)
- Adrenalin junkie (taking risks, getting hyped-up)
- Self-mutilation, cutting, excessive tattooing – just to “feel something – *anything*.”

- Now comes a little bit of vulnerability. Would a few of you like to share about your experiences with some of these symptoms? How much did they affect you? Do you feel they are getting better, staying the same, or getting worse?

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs.]

A war-related trauma sufferer won't experience *all* of these symptoms by any means. He or she might have some of them from the first category, one or two from the second, four from the third – the set of symptoms will be as unique as the individual suffering from them.

If you are currently experiencing war-related trauma or PTSD, there are many reasons to take hope! For *years* people who have studied victims of overwhelming stress and trauma have been amazed by the resiliency of these survivors. Refugee camp occupants, prisoners of war freed after years of captivity, terrorized hostages – so many are seen as coping and being victorious, rather than spiraling into a pattern of defeat. Many war trauma survivors have actually used their experiences to strengthen and enrich their lives – and the lives of others. God can enable you to rebuild your shattered life, career and family – even as you wrestle with the bitterest of memories.

- We have faith that there will come a time when the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be over, and there will be peace. How do you see your traumatic experiences being transformed and useful to others around you? In what positive ways may those experiences change you?

[Have someone read the next section up to “Free will.” You might preface this section by saying something like:]

This next section is very important. For many people, if we are not able to explain to them how a good God can allow such pain and suffering in our world, they won't be interested in anything else we have to say – especially if it has anything to do with God. “If God is so powerful and loving, where was He when all these horrible things were going on?”

But where was God?

When a person experiences a horrible event, when evil triumphs, when the innocent are harmed, when a random, unexpected incident results in destruction and death, it is a natural human tendency to ask, “Where was God? Why didn't He prevent this?” It's natural and *normal* to ask this.

Some of the most godly, faith-filled men and women in history have done the same, more or less. Even the Son of God – Jesus Christ – cried out from the cross that was killing Him . . .

“My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?” – Matthew 27:46

What do you know about God? Those who have walked with God very closely for a long, long time tell us that He is “supremely-good” and “supremely-powerful.” But wait a minute. If God is supremely-good, He certainly wouldn't want bad things to happen. And if He's supremely-powerful, He certainly would be able to do what He wants – and keep bad things from happening.

So . . . why do so many bad things happen in a world ruled by a God who is so good and so powerful?

Here's why . . .

“For God so loved the world . . .” (John 3:16). God loves the whole world – and God loves *you* – at a depth and with an intensity that we can't even imagine. His love isn't the sentimental, syrupy love that we see in the movies or daydream about. It's a love that is wise, self-less and freeing. It has eternity in mind, not just the present.

- What do you think about people who go through a traumatic event and question the existence of God, or question His interest or ability to love us and take care of us?

[We should not judge them. Their questioning is normal, common, and expected. They just need to have an expanded perspective, which we'll be looking at in the next section.]

- What do you think about the fact that even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had His moment of doubt on the cross, and feared that the Father had abandoned Him?
- Does it make any difference to you to know that – even though you have gone through great difficulty – God loves you with a love that has eternity in mind?

[Have several people read the next section, up to “Knowing your enemies, knowing your allies.”]

Free will

One central fact about His love for you is that He is not going to *force* you to do anything. He is not interested in a planet full of puppets who will do what He says whenever He pulls the right strings. He *loves* you, and what He wants more than anything in all the universe is *your* love, sent back to Him of your own free will. If we are forced, it's not love at all. It's just action and reaction – like in physics or chemistry.

So God – from the very beginning – has deeply desired that we'll decide on our own to respond positively to His loving overtures. Love cannot be forced or commanded.

“We do not want this man to reign over us!” That was Jesus telling a story in Luke 19 about how He was going to be rejected as King.

The story came true a few days later. **“Away with Him! Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar!”** (John 19:15) The people did not want God – or His Son – as their ruler, so they killed Him. But this was nothing new. People have been rejecting God's rule in their affairs since the time of Adam and Eve. Mankind said “No” to God at the first opportunity and we've been saying “No” ever since – as a species, as nations, as individuals. God reaches out in love and says, “I am here. May I be your Covering, your Guide, your Sustainer, your Companion, your Comforter?” And every one of us at one time or another has said, “No, You may not. I would prefer to be the Captain of my own soul. Leave me alone. I'll do as I please.”

And you can see the horrific results of man “doing as he pleases” as you fight for your life and your country in the face of Azerbaijani and Turkish aggression.

God didn’t change His mind about respecting our free will. God granted our wish. He backed off. But not very far. He’s always there, ready to respond, reaching out – but out of our way. “We don’t need God – we can handle things just fine by ourselves.”

But obviously, we humans are doing a very bad job of “handling things by ourselves.” That’s why you are in the distress that you are right now, and perhaps why you are reading this. According to historian Will Durant, in more than 5,000 years of recorded history, there have only been 29 years when there wasn’t a war raging somewhere on our planet.

As one man in a German prison camp during World War Two asked his friend: “Where is God?” The other man, thinking about their cruel guards and a world that would not help them, replied, “Where is man?”

This is important to understand:

YOUR CONDITION IS DUE TO THE SINFUL ACTIONS OF EVIL MEN – NOT GOD.

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God is not the author of evil. He has been right there with you as you walked through your traumatic experiences. He has helped you in ways you might not have known. He has wept over your dead family members and friends just as He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). He is biding His time until the day He will judge and eliminate all evil and those who practice it. But in the meantime, He is walking beside you and in great sadness about the pain you are experiencing. He is ready to come to your aid if you will let Him.

- What characteristic or “gift” has God given every person on earth? *[Free will.]*
 - And how does God hope that we will use that free will? *[To choose to love Him back.]*
 - And what does this love look like? *[Obedience. John 14:21 – have someone look it up and read it.]*
- How has mankind abused the free will that God has given them?
- What role has man’s abuse of free will led specifically to the current situation in Armenia?

[Have someone read the next section, up to “Conclusions.”]

Knowing your enemies, knowing your allies.

You have seen your human enemies. You may know that they are influenced and strengthened by spiritual enemies who hate God, hate you, and because God loves you, desire nothing more than to defeat and kill you. Like a roaring lion, their objective is to devour you (1 Peter 5:8). They will use any weakness you have, any experience you have gone through, any vulnerability they can discover to fulfill their mission for you. They will use your traumatic experiences to find the open spots in your armor and shoot their arrows there.

They are our enemies. Not God.

Have you ever watched a bunch of chicks with their mother hen? When danger comes, they instantly scurry toward their mother, who lifts her wings and gathers them underneath for protection. Could you imagine a wolf bounding into the chicken yard and one of the chicks running

away from the hen and *toward* the wolf? That would be one very stupid – or confused – chick. And one very happy wolf.

And yet so many humans, when problems bound into their lives, decide to run away from the Supreme Problem-Solver of the universe, rather than toward Him.



- In which direction are you running right now – toward God or away from Him? Why?

- While God has not caused the trauma you have (or are) experiencing, how has He helped you through this time of great difficulty? How has He been your ally?
- As the question in your manual asks, “In which direction are you running right now – toward God or away from Him?”

[Have someone read the “Conclusions” below and the final paragraph – or read them yourself.]

Conclusions:

- War-related Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Injury are physiological, emotional, and spiritual reactions to a life-threatening event involving extreme distress, pain, and horror. God designed those reactions to help you survive – but not processing that trauma (stuffing it down, not talking about it, denying it happened or saying that it was not very significant) can cause a person to get “stuck” in this crisis-alert mode.
- The ultimate source of this trauma is not God, but man’s inhumanity to man, influenced by Satan and his demonic forces. God is there with you now, standing ready to help you in this crisis. He may not take you *out* of the crisis, but He will be walking with you *through* it – guiding, protecting, factoring your difficulties into a long-term plan for you in a way that will not compromise human free will.
- If you **UNDERSTAND** these things, it will help clear up your confusion, give meaning to the pain you are experiencing, and dispel your doubt with faith – moving you toward strength and stability.

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- To close this chapter, let me read this statement, and then have you respond to it:
“I feel God is my ally, not the cause of my trauma, and is working to help me through the effects of my trauma.”
Which of the following responses best represents how you feel right now?
A. I don’t agree at all.
B. I have my doubts.
C. I think it could be true.
D. I definitely believe it.
- If you answered anything other than “D,” would you care to share with the group why you feel that way, and what it might take to move you closer to the “D” answer?

[Close in prayer – either you or one of your group members.]

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 2:

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CONNECTING

...with the Healer

Crossing the River of Separation from Your Creator

Objectives of this Chapter:

- Recognizing that the most important component in a “trauma healing environment” is the Healer, this chapter seeks to inform the reader how to begin a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- For those who are already Christians, it will provide a valuable review of the Gospel, give them the opportunity to re-evaluate their initial commitment to Christ, and provide a method by which they could share the gospel with others.

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? – 1 John 5:4,5

- Right now, the world is a difficult place. What are some of the difficulties Armenians are currently experiencing?
- In this verse, what (or who) is meant by “whatever is born of God?”
- How do you think believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God would help a person to “overcome the world?”

Hakob

On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan attacked Armenia with help from Turkey and Syria. Obviously, we Armenians wanted to defend ourselves, so there was an immediate call for military service. I am a church pastor, and as a Christian I am against wars, but I realized that this was a battle for our very existence. I had to go to the battlefield to fight for my nation.

At the time, I didn't realize that God had plans for me that went far beyond saving our country – they had to do with saving *souls* for all eternity.

When we arrived at the battlefield, we began to despair, as we realized the size of the armies we were fighting against. It began to dawn on all of us that we would not return to our homes alive.

We fought for days and nights. I was convinced that I would not live past the next day. But suddenly, the artillery and UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) stopped for a short period. So I ventured outside to pray to God. I don't think I had ever prayed so intently in my life!

“Oh my Lord Jesus! I have walked with You for 27 years now, and You have been with me every step of the way. You have guided me, helped me, protected me, rescued me, and given me Your joy and peace even in the most difficult circumstances. But now, I can't help but wonder: why have you brought me here? Is this how my life is to end? Why? Please help me and give me my answer!”

Immediately, God's peace flooded over me. I knew that God was with me still, and that He had plans for me – even here.

I went back inside our bomb shelter, where 35 other soldiers were. I wanted to tell them about God, and how He could protect and save them, but I didn't know how to start a conversation with them. Then a soldier came up to me and began telling me of a fearful dream he had. Another approached me and told me he was so afraid to die. Neither of these men were believers. I told them that I was a pastor of a church, and they became very enthusiastic about talking more with me. Others overheard our conversation, and they drew closer to listen. God had prepared their hearts!

I shared the gospel with them, and they asked me to pray for them. I told them about how prayer works and led them in The Lord's Prayer – I prayed loudly, and they repeated after me. Then I encouraged them to pray for themselves, and they did! Many of these men – maybe all of them – became Christians that day.

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Two days later, we were in the trenches, and the enemy began to shoot everything they had at us! Artillery, machine guns, UAVs, tank cannons, planes dropping bombs – this went on for so long! But the strange thing was that they were always missing our trenches! God was indeed miraculously protecting us – and all the soldiers could see it!

After the operation, we saw that NONE of us had died! I shared with the other soldiers Psalm 91 – especially verse 7: *"A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."* One of our guys said "Oh my God, it was not possible, but we all are alive, how is it possible? This is really a miracle from God!"

And when I heard this from a man who only two days before was an unbeliever, I immediately understood that God's priority was not only to save their physical lives, but our eternal *spiritual* lives as well. And I was so *happy* that He had planned all along to use *me* in this process!

- What did you think about the prayer that Hakob prayed? Did it show his weakness or lack of faith? Or was it understandable and reasonable that he would feel so confused by the possibly deadly trials he was experiencing – since he was a Christian and a pastor?
- Why do you think the other soldiers became so eager to talk with Hakob?
- Have any of you ever experienced something like this – where someone became very eager to hear about God and the gospel? How do you explain it?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs up to (stopping before) "The following four principles will help..."]

Making sure your heart is firmly connected to The Healer: knowing God personally

Yes, you *can* know God personally, as presumptuous as that may sound. God is so eager to establish a personal, loving relationship with you that He has already made all the arrangements. He is patiently waiting for you to respond to His invitation. You can receive forgiveness of your sins, confidence of eternal life, and be put on the road to experience His healing of your body, mind, and soul through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

This section won't be about how God could eliminate evil the world and end all wars, or how He could heal the land of Armenia. It's about something *very* focused and specific: **your personal relationship with God.**

The major barrier that prevents us from knowing God personally is ignorance about who God is and what He has done for us. Read on and discover for yourself how you can begin a life-changing relationship with God.

- What do you think about the statement at the beginning of this section: "You can know God personally"? Do you think that's possible?
- Are there any of you here who could say that you already know God personally? If so, how did that come about?
- How would knowing God personally help a person to heal from the trauma they have experienced?

[Have someone read the first principle below: "God loves you..." up to "What prevents us from knowing..."]

The following **four principles** will help you discover how to know God and experience the full life He promised.

1. God loves you, and created you to know Him personally.

Scriptures from the Bible about this point:

- **GOD'S LOVE:** "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16 (NIV)
- **GOD'S PLAN:** "And this is the way to have eternal life—by knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth! – John 17:3 (TLB)

- The Bible says that God loves you. Is that something that you can truly believe? Why or why not?
- In what ways does God show His love to us?

[Consider reading Romans 5:8 to the group: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."]

[Have someone read the second principle below: "Man is sinful..." up to "The following diagram illustrates..."]

What prevents us from knowing God personally?

2. Man is sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.

- **MAN IS SINFUL:**
 - "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." – Romans 3:23 (NASB)
 - "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." – Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

Man was created to have fellowship with God. But because of his own stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way and fellowship with God was broken. This is true of us individually and as a species. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is evidence of what the Bible calls "sin."

- **MAN IS SEPARATED:**

- “But your wrongdoings have caused a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” – Isaiah 59:2 (NASB)
- “For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God], but the gracious gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23 (NASB)

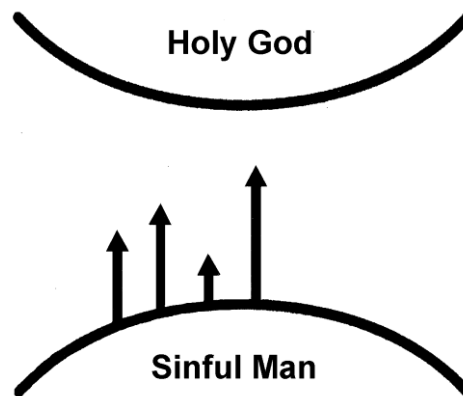
- How does the fact that each of us have sinned keep us separated from God?

[Consider sharing this illustration: “The word “sin” in the Bible was originally a Greek archery term. When an archer shot at a target, they would measure the distance between the bullseye and where the arrow hit, and that was called the “sin” of the arrow. The bullseye represents perfect obedience to God. Even though each of us may have been aiming at that bullseye, every one of us has missed it. We have all “sinned” – missed the mark – of God’s perfect requirements of us.”]

- Has there ever been anyone who has lived a perfect life and never sinned (besides Jesus Christ)?
- What do you think happens to a person if he or she dies in this condition – separated from God?
- What does God offer us instead?

[Have someone read the next paragraph, up to “The third principle explains...”]

The following diagram illustrates how a great gulf separates God and man. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and establish a personal relationship with Him through his own efforts. These efforts take many forms, such as being a good person, a positive philosophy, taking care of the environment, or being religious – but he inevitably fails. The gulf is just too great. It would be like trying to swim from London to New York City. The greatest swimmer of all time might go farther than anyone else, but he or she would still fall hundreds of miles short.



- I'm sure each of you has known at least one “very good and righteous” person in your life. They may have done many, many good deeds. Are all the good things this person did going to be enough to bridge the gulf between him or her and God? Why not?

[Because despite all the good things they have done, they have also committed some sins. And unless those sins are forgiven, there is still a separation between that person and God.]

[Consider sharing this illustration to illustrate the consequence of sin: "Let's say I'm driving one day, and I run through a red light at an intersection. A policeman pulls me over and says, "You didn't stop at that red light. I'm going to have to give you a ticket." But then you protest, "But wait a minute! I stopped at all the other red lights and stop signs I've encountered today. My license is up to date. I've paid all my taxes. I don't beat my spouse or children. I even helped an old lady across the street yesterday. I've done all these good things! Why are you punishing me?" The policeman says, "It's wonderful that you did all those good things, but I'm still going to have to give you a ticket." James 2:10 (ESV) – "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."]

[Have someone read the third principle, up to "Just knowing these three truths..."]

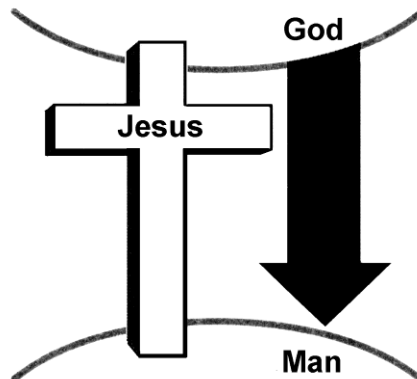
The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gulf...

3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love.

- **HE DIED IN OUR PLACE:** "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." – Romans 5:8 (NASB)
- **HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD:** "Christ died for our sins... He was buried... He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time..." – 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (NASB)
- **HE IS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD:** "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except through Me.'" – John 14:6 (NASB)

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The following diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him. He did this by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Because of Jesus' willing sacrifice of Himself, we can now experience a relationship with God.



- When the Bible says, "Christ died for us" what does that mean? In what way did He die for us?

[When we put our faith in Christ as our Savior, the penalty for our sin (death) is transferred to Christ. So when He died on the cross, He took our sins upon Himself, and also took our penalty on Himself too. He died for us – or instead of us, or in our place. But because He was the sinless Son of God, after He paid for our sins by His death, the Father raised Him from dead.]

- The Bible says that Jesus rose from the dead. How do we know this is true?

[Because of all the witnesses who testified that they saw Him after His resurrection, and every one of them was willing to endure torture and death rather than to deny their eyewitness testimony later.]

- Can you think of any other reasons why you feel it's true that Jesus rose from the dead?

[How about personal testimonies of the relationship you have experienced with God through Jesus Christ?]

- In Jesus Christ's opinion, how many ways are there to God? *[See John 14:6 above.]*

- Most religions focus on ways that people can reach God through their own efforts. What is different about how the Bible says we can be reunited with God?

[God took the initiative and reached down to us first.]

[Have someone read the fourth principle, up to the circle diagram – “These two circles represent...”]

Just knowing these three truths is not enough...

4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love.

- **WE MUST RECEIVE CHRIST:** “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” – John 1:12 (NASB)
- **WE RECEIVE CHRIST THROUGH FAITH:** “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” – Ephesians 2:8,9 (NASB)
- **WHEN WE RECEIVE CHRIST, WE EXPERIENCE A NEW BIRTH:** “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” – John 3:3 (NASB)
- **WE RECEIVE CHRIST THROUGH FAITH:** [Christ speaking] “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him.” – Revelation 3:20 (ESV)

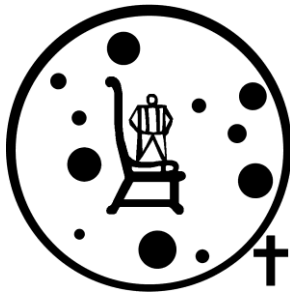
Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives, to forgive our sins, and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have only an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

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- According to the first verse (John 1:12), what is the relationship between “receiving” Christ and “believing” in Him? *[They are equal. To “believe” is to “receive,” and to “receive” is to “believe.”]*
- Does the Bible say that we can “work” our way into heaven? If it's not a result of work, what is it a result of?
- What do you think Jesus meant when He said that we need to be “born again?” *[We have already been born once into the physical realm. But we also need to be born into the spiritual realm, which happens when we receive Christ into our lives.]*
- In the third verse (Revelation 3:20) what do you think the “door” is that Jesus is talking about? *[Many people feel it represents the door of our life – our will, our intellect, our emotion, etc.]*
- Would Jesus just come into a person's life on His own initiative, or does He require that we use our free will and open the door for Him?

[Leader – read and explain the “Two Circles” diagram below.]

These two circles represent two kinds of lives:

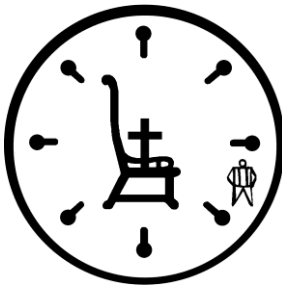


The Self-Directed Life

“Self” is on the throne or controlling center of the life.

Christ is outside the life.

The various sized circles represent the various interests and activities of a person's life – which “Self” cannot sufficiently control, resulting in discord with God's plan, frustration, dead-ends, and despair.



The Christ-Directed Life

Christ is on the throne. Self is dethroned, yielding to Christ.

The various interests and activities are now controlled by God, resulting in harmony with His plans, strength, stability, and healing.



- Which circle best represents your life?
- Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

- How many of you would say that the first circle represents your life?
- How many would say the second circle does?
- Can anyone think of a reason why someone would not want the second circle to represent their life?

[Have someone read the next section, up to “How to know that Christ is in your life.”]

The following explains how you can receive Christ:

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer

Prayer is not a mystical or complicated thing, only engaged in by “professional” Christians such as priests, pastors, ministers, or missionaries. Prayer is simply talking with God – and anyone can do it!

God knows your heart and is not so concerned about your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

“Jesus Christ, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I believe You are the Son of God, and that You were raised from the dead. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Help me to heal, and make me the kind of person You want me to be.”



- Does this prayer express the desire of your heart?
- If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

• *[There are several ways you could proceed here...]*

- *You could pray the prayer out loud and ask anyone who would like to receive Christ to pray it along with you silently.*
- *You could ask the whole group to pray it out loud in unison; some might be asking Christ into their lives for the first time, others might see it as a prayer of rededication.*
- *You could ask people to consider this prayer personally, think about it tonight, and if they would like, to pray the prayer on their own, and let you know of their decision later, so that you could be praying for them and helping to disciple them.]*

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs, up to "An important reminder..."]

How to know that Christ is in your life

Did you ask to receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20 (see above), where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said that He would come into your life and be your friend so that you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word – the Bible.)

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The Bible promises eternal life to all who receive Christ

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know based on His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him into your life. He will not deceive you.

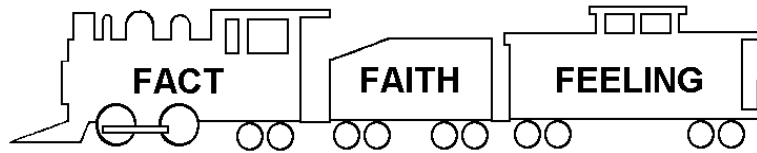
- If you have prayed that prayer and invited Christ into your life (either today or at some time in the past), how do you know He is there?
- What do you have to do (or not do) to keep Him there? *[Nothing! He said He would never leave! Consider reading Hebrews 13:5b (NIV): "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"]*

[Have someone read the next section, up to "Now that you have entered into a personal..."]

An important reminder...

Do not depend on feelings

The promise of God's Word, the Bible – not our feelings – is our authority. The Christian lives by faith in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. Feelings come and go based on many factors and are not a reliable measure of what is true. The train diagram below illustrates the relationship among **fact** (God and His Word), **faith** (our trust in God and His Word), and **feeling** (the result of our faith and obedience) (John 14:21).



The classic train pictured above was powered by coal, which was stored in the second car. As coal was shoveled forward to the engine's firebox and burned, it produced steam which powered the train. Shoveling coal from the second car to the last car will not move the train at all. In fact, the train will run with or without the last car. However, it cannot run without the engine – the last car has no power to do that job. In the same way, we as Christians do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the facts – the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

- Once a person has made the decision to receive Christ into their life, what are some of the “feelings” that might assault him or her, which might make that person doubt his decision?
- What are some of the “facts” that we should put our faith in?
- What happens if our “feelings” don't fall in line with the facts that we have put our faith in? What should we do?

[Have someone read the next section, up to “Conclusions.”]

Now that you have entered into a personal relationship with Christ...

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of your will, many things happened, including the following:

1. Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20 and Colossians 1:27).
2. Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
3. You became a child of God (John 1:12).
4. You received eternal life (John 5:24).
5. You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

- *[If you have time, consider opening up your Bible and reading each of the supporting verses in this section – or have several people consult their Bibles or their phone's Bible app and read the passages.]*
- Are any of the things mentioned in this list a surprise to you?
- Which one means the most to you?
- Do you have any questions or comments about any of them?

[Have someone – or you – read the “Conclusions.”]

Conclusions:

- God is the Healer of all sickness and injury – whether it is of the body, mind or spirit.
- If you desire to receive His healing, then you must align your heart with His heart. In this position, God will have unhindered access to your body, mind and spirit for the purpose of healing you.

- The first and most important step over this bridge is to **CONNECT** with your Creator. He is the one who made you, who knows everything about you, and He deeply desires to heal you in every way.
- By asking God's Son Jesus Christ to come into your life and by beginning a relationship with Him, you are connecting with God. He forgives all your sins if you ask Him to – no matter how bad they are. He cleanses you. He declares you righteous in His eyes. He brings you out of the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light. He gives you His Holy Spirit. He adopts you as His son or daughter. And He now walks with you as you journey to your place of healing.
- This doesn't mean that your life is now going to become easy and problem-free. You will still face many problems. But the difference is that now you have the Supreme-Problem-Solver of the Universe living right inside of you! He will be there to help you every step of the way.

- Why do you think that having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will help you to heal from the trauma you have experienced?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 3:

FILLING

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... of the Holy Spirit

Crossing the River of Powerlessness

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To learn more about who the Holy Spirit is, and to help participants overcome their sense of powerlessness in the midst of war by connecting to the power that is available through the Holy Spirit.
- They will be presented a practical, Biblical method of being "Filled" (controlled, guided, empowered) by the Holy Spirit, and will be offered the opportunity to ask God for the filling of His Holy Spirit during this lesson.

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . . – Acts 1:8

- What do you think it means when it says, "...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you?"
- When do you think this happens? *[We'll be looking more deeply into the Biblical answer to this question later in this chapter. But it would be good to hear some of the group members' ideas about this ahead of time. Let them answer, but don't offer any "corrections."]*

[Have someone read the opening story, up to "Sevag was desperate...".]

When you need strength beyond your own . . .

As soon as he heard the explosion, Sevag dropped everything and ran as fast as he could toward it. You would think he would run the *opposite* way, but Sevag could tell the blast occurred in his neighborhood. He didn't think twice – he just ran. His wife Alin and their infant daughter Anna were at home, and he *had* to see if they were alright.

His heart sank as he rounded the corner onto his street. His building was demolished; huge sheets of concrete stood in a jumbled pile where his apartment used to be. He ran to the mountain of rubble. "Alin! Anna! Where are you?! Are you in there? Say something!"

Sevag heard groans and crying. He couldn't tell if it was his Alin and Anna, but he dove into the work of trying to free them – whoever they were. He removed some of the blocks and timbers without too much difficulty, but Sevag quickly saw that the huge pieces of concrete were going to be too much for him.

Then he looked across the street and hope sprang into his heart. A front-end loader was sitting at the construction site there – and Sevag knew how to operate one! It could easily lift the concrete pieces! He sprinted over to it, jumped up in the seat and tried to start it. It cranked and cranked, but it would not catch. It was out of petrol! Sevag began hitting the dashboard in frustration. *How can I rescue Alin and Anna? I'm not strong enough by myself!*

Just then he looked to his left and heading right toward him through the smoke and the growing, frantic crowd, was a petrol supply truck! Sevag waved his arms desperately, and the driver stopped right next to the front-end loader.

"It's out of petrol!" Sevag yelled. "Can you help us?"

"Of course!" the driver replied. Within minutes they had filled the loader's petrol tank. This time when Sevag hit the starter, it cranked for a few moments then roared to life. He drove the big machine across the street, and many other rescuers began to work with Sevag and the loader to carefully lift up the big pieces of rubble.

It took more than five hours, but Sevag and his powerful machine were able to pull many people from the collapsed building alive that day – including Alin and Anna.

-
- Sevag had plenty of courage and determination to meet this challenge and rescue his wife and daughter, but what did he lack? *[Power.]*
 - In this story, what do you think the front-end loader that was out of petrol represents?
[The plans, hopes and desires of a Christian who is not filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he is not connected to the power he needs to accomplish important things in his life.]
 - What do you think the petrol supply truck represented? *[God, bringing the power, ability and guidance of the Holy Spirit.]*
 - Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you didn't have enough power within yourself to accomplish a desperate objective? Would anyone care to share what happened?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs, up to "Who is the Holy Spirit?"]

Sevag was desperate to rescue his wife and daughter from the building that had been blown up by a missile strike. But it didn't matter how strong he was, he was no match for the heavy concrete slabs. The front-end loader could certainly do the job, but even if it was brand-new, the top-of-the-line, the most powerful model, and in perfect working order, without petrol it could do nothing.

But what happened when the petrol filled its tank? *Power!* Suddenly Sevag – and that front-end loader – could accomplish amazing feats of strength, beyond anything he could have done by himself.

This is similar to the relationship between a Christian and the Holy Spirit. He is our power source! We may be very capable, strong, and impressive people. But without the Holy Spirit empowering us, we cannot accomplish anything of any significance or of any eternal use.

- So who – or what – was responsible for the rescue of those people from the collapsed building?
[It was a partnership between Sevag and the front-end loader that was now filled with petrol. While God is capable of doing anything He wants through miracles, He loves to partner with us as He accomplishes His will. He supplies the power and ability as we work to accomplish what needs to be done.]

[Have someone read the next section about "Who is the Holy Spirit," including the bullet points, up to "The Filling of the Holy Spirit." They don't need to say all of the Bible references out loud as he/she reads. Encourage group members to read the scripture passages on their own later.]

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Here are some facts about the Holy Spirit that you should know, *many* of which will have direct bearing on the war-related trauma you are struggling with (please feel free to read the verses noted in your own Bible):

- The Bible presents God as a “Trinity” – three-in-one. God is the one-and-only God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10), and yet He shows Himself as three distinct “persons:”
 - God the Father (John 6:27)
 - God the Son – Jesus Christ (John 20:26-28)
 - God the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- The Holy Spirit guides us – John 16:13.
- The Holy Spirit teaches us “all things” – John 14:26.
- The Holy Spirit gives us freedom – 2 Corinthians 3:17.
- The Holy Spirit gives us power – Acts 1:8.
- The Holy Spirit is God’s seal – His signature on us – showing that we belong to Him, and that He will make sure we are safely delivered to heaven – Ephesians 1:13,14.
- The Holy Spirit is like streams of living water flowing from inside us – John 7:37-40.
- The Holy Spirit helps our weaknesses and prays for us – Romans 8:26, 27.
- The Holy Spirit produces godly character qualities in us such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – Galatians 5:22,23.
- Anyone who has asked Jesus Christ to come into his or her life now has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. This is called the “Indwelling of the Holy Spirit,” and it is a permanent condition. He will never, ever, under any circumstances leave you (forever means *forever!*) - John 14:16,17.

But for a person to be “Filled” with the Holy Spirit is different from being “Indwelt.” As you will learn in this chapter, to be *filled* is to be “controlled, guided and empowered” by Him. This condition depends on the desire and obedience of the Christian, so sometimes our condition is “filled,” sometimes not. It depends on us. As one Bible teacher puts it, “We leak.” Like a cracked pot that must continually be re-filled, so we too need to be careful to maintain our “filled” condition.

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- What are your thoughts on that definition of the “Trinity?” Are you able to understand it? How would you explain it to someone who had never heard of it before?
- As you read the list of things that the Holy Spirit desires to do for us, which are the most important to you, and why?

[Have someone read the next section on “The Filling of the Holy Spirit,” up to the Circle Diagrams, “The Bible talks about three kinds...”]

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

“Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

– Ephesians 5:18

In the above verse, God gives us two commands, one positive and one negative. Can you recognize them?

1. Don’t get drunk. *[The negative one.]*
2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. *[The positive one.]*

The point of this verse is that, just as alcohol can control us (in negative, destructive ways), the Holy Spirit – if we allow Him to – can control us in positive, constructive ways.

- In what ways does alcohol control a person in negative, destructive ways?
- What are some ways the Holy Spirit can control a person in positive, constructive ways?
- How can the Holy Spirit help a person to recover from his or her traumatic experiences?
- Since both “Don’t get drunk” and “Be filled with the Holy Spirit” are commands, where does our “free will” fit into the experience?

[The filling of God’s Spirit is not automatic, with God taking the initiative whether we want it or not. He gives us a command, and then it’s up to us as to whether we will obey it or not.]

- Do you understand the difference between being “indwelt” and being “filled” by the Holy Spirit?

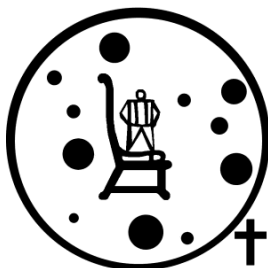
[If not, go over the concepts again. To be “indwelt” is a “positional truth.” That means it is our unchanging position before God since the time we asked Christ into our life. He will always live inside us and never leave (Hebrews 13:5b). But to be “filled” is a “conditional truth.” That means that we are filled (controlled, guided, empowered) by God’s Spirit as long as certain conditions are met. It has to do with desire, obedience, yielding control to Him, etc.]

[Leader – read and explain the “Three Circles” diagram below.]

The Bible talks about three kinds of people (You met two of them in the previous chapter):

THE NATURAL MAN – “CAPTAIN OF MY OWN SOUL!”

1 Corinthians 2:14



Self sits on the throne or control center of his or her life.

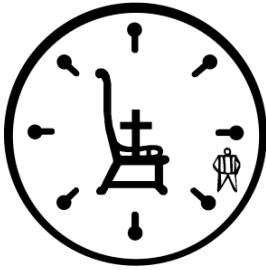
Cross = Christ, outside the life.

Circles = Activities, interests, priorities, and plans in discord with God’s.

This represents the **non-Christian** who doesn’t have a relationship with God. He tries to direct his own life in his limited and usually self-interested way. However, this often results in frustration, despair and discord with God’s perfect plans for him. This “captain” often runs aground!

THE SPIRITUAL MAN – “WALKING IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.”

1 Corinthians 2:15,16



Self is dethroned, yielding to Christ's Lordship in his or her life.

Cross = Christ on the throne, guiding and empowering the Christian.

Circles = Activities, interests, priorities, and plans in harmony with God's.

This represents a **Spirit-filled Christian** walking closely with God. Since Christ is all-powerful and all-knowing, He can ensure the Christian's life will harmonize with God's plans for him. This results in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23) – among other things! There is no guarantee of a problem-free life, only one that is in harmony with God's plans for him or her.

THE WORLDLY MAN – “I’LL TAKE IT FROM HERE, THANKS.”

1 Corinthians 3:1-3



Self is back on the throne, trying to direct his or her life again without God's input.

Cross = Christ is still in the life, but dethroned and not allowed to be Lord.

Circles = Activities, interests, priorities, and plans in discord with God's.

This represents a **Fleshly** or **Worldly Christian** who isn't walking with God. As he ignores or disobeys God's directions, his life falls into disarray. When the Worldly Christian's life is compared with the non-Christian's life, there is not much difference in the level of frustration, despair, dead ends, and lack of opportunities.

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Study the three diagrams and descriptions above.



Which one would you say currently represents your life?

Which one would you like to have represent your life?

- What are some of the differences between these three persons? How do their life experiences differ?
- Let's answer the two questions that are in your manuals. How many of you would say that the first circle represents your life?
- How many would say the second circle does?
- How many would say the third circle does?
- Can anyone think of a reason why someone would not want the second circle to represent their life?

[Have someone read the first section on "Desire."]

Five Steps to receiving the filling of the Holy Spirit . . .

1. Desire

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."
– Matthew 5:6



- In the above verse, what does Jesus say is required to be "filled"?
- What would this "desire" look or feel like in your life?

Search your heart. Do you "hunger and thirst for righteousness"? Do you truly *want* Jesus Christ as your Lord, and the Holy Spirit as your Guide? Are you willing to obey what God tells you to do? Don't expect His power to flow unhindered if you're simply "going through the motions." God looks at the heart, and He knows your heart completely.

- Let's answer that first question. What does the verse in your manual, Matthew 5:6, say is required for us to be filled? *[They need to be people who "hunger and thirst" to be right with God. They must strongly desire it.]*
- How did some of you answer that second question: "What would that "desire" look or feel like in your life?"
- Do you think a person could experience the filling of the Holy Spirit if he or she didn't really want God leading them in his life?

[Have someone read the next section on "Confess."]

2. Confess

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." – 1 John 1:9

When you throw water on a fire, you "quench" it, and it will no longer cook your food or keep you warm. The Holy Spirit can be quenched too. He may be quenched in your life right now because of sin – saying "No" to God and "Yes" to your unrighteous desires. In prayer, ask God to reveal the sins that have been disconnecting you from His plan and power. As He brings them to mind, agree with Him that those choices were wrong (that's the essence of confession). Ask Him to forgive you for each one.

We'll be taking a much more in-depth look at forgiveness at "Bridge 4 – Forgiving."

- What are some ways that people might "quench" the Holy Spirit in their lives?
- If a person refuses to admit and confess his sins before God, why would this keep the Holy Spirit from controlling and empowering him?

[Have someone read the next section on "Offer or Yield."]

3. Offer or Yield

"Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. Just as you used to offer yourselves

as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.” – Romans 6:13,19 (NIV)



- The “offering” (or yielding) of ourselves spoken of in this passage – do you think it involves a passive attitude or a purposeful commitment? It’s pretty clear that purposeful commitment is on display here.

Most people consider slavery to be demeaning oppression – and in most cases it is. In the spiritual realm, Satan desires to enslave you to his will, which will lead to destruction. But God wants you to be “enslaved” to *His* will for your *benefit*, leading to freedom from the things that tear you down, and a strong connection to the things that will build you up and bring you satisfaction, fulfillment and joy.

An important insight is found in **Romans 6:16-18 (THE MESSAGE)**:

“You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it’s your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits. All your lives you’ve let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you’ve started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!”

- How did you answer the question – is “offering” (or yielding) yourself to God a passive or purposeful action? Does it just happen whether you want it to or not, or do you have to make a decision about it and actually *do* it?
- What do you think about the idea of being a “slave to righteousness,” as talked about in the above passage (Romans 6:16-18)? What do you think that means?
- Can you think of something you’ve done in the past that you thought was going to be fun and freeing and would make your life better, but you found out later that it put you into bondage?

[Have someone read the next section on “Ask.”]

4. Ask

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of your fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” – Luke 11:9-13



- When some people come to God with their needs, they think they may need to perform some amazing act of faith or strength in order to make Him more willing to listen to them and grant their request. But what attitude does this Bible passage say that God holds toward us when we have needs and desires?

Remember what was said earlier about our free will? God won’t take away your privilege of choosing. Since you (and all of us) made a willful choice to depart from His will, you need to make a willful choice to get “reconnected.” When you *ask*, you are exercising your free will in a positive way – just what God is looking for!

- How would some of you answer the question above?
- What attitude *does* God hold toward us when we have needs and desires? What does he invite us to do?

[Have someone read the next section on "Thank Him in Faith."]

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5. Thank Him in Faith

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." – Mark 11:24



- Notice that this verse says "...believe you *have* received it..." Past tense. This is something that has actually already occurred. So what should happen if you truly believe that you have already received what you prayed for? Usually you should say, "Thank you!" Saying thanks is always a sign that you have faith that God has heard and answered your prayer.

-
- What does thanking God for His answer to our prayer have to do with faith?

Asking to be filled

When you pray to God, He isn't as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. But sometimes it helps to express what is in your heart if someone else supplies the words for you. Here is a suggested prayer:

Dear Father, I need You. I hunger and thirst for Your righteousness, rather than for the garbage of the world. I want You to be my King and my Guide. But I confess that I have taken the throne of my life from Your control and have sinned against You. I've made many wrong choices. Please forgive me for this. I offer myself to You in obedience, desiring to serve You rather than myself or my enemy, the devil. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I step down from the throne of my life and give it back to You. Based on Your promise, I have faith that You have heard my prayer and have filled me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank you! Amen.



- Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? Would you like to pray it right now?
- If you prayed the above prayer, or something similar, remember this day! It is very likely that you will look back on it as a turning point for good in your life!

-
- Are there any of you who would like to pray that prayer right now?

[Leader – you can decide how best to proceed from here. You may want to lead them in this prayer out loud while they pray silently. Or, if the group seems eager, you may ask if they'd all like to pray it out loud together. Or, you might ask people to think about the prayer when they go home, and perhaps pray it while they are alone with God. Tell them if they take that option, you would really like to hear about it tomorrow! Read the following two sentences yourself out loud.]

[Have someone read the next section on "How do I know the Holy Spirit has filled me?"]

How do I know the Holy Spirit has filled me?

We can be sure that when we ask the Spirit of God to fill us, He will do it immediately based on two things: His **command** and His **promise**. You already read his command earlier in this chapter:

>>His **command**:

"Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit."

– Ephesians 5:18

If God commands us to do something, you can be absolutely certain that it is within His will. Now let's read the **promise** concerning what happens when we ask God for something that we know is within His will:

>>His **promise**:

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." – 1 John 5:14,15

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Asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit is definitely within His will for every believer – because it is commanded – so you can be *positive* that if you ask to be filled, you can begin thanking Him immediately for it – because it's already happened!

- How do God's **command** and His **promise** work together to let you know for sure that – if you followed the Five Steps and asked to be filled by His Spirit – you *are* now controlled, guided and empowered by Him?
- But what if you don't *feel* like you are filled? What part do you think our "feelings" should play in this issue?
[Remind them of the "Train" illustration from Bridge 2.]

[Have someone read the next section on "Spiritual Breathing."]

Spiritual Breathing

It's an unfortunate but natural tendency for us humans to re-take the throne of our lives from time to time. We decide we want what we want when we want it, and we ignore what God wants. And so God gives us what we want: He steps down from our throne, and lets us have it. This doesn't mean we are no longer saved or that the Holy Spirit has left us. It simply means that we have slipped into that "Worldly Man" condition. He'll wait patiently until we "take a spiritual breath."

Exhale. When you exhale, you rid your body of harmful carbon dioxide. When you become aware of sin in your life, you must first exhale by **confessing** your sin to God. The Holy Spirit tells you something is wrong, and you simply agree with Him – that's confession. And if you truly agree with Him about it, you'll not only say so, you will also quit doing the thing He has pointed out to you. That's **repentance**: to stop, turn around and go back the other way.

Inhale. When you inhale, you draw life-giving oxygen back into your body. Out with the bad, in with the good. That's breathing! After you have exhaled spiritually, breathe in the life of the Holy Spirit by asking Him to once again take the throne of your life. By faith, ask Him to control, guide and empower you.

How often do I do this? As often as you need to. It may be once a week, once a day, once an hour or even once every few minutes! The important thing is not to lose heart and give up in defeat. As a drowning man will struggle frantically to clear his lungs of water and breathe in air, so we need to recognize the critical need to keep the Holy Spirit on the throne of our lives – confessing our sins and seeking His filling.

- How is exhaling like confessing your sins?
- How is inhaling like asking the Holy Spirit to once again take the throne of your life?
- If you sin, and re-take the throne of your life, does this mean that you are no longer saved? If not, what *does* it mean?
- How often do you think you might have to “take a spiritual breath?”

[Go around the room and have each person read one of the Conclusions.]

Conclusions:

- In our own strength we cannot live the kind of life that is pleasing to God or satisfying to ourselves. Living the Christian life isn't hard – it's *impossible!* That is, without the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. We need the supernatural petrol of the Holy Spirit in our tanks!
- The Holy Spirit's filling – His controlling, guiding and empowering influence in our lives – depends on our willingness to allow Him this freedom with us.
- We can deny Him, which leads to lives that look very similar to someone who has no relationship at all with God. Or we can ask for His filling and live the kind of abundant, meaningful, joy-filled lives He wants for us.
- This kind of life requires that we actively make *choices* to keep God on the throne of our lives, and quickly re-enthroned Him whenever we realize we've pulled off a coup d'état by our sins.
- His **FILLING** will give you the power, wisdom and endurance to make your journey to your place of safety and healing.

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[If you have time... One final question:]

- Would someone like to share with the group how your life would look when you are *not* filled by the Holy Spirit, and how it would look when you *are*?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 4:

FORGIVING

...received and given

Field
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To help participants understand how important the issue of forgiveness is, and how forgiving those who have harmed them will actually benefit them the most; to give them practical ways to seek forgiveness from God, from those they have hurt, and to forgive those who have hurt them.

[Note: you may want to share with your group that this will probably be the hardest Bridge to cross. We will be addressing some of the experiences that are at the very heart of their trauma. But if they can cross it, there will be great benefits to their own sense of personal peace and healing.]

*[Note 2: be sure to bring with you at least **three pieces of paper** (half-sheets are ideal) for each person in your group for the "Memorial Project," the exercise in the "Seeking forgiveness" section, and the "Forgiving those who have hurt you" section.]*

[Have someone read the opening Bible verses.]

***Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.
– Isaiah 1:18***

***See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;
that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble,
and by it many be defiled.
– Hebrews 12:15***

[Have someone read the opening story, up to "The horrible atrocities which..."]

The root of bitterness

Karlen was only 6 years old living in a village in the Shahumian region. In June of 1992 Azerbaijan descended upon his village with tanks, armored person carriers and attack helicopters. There was little warning – everyone just ran, seeking some kind of shelter. Some of the men of the neighborhood – including Karlen's father – tried to fight back with whatever weapons they had on hand, but they were no match for the well-equipped Azerbaijanis.

Young Karlen ran out the back door of his house and hid at the edge of the woods. He watched in horror as his father was shot by an Azeri soldier point blank in the back of the head. Then an artillery shell exploded on his house. He heard his mother screaming, but after a short time she stopped. He couldn't see his sisters anywhere.

There were so many dead bodies. So many people screaming. Fire. Smoke. Explosions. Karlen was frozen, not knowing what to do. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. He didn't dare look to see who it was, but finally his older friend Vartan whispered urgently in his ear.

"Karlen! We must get out of here! Come with me – quickly!" Vartan waited until none of the bad men were nearby, then he grabbed Karlen's hand and they ran deep into the woods.

For many days Karlen and Vartan wandered. They hid anytime they saw an adult. And though Karlen's body was alive as he and Vartan roamed in search of food, his heart felt like a dead stone. He could think of nothing all day, every day, but the horrible morning his family was murdered, his neighborhood demolished, and his life destroyed. Hatred for the bad men and an unquenchable desire for revenge dominated his every waking thought as he walked endlessly. Eventually, the two boys were found by aid workers who got them to safety. Karlen was sent to live with his uncle and aunt who lived in Yerevan.

Now Karlen is a grown man. He has meditated for years about how he would kill those who killed his family. He has served in the army for several years, eager for an opportunity to do so. Nothing else matters to him. He's not interested in a career, a wife, raising his own family, making a home, having fun. There is only one thing he desires: vengeance. It is his life. He has fought valiantly for years on the eastern front, but the few Azerbaijani soldiers he has killed did not even begin to quench the fire in his soul. And now that his country was in a full-on war with Azerbaijan, he was being consumed by hatred and an insatiable desire to kill.

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[Open this section by saying something like:

"I recognize that many of you have had traumatic experiences that are very hard to talk about, and very personal. In the "fog of war," some of you may have even committed traumatic atrocities. No one here is going to force you to talk about them. But recognizing the therapeutic nature of talking about your trauma in a group of people who have had similar experiences, who support you, and won't judge you, we want to at least give you the opportunity to do so today. Everyone should keep in mind the commitment we have all made to confidentiality. Anything said in this group stays in this group."

- In the story we just read, what are some of the traumatic events that Kahlid experienced in his life?
- How did his childhood trauma affect him when he grew to adulthood?
- Without sharing anything about it, how many of you would say – by a show of hands – you have been in a situation where you were seriously concerned that you might not live through it? *[This is Primary Trauma.]*
- How many of you here would say that you experienced trauma in which you witnessed the harming or death of a friend or loved one? *[This is Secondary Trauma.]*
- How many of you would say that you may have done something traumatic to another person, and feel very bad about it? *[This is Moral Injury.]*
- How many would say that you struggle a lot with a strong desire for vengeance against those who have traumatized you? *[This is Bitterness or Vengeance-seeking.]*

[Have someone read the next four paragraphs up to "In this chapter, we will be addressing..."]

The war trauma which Karlen experienced as a boy should not have happened to *anyone*. His pain, his loss and his grief are beyond what any human can endure. It's understandable that Karlen feels as he does.

But think for a moment. Even though the raiders never touched Karlen, they did wound him severely – in his heart, mind, and soul. People could have easily seen a physical wound in Karlen and given him aid. But his unseen anger, bitterness and unforgiveness are killing him just as surely as the weapons of his family's murderers.

What about you? What horrors have you witnessed or experienced? What horrors have you committed? If the anger, bitterness, guilt, and despair which these events have produced in you are not met with forgiveness – either given or received – your journey to a place of healing will not be possible.

This fourth bridge will help you find the way to seek forgiveness from God and/or from people you have hurt. It will also help you learn how to forgive those who have hurt you, thereby releasing your anger and bitterness – which is not doing you any good at all.

- What has been your experience with this issue of “forgiveness” in the past? Have any of you had to seek forgiveness from someone you hurt? Did someone come to you and ask your forgiveness for something they did to you? If any of you feel comfortable enough, would you share this story with the rest of us?

[Have someone read the opening paragraph of this section and the paragraph after “False Guilt.” Then ask the group members to go around the circle, with each one reading a description of each type of False Guilt.]

- As we go through the list of various types of “False Guilt” in this section, put a check mark next to any that you have experienced in the past.

In this chapter, we will be addressing three types of forgiveness:

1. Seeking forgiveness from God
2. Seeking forgiveness from those you have hurt
3. Forgiving those who have hurt you.

1. Seeking forgiveness from God

Most people are prompted to seek God's forgiveness because they feel *guilty*. But there are two kinds of guilt, one that needs forgiveness and another which *doesn't*. You need to know which kind you are experiencing.

False Guilt

Guilt is good, created by God. Its purpose is to let us know when we are doing something that will hurt others or ourselves, and it prompts us to go back to God for forgiveness and restoration. But Satan likes to give us guilt feelings that have nothing to do with God's laws. This kind of guilt does nothing but produce frustration and depression. This happens because there is no way to rid ourselves of the effects of false guilt – unless we recognize it for what it is: *false*. Following are some examples of false guilt – make a check mark next to any that you recognize in yourself:

- ☐ **Survivor's Guilt** – “I should not have survived when others died.” “If I had suffered more, others would have suffered less.” “If I had died, others might have lived.”
- ☐ **Guilt Over Survivor's Joy** – “I feel so ashamed about it, but I can't help thinking, ‘I'm so glad I didn't get killed!’ How can I feel *good* when others died?”
- ☐ **Guilt Over Involuntary Flight/Fight/Freeze Response** – “I always thought I was so brave, but I just froze in my tracks! I couldn't move!” “When that man jumped me and nearly killed me, I went crazy. I killed him, but couldn't stop beating him until his face was like chopped meat. I behaved like a devil.”

- ❑ **Guilt By Association** – “I’m a soldier; soldiers sometimes commit atrocities; I am among the atrocity-committers; I’m one of them.”
- ❑ **Competency Guilt** – “If only I had acted quicker, more skillfully or smarter, people wouldn’t have suffered and died.”
- ❑ **Impossible Choice Guilt** – “The woman looked like she had a bomb under her coat. We kept yelling at her to stop, but she kept coming. If I didn’t shoot her, she could blow up all my mates. I shot her – but she had no bomb. How am I supposed to live with that?”
- ❑ **Helplessness Guilt** – “I wanted so badly to get my comrade out of the line of fire, but they had him pinned down. If only I could have gotten to him, he’d still be alive today.”
- ❑ **Role and Responsibility Guilt** – “As an officer, it was my responsibility to keep my men safe. Some of them died, so obviously I didn’t do my job. It’s all my fault.”

- Does anyone recognize themselves in any of these types of False Guilt? Have any of you been “beating yourself up” over one or more of these kinds of guilt feelings?
- Do we have to seek God’s forgiveness when we are burdened by these events that produce False Guilt?
- What do we need to do instead? [*Seek to have the burden of False Guilt removed.*]

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs up to “Real Guilt.”]

In each case listed above, there is *no guilt* as far as God and His laws are concerned – each is based on a false idea. Of course, it’s normal to feel sad, angry, and frustrated about how things turned out – but don’t turn that emotion in on yourself. You weren’t meant to bear the responsibility for those unfair and unfortunate events – so don’t take it. Remember that you have a spiritual enemy who will try to manipulate the memories of those events in order to weaken and destroy you. Also remember what you probably heard all the time growing up: “Life isn’t fair.” It won’t be fair until we get to heaven.

The only way to deal with false guilt is to recognize its deceitful basis, shine a spotlight on its source (Satan), and ask God to remove it from you. The guilt feelings may or may not lift immediately, but keep bringing it before God and let Him take that burden off your shoulders. It’s not accomplishing anything. God doesn’t mean for you to carry it – and *no one else* wants you to either.

- I’d like to give us all a few moments where we can pray silently and ask God to remove the burden of False Guilt, if any of you are carrying that. Let’s bow our heads together...

[Have someone read the next section up to “In order to have Jesus’ sacrificial death apply...”]

Real Guilt

As you consider your war-related experiences and other traumatic incidents you’ve been involved in over the years, you may have done some things that were definite sins. These are not like the false ones listed above. You may have broken some or all of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).

Here are two bits of good news you need to hear:

1. If you are feeling guilty about *those* sins, then it's because right now you are *not* ignoring the Holy Spirit; you're sensitive to His conviction – that's *good!* The fact that you are feeling bad about what you have done is a strong indication that God loves you, and is lovingly trying to guide you back into the safety of His "sheepfold."

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." 2 Corinthians 7:10 (NIV)

2. You are not alone – *all* of us have sinned; *every one of us* has done things that have set up separations between us and God. It's a fact of the human condition. And it *can* be fixed.

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No matter how bad your sins are, even "red like crimson" (Isaiah 1:18), God can forgive them, and will no longer hold you accountable for them. This is because Jesus was willing to be held accountable for them on the cross in your place. He was willing to replace our sins with His perfect righteousness. He took our sins upon Himself, and then suffered the ultimate punishment for them: death. But then, to demonstrate His power over death and His eternal nature as God the Son, He rose again from the grave in strength and victory.

- How do the "two bits of good news" listed in this section affect you? Do you believe them?
- On what basis can our sins be forgiven?
- Are there any sins that we have committed that cannot be forgiven? *[Note: At this time there's no need to get into "the unforgiveable sin" that Jesus talked about, because there is some disagreement about what it actually is. But you might just let the group know that almost all Bible scholars agree that a believer cannot commit it.]*

[Have someone read the "1. Confess" paragraph and verse below up to "Suggested Memorial Jar Project"]

In order to have Jesus' sacrificial death apply to *your* sins, you need to take **two steps**:

>>1. Confess

In Greek (the original language of the New Testament) the word "confess" is from a word that means, "to say the same thing as." God has told you what you did wrong, as in, "David, you stole that money." You confess by saying the same thing: "Yes, it's true. I stole that money and I agree it was wrong. Please forgive me." The Bible gives us a great promise concerning this:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." – 1 John 1:9

- When we "say the same thing" as God concerning our sin (or sins) what does the Bible say He will do with those sins? Will He bring them up again? Will you? If so, why?

[If you have decided to do the following project together as a group, first, pass out the half-sheets of paper they will need for this project. As leader, you don't have to actually read the next section, just do it! If you can't find a lid for the jar, and aren't in a position to light papers on fire where you are, just put a trash can in the middle of the room, and after everyone has written their paper and written "1 John 1:9" on it, have them tear up the sheet, walk over, and put the torn up pieces in the trash can. Or use an electric paper shredder. But it's a lot more dramatic and memorable if you can burn them in the jar!]

Suggested Memorial Jar Project – to be done either individually or as a group

Find a glass jar with a lid that can be screwed on tightly. Take a few minutes alone and present yourself before God. Ask Him to reveal to you any sins that are creating a separation between you and Him. Ask Him to be very specific about it. Take paper and pen and make a list of all the sins that He tells you about.

When you're done with this, take your list and agree with Him in prayer regarding each thing you wrote down. Then write "1 John 1:9" across the top of it in big, bold writing.

Stuff the paper in the jar. Take it to a safe place and light the paper on fire. Watch it burn and thank God as it symbolizes what He has done to the list of sins that were being held against you.

After the fire is out and cooled down, screw the lid on, and put a piece of tape on the front. Write "1 John 1:9" and the date on the tape. Then put the jar of ashes somewhere to remind you of God's forgiveness. Whenever Satan tries to remind you of your sinfulness, bring out the "Memorial Jar" and remind *him* of what Jesus Christ did with your sins.

If you have been struggling with false guilt, write those issues on a list as well and burn them at the same time. Tell Satan he can't use those false accusations against you anymore.

[Have someone read the next section on "Repent," up to "Restitution."]

>>2. Repent

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." – Acts 3:19

The word "repent" comes from the Greek word that means, "to turn around and go the other direction." While "confess" has to do with an *agreement* between you and God that takes place in the spiritual realm, "repent" has to do with an *action* that needs to take place in the physical world. It's not enough to say, "Oops, sorry. I blew it. Forgive me." and then repeat the same sinful act again and again. That's not true confession anyway, because if you were really agreeing with God that it was wrong, you would at least make the attempt to stop doing it.

Here's the point: God is not only looking for your *agreement* with Him about your sins. He's interested in changed *action*. Your actions will show what you really think. When repentance happens, it clears the way for God to bring His healing unhindered.

Confession and **repentance** won't be a once-and-for-all thing. The Memorial Jar you made memorializes one day when you took a stand and said, "From today on, I *know* that my sins are forgiven, and I am clean before God." This will make it easier for you to keep Christ on the throne of your life through regular "spiritual breathing" as needed.

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- How is "repentance" different from "confession?" Is it enough simply to confess our sins to God, or is He looking for more?
- What is a true indication to God that we actually recognize that a certain action we have done is wrong?

[Have someone read the next paragraph on "Restitution," up to "But you don't know what I've done...."]

Restitution. In some cases, you may need to make restitution as part of your repentance. If you stole something, you need to return it or reimburse the victim for their loss. If you told a lie that damaged someone's reputation, you need to try to fix it. If you fathered a child through adultery, you need to support that child. If you broke a law, you may need to talk with God about turning yourself in to the authorities. Forgiveness doesn't mean you are released from all responsibility attached to your sin. It means that it no longer separates you from God and clears the way for Him to work in your life. But part of your healing process may involve taking steps to make things right with other people.

- This section says that confession and repentance doesn't mean that we are released from all responsibility attached to our sin. Is there anyone here brave enough to share with the group a time when they needed to make **restitution** for a sin they committed – maybe something they did as a child? Or maybe restitution that you feel you need to make in the near future?

[Leader: you may want to reflect a little ahead of time and think of an example in your own life that you could share. This could motivate some of the group members to share too.]

[Have someone read the next section up to "2. Seeking forgiveness from those you have hurt."]

"But you don't know what I've done..."

Some people look at their sins and come to the conclusion that they are unforgivable. They live under a load of shame and self-condemnation that will eventually crush them. They are under that load *not* because God wants them there, but because their enemy does – more false guilt. Don't misunderstand – there is sin and therefore there is guilt, but the lie that it is *unforgivable* is what makes that guilt crushingly false.

For someone to think that God is not willing or able to forgive their particular sin is very bold and foolish. They are deciding what God can or cannot do. He has already told us in Isaiah 1:18 (paraphrased): *"No matter how bad your sins are, I can make you pure. No matter how low you have gone, I can go there and get you."* Do you really feel tough enough to say to the Almighty God of the universe, "Oh no You can't!"? We don't recommend it.

The Apostle Paul referred to himself as *"chief among sinners"* (1 Timothy 1:15). Here's why: Before he became a Christian, he had broken many of God's commandments. He had threatened, chased, kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured and killed Christians, just because they were Christians. If he'd had the opportunity, he would have considered it a great honor to do the same to Jesus Christ Himself. But then he met Christ, and everything changed. That's why he could write with confidence:

"Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, His blood poured out on the altar of the cross, we are a free people – free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!"

– Ephesians 1:7,8 (The Message)

If God could forgive Paul, the world record holder of sinners, He can certainly forgive *you!* If you haven't done the Memorial Jar exercise yet, do it now with the "unforgivable sins" that have been weighing you down. Thank Him for setting you "abundantly free!"

- Do any of you struggle with this idea that you have committed sins so terrible that God could not forgive you? How do you feel about what is written in this section, asking if you feel "tough enough" to say to God, "You can't forgive MY sins."?
- If this describes you, I would like to suggest that you go before God, tell Him what you have been feeling and thinking, and then go through the process of confessing your sin (agreeing with God), and repenting of it. You may start to feel the heaviness of the guilt you're carrying start to lift.

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs up to "Here are six steps you can take..."]

2. Seeking forgiveness from those you have hurt

In order to heal, each of us needs to experience both forgiveness from God and forgiveness from those whom we have hurt. For some people, the idea of admitting a wrong to another person and asking for their forgiveness is very difficult. But Jesus makes the point that this issue is so important that you should even put worshipping God on hold until you settle things:

"This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God."

– Matthew 5:23,24 (The Message)

- How important do you think Jesus felt it was that there not be any unforgiveness between people?

[Pass out another half-sheet of paper to each participant. Ask six people to each read one of the "Six Steps" and then you ask the question in the Field Guide, or the one supplied here.]

Here are six steps you can take to help you in the process of seeking forgiveness from another.

>>1. Ask God to show you who you have hurt.

Consider praying the prayer that David prayed:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life."

– Psalm 139:23,24 (NLT)

If you're filled with the Holy Spirit, and if there *is* someone you've hurt physically or emotionally, God will bring it to your mind quickly. Be open to whatever He has to say to you.



- Has God brought one or more people to your mind? Write their name(s) down on a piece of paper, or in this manual.

- Let's take a minute and do what it says (above) in your manual.

>>2. Ask God to forgive you for the pain you caused.

This is like a “double sin.” You have sinned against the person, but also against God for breaking one of His laws. Go through the process of confession and repentance regarding this incident. Get right with God first.

[Note: By the way, you don't have to fire up a Memorial Jar every time you confess a sin. That was a one-time symbolic act that shows an on-going process in your life.]

- Let's spend a few moments of silence, and let you talk with God silently about this.

>>3. Pray for the one you hurt.

Spend some time praying for the person that you have hurt. Ask God to heal the wound you caused. Ask Him to perform a miracle: that the hard feelings your wounded acquaintance probably holds toward you would be overcome by God's supernatural love. Ask God to make a way for you to meet with him or her. And ask God to make him or her receptive to your request for forgiveness.

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- Let's go to God in silent prayer again. Read through the paragraph again about some of the things you should pray for the person or persons you have hurt.

>>4. Take the initiative and go to the one you hurt.

This part will not be easy, but God will be right by your side in this, because He will be *very* pleased about what you are doing. It might start with a phone call, a text, or a letter. Let them know you want to talk to them about something, and try to get an appointment with them. If you can't get face-to-face, you'll have to deal with it over the phone, but talking in person is the best way to go. They'll probably know from the tone of your voice what it's about and that you feel bad about it.



- When will you take steps to contact each person whose name you wrote above?

- Another action point: Write down on your piece of paper or in this manual when you plan to take steps to contact each person whose name you wrote down.
- It is possible that you are not going to be able to reach some of those you are seeking forgiveness from. You may have lost track of where they live, they don't want to talk with you, or they may have died. What thoughts does the group have about what you could do about it then?

>>5. In humility, recount to the person what you did and ask for forgiveness.

You could say something like this: “Max, remember that time that I ... Well, I've thought a lot about what happened since then, and I want to tell you that I'm sorry for what I did. I was wrong. Do you think you could forgive me?” Don't try to make yourself look good or try to explain or defend your actions. Just take responsibility for what you did. Go to them totally unarmed.

- How difficult do you think doing this will be? Do you still think it's important enough to go through with it?

>>6. Work on rebuilding trust with that person

They may or may not say they forgive you at that time. Regardless, you can't expect your relationship to go immediately back to how it was before. You broke trust with that person. It's going to take some time to re-build it. And it's going to take some initiative on your part to demonstrate that you meant what you said, and that you've changed. Ask God to give you some creative ideas about how to do that.

- What are some creative ways that we could try to rebuild trust with someone we have hurt?

[Have someone read just the opening paragraph of the next section.]

3. Forgive those who have hurt you

Now we're getting to the type of forgiveness that Karlen needed to address in this chapter's opening story. For many Armenians, this could be the hardest lesson of all – to be able forgive Azerbaijani soldiers who have invaded your land, stolen your property, and destroyed so much of your life. Is it possible? And why should one even consider it?

- Can anyone answer those two questions? Should anyone even consider forgiving the Azerbaijanis, or the Turks, or the Russians for what they have done? Why?

[Have someone read the next section, up to the "Note."]

"Fight fire with fire!"

In some cultures, this expression suggests that we should fight evil with evil. This is the strategy that Karlen was committed to in this chapter's opening story – and his desire for revenge was consuming him. But the best method of fighting fire is with the *opposite* of fire, which is *water*. When considering how people relate to each other, fighting fire with fire never works – we only end up with more fire – and Satan loves that.

God gives us a different strategy in His Word:

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." – Romans 12:21

Within the Kingdom of God, we have been given a strategy for dealing with the fires lit by trauma in a way that will lead to our healing. And it is the *opposite* of evil.

- How can doing good more effectively overcome evil than doing evil? Can you think of an example of this?
[Leader: try to think of an example of this before the class, so that if no one can come up with one right away, you could share your example which might turn the lights on in someone else's mind.]

[Have someone read the "Note" below]

[Note: The issue of forgiveness in the midst of war must be understood differently. When an enemy combatant or invader is trying to kill you, it would not be in your best interests to say, “Hey – I forgive you. Let’s sit down and talk this out. Can’t we be friends?” It’s not likely they will be satisfied with a good chat. If you are in a “just war,” and you are defending yourself, your family, and your homeland from people who want to violate God’s laws and rob, enslave, or kill you, you are well within your rights as a child of God to use lethal force to defend yourself. Much of the Old Testament was about the armies of Israel warring against people and countries who were against God and wanted to wipe Israel out. And God directed Israel to go to war. But what will happen *after* the hostilities have stopped? Will you allow the “root of bitterness” to grow and defile you and those around you, or will you be able to kill that root and forgive your former enemies?]

- How does the issue of forgiveness during a “hot war” compare to forgiving after peace has broken out, and hostilities have ended?

[Have someone read the first reason, up to “2. It’s a God-like characteristic.”]

Why should I forgive them? Three reasons...

>>1. For your own good.

“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” – Hebrews 12:15

In many parts of the world a plant known as poison ivy grows abundantly. If you touch it, you will get a very bad rash that will spread on your body and itch for more than a week. The only way to kill the plant is to pull it out of the ground, roots and all. If you leave any roots behind, they will spread secretly and take over an entire field within only a few years. This is like the “root of bitterness” spoken of in Hebrews 12:15.

When we have been wounded (physically, emotionally, spiritually) and feel helpless against the consequences, conditions are ideal for bitterness to grow. Our hatred for our attacker deepens, our frustration increases, which makes us more angry and hate-filled. The result is that nobody wants to be around us anymore. The bitterness spreads, just like the poison ivy. The sad part is that all this anger and poison does absolutely nothing to the guilty one – only to the one who was wounded. It makes him or her worse and worse.

It’s like drinking a bottle of rat poison, and then waiting for the rat to die.

The only way to deal with it is to pull out its root – and that can only be done by forgiving the offender. When we remove that bitter root with God’s help, the harmful increase of hatred and anger toward the one who hurt us stops, allowing us to move on to more constructive pursuits.

Spend a few minutes alone in prayer. Ask God to reveal to you whether or not you have a “root of bitterness” in your heart toward those who hurt you and helped bring about your trauma. If the answer is “yes,” ask God to let you know what you can do about it. Listen to Him. He may give you an immediate answer, or the solution may become apparent over the next few days or weeks. Once you have an action plan from God about this, write it down on a piece of paper or in your journal. It’s more likely you will take action if you write it down.

- Could someone summarize this section? How is unforgiveness like a poison ivy root or like rat poison?
- Do you know anyone who has let bitterness poison their personality, and people just don't want to be around them? Tell us a little about them, not using their names or anything that might identify them.

[Take a few minutes in silence and follow the prayer direction in the last paragraph.]

[Have someone read the second reason, up to "3. It allows God to bring perfect justice."]

>>2. It is a God-like characteristic.

We are the sons and daughters of a forgiving God – and His desire is that we grow up to be like Him.

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him." – Psalm 103:10,11

The main point in the verse above is that God doesn't treat us the way we deserve. He forgives. When you forgive, you're acting like God. The next time you decide to demand your rights, realize that you *really don't want* your rights. If you got your rights, you'd be in hell today! Instead, as God has done for us, He's asking us to do the same for others: to not count their sins against them:

"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation." – 1 Corinthians 5:19 (LNT)



- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = "I am absolutely sure God can do this" and 10 = "Absolutely no way ever" what is your level of confidence that God can perform a miracle in your heart and enable you to forgive your attacker(s)?

- Here's another opportunity to be vulnerable with each other. I'd like for a few of you to share with the group what number you would assign yourself. There will be no judgement here – we're all in this boat together. Let's be honest about where we are.

[Afterwards, have someone read the "Prayer Assignment" below. Encourage the group members to pray on their own about this issue.]

PRAYER ASSIGNMENT. It could take a miracle for you to come to the point of being able to forgive the ones who've hurt you. This level of love and mercy is indeed "supernatural." If you chose a number toward the "10" end of the scale above, begin asking God for that miracle. You won't be able to generate it on your own – but He can build it into you if you're open to it.

[Have someone read the third reason, up to "Forgiving those who have hurt you..."]

>>3. It allows God to bring perfect justice.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." – Romans 12:19

The Bible presents a great number of God-given laws that are meant to protect people from abuse. They address issues such as murder, rape, assault, theft, etc. When people break these laws, God gives the civil and religious authorities instructions about how they should punish the offenders and force them to pay back the victim for his or her loss. This is the normal way we deal with injustice. But what if we can't find the offenders? What if they operate outside the laws of society, and no one can touch them? What if they *are* the civil and religious authorities?

Then, in effect, Jesus Christ says to us, "I know you have been sinned against, and you are entitled to justice. But why not let Me handle it personally? If you will step aside, give up your right to repayment and vengeance, I'll take care of your enemy *perfectly*. Vengeance is Mine, I will repay. But I'll do it in a way that will free you of your bitterness, bring your attacker to justice, and move *both* of you closer to My righteousness. What do you say?"

- How difficult will it be for you to do this – to release your rightful desire for justice and vengeance, step aside, and let God handle the situation?

[Note: remember – we're not saying that to forgive someone releases them from the civil consequences of their actions. Anyone who has hurt another or committed atrocities should be held accountable. But we are cutting the emotional bonds that may be holding us to them, which stops their ability to continue tormenting us in our minds. Instead we expect God or the civil authorities to bring judgement.]

[Have someone read all three steps in the next section at once (stopping before "Conclusions," and then give the group a few minutes to write their list of people who caused their trauma (second step).

Forgiving those who have hurt you. Three steps...

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>>1. Ask God to give you His supernatural mindset for this.

Satan wants you to add more fire to the fire. However, God has a higher road for you – and it's harder. But by making the decision to forgive, you are *not* excusing their sin or minimizing what happened to you. You are making a direct assault against your true enemy (Satan) who wants to use your bitterness to destroy *you*. Your mindset should be: "I know there is evil here, and I choose to break the cycle of pain and violence. Rather than add to the evil, I will contain it, starve it out, and kill it – with good." God can give you that mindset.

>>2. Make a list of your traumatic experiences and who caused each one.

Write them all down – not just the big ones. Don't say, "Oh, that one doesn't matter."

>>3. Make an act-of-your-will pronouncement of forgiveness for each person.

This is an act of obedience, and may or may not involve your emotions or "feelings." You might pray something like this:

"Lord, as an act of obedience I choose to forgive _____. I don't feel like it, but I love You, and I know You love me, and I want to obey You. So today I release _____ from my judgment. Forgive me for the ways I may have hindered Your work in me and in him/her by my unforgiveness. I now step out of the way so that Your will may be done for _____ and for me."

[Two options here, based on the size of the group, available time, how ready you feel the group members are to actually forgive those who hurt them, and how open you think the group is to praying out loud in front of each other...]

- **Option 1:** Ask each person to choose one person that they need to forgive and pray the forgiveness prayer out loud that is written in Step 3 above. They can pray the forgiveness prayer for the rest of the people on their list later by themselves.
- **Option 2:** Encourage the group to take the list home with them and pray the written forgiveness prayer for each person on their list. Of course, they don't have to pray the written prayer word-for-word. It simply gives them a good pattern to follow.

[Have someone read the "Conclusions."]

Conclusions:

- Injustice and trauma always create anger in victims and guilt in abusers. If the anger and guilt are not dealt with, they will eventually become a "root of bitterness" and have a deeply negative effect on you.
- Dealing with your sins requires both **confession** (work between you and God in your heart) and **repentance** (work between you and those you've hurt).
- To forgive those who have hurt you is accomplished by an act of your will. It's not an act of emotion, or something that you will be particularly happy about doing. It probably won't make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. It may set your nerves on edge even worse than fingernails scratching across a chalk board. But if you set your mind to just do it – regardless of how you feel – you will be amazed at how you eventually feel lighter, stronger, and less anxious whenever you think of the person who hurt you.
- As you seek **FORGIVING** between you and God, between you and those you have hurt, and between you and those who have hurt you, you will experience God's pleasure, release, and progress toward your place of healing.

- One of the main reasons presented as to why we should forgive those who have hurt us is because of how it will positively affect us. It's not easy, it may not help us feel better right away, but eventually it will make a strong difference in us, and help us to heal from our trauma. Pulling out that root of bitterness, and not allowing our attackers to continue to assault us in our minds opens the door for God to work on our hearts. By a show of hands, how many of you feel you have come to a place in your mind where you can forgive those who have hurt you now, or in the near future?

[If there were some who didn't raise their hand...] I notice a few of you didn't raise your hand – and that's OK! – I understand that you're just not there yet. But I'd be interested to know what you feel is holding you back from forgiving them?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 5:

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...a house of healing

Crossing the River of Spiritual Poverty**Objectives of this Chapter:**

Recognizing that, if God truly is the healer (Exodus 15:26), anything that a trauma sufferer can do to strengthen and deepen his/her relationship with God will facilitate their healing from trauma. To accomplish this, we will...

- Provide practical input on how to build an environment that will give God optimal access to the trauma sufferer's body, mind and spirit for the purpose of healing.
- Help them understand the foundational truths about four key elements of the foundation of their house of healing: prayer, God's Word, the Christian community and talking about their trauma in a safe environment.

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

***Unless the Lord builds the house,
they labor in vain that build it. – Psalm 127:1***

- Has anyone here ever been involved in construction of a house? If so, give us a two-minute course in how to do it – from beginning to end. What must you do first? Then what? Then what?

[When he/she is done, ask questions about the process and materials he mentioned, highlighting what the finished product would be like if we tried to build a house in a way other than he described – not using a good architect, using poor materials, following the procedures out of order, etc.]

- When it comes to rebuilding a traumatized life, why is it so important to count on God to build it?
- Any ideas on how to let the Lord build our house of healing?

[Have someone read the opening story: "Building a proper house" up to "If you are struggling..."]

Building a proper house

Illya went to visit his friend Vika who was building a new house. Vika's apartment had been demolished during the war, so he had decided to move away from the city, and build a house of his own that would not be vulnerable if another war occurred. It was the first time Vika had ever built *anything*, especially an entire house. Illya drove for more than an hour, but he finally reached Vika's home site, beautifully situated on the bank of a river.

"Hello, Vika! This looks like a great place to build your house!"

"Illya! I'm so glad you could make it! Yes, as you can see, I've been working hard on it. It's almost done – my family and I should be able to move into it next week. Isn't it fantastic?"

Illya was confused as he looked where Vika was pointing. All he could see were a few branches pushed into the soft ground, some freshly dug holes, about fifty stones which apparently traced the outer walls of the house, and an umbrella tied to a small tree that was growing in the center.

"Vika, this doesn't look like a house. There's nothing to it. How can you expect to shelter your family here?"

Vika looked offended. "Well, I'm sorry that it's not a grand house like *you* live in, but I think it's just fine. My family will be able to tell where their rooms are – the sticks – where the outer walls are – the stones – and the holes will provide excellent storage places. And if it begins to rain, we can all seek shelter under the umbrella."

Illya didn't know whether to laugh or take his friend to a doctor. "Vika, my friend, you need a *real* house with *real* walls and a roof and doors and windows. This one won't protect you. The river will rise and wash it all away anyway – you've built too close to it."

"Well, Illya, you can see that I have used very inexpensive building materials. If the river *does* take it, it won't cost much to rebuild."

Illya felt sorry for his friend. Maybe he didn't know how to build a house, or perhaps he didn't have money for the building materials. "Vika, today is your lucky day. Because today you and I are going to go into town, and I'm going to find a man who can help you build your house, and I'm going to help you buy the materials you need to make a *good* house!"

- What were some of the foolish principles that Vika was using to build his house?
 - Did any of them *seem* like a good idea, but really weren't?
 - Why would he have such foolish ideas about building his house?
 - What are some of the foolish ideas people have about rebuilding their lives after trauma?
- [Have someone read the next two paragraphs and the 4 bullet points: "1. Prayer... etc.]*

If you are struggling with the effects of war-related trauma, you need to build a house too – a house of *healing*. Without it, you will continue to live in homeless spiritual poverty and at the mercy of the various forces that whip into your life. For it to be a *good* house, it must contain certain elements that will help you to stay connected to God. This will allow Him to have unhindered access to your body, mind, and spirit so that He can work on you. It won't be good to use just *any* "building materials." They must be high quality, durable and eternal.

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There are many elements needed to build a house of healing, but in this chapter we will concentrate on four crucial elements which will help you lay a strong foundation:

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. God's Word**
- 3. The Christian community**
- 4. Talking about your trauma**

- Vika was trying to build his house with branches, stones, holes, and an umbrella. What does the manual propose that we build our houses of healing with?
- [Note the four foundational elements of their "house of healing" above: Prayer, God's Word, the Christian community and Talking.]*
- Why do you think each of them might be so important?

[Have someone read the next section, through the question: “Why do you think...”]

1. Prayer: vital communication with your divine commander

If you’ve ever been involved in any kind of military operation, then you know that communication is *absolutely crucial* for a successful outcome. If you aren’t connected to the rest of your unit by some means of communication – and especially to your commanders – things could go very wrong very quickly.

Could you imagine a platoon of soldiers outnumbered and pinned down in a firefight, and the sergeant not even thinking about getting in touch with his commander and asking for backup? Every soldier knows that if he gets into trouble, he can rely on the team back at his base of operations to instantly do everything they can to provide support for them.

But it’s strange how so few Christians take advantage of the incredible communication system we have with God. Imagine: instant contact with our Creator and Savior by simply talking or thinking!



- Why do you think the majority of Christians don’t pray very much? How about you? Do you think you pray *too much*, or not enough?

- What do you think? Do most Christians pray too much or not enough? If too little, why do you think that is?

[Have someone read the next three paragraphs, up to “What does God want you to pray about?”]

Could it be that people simply don’t have a clear idea of what prayer is for? Though God loves to answer the requests we make of Him in prayer, this isn’t its only purpose. We must never forget that Christianity is not just a religion or a philosophy of life – it is a *relationship* with our heavenly Father. And in any relationship, there must be communication. We don’t always benefit directly from the communication itself, but the communication produces a deeper relationship, which opens the door to *all kinds* of benefits.

I talk to my wife every day – because she’s my best friend and I love her. We talk about *everything*. Sometimes I talk and she listens, sometimes it’s the other way around. Sometimes we don’t even need words to communicate. Because of this, our relationship is very deep and satisfying for both of us.

But how would it be if the only time I ever spoke to her was to tell her that I wanted something? Our relationship would be very shallow. Good communication involves a wide variety of techniques and styles, not just demands!

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- For those of you who are married, how is communication between you and your spouse like communication between you and God?
- What motivates you to communicate with your spouse?
- Are these factors similar to why we might be motivated to communicate with God in prayer? In what ways?

[Have someone read the title and first paragraph of the next section, and the first prayer example. Then go around the group and have a different person read each prayer example.]

What does God want you to pray about?

Here are a few verses from Scripture and a brief summary of what the pray-er was praying about, or what is encouraged in the verse. These and other verses can give you examples for your own prayers:

- *Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)*
 >> This verse shows us that we can ask for help with our physical needs.
- *I love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:1-3)*
 >> This verse is a great example of worship; expressing love for God, praising God for His help; rejoicing over what a great resource He is.
- *In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*
 >> This verse is urging us to thank God for all He has done for us.
- *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? (Psalm 22:1,2)*
 >> This is an honest expression of fear and doubt; a plea for help.
- *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*
 >> This verse urges us to confess our sins to God for the purpose of receiving forgiveness and cleansing.
- *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:13)*
 >> This verse shows that we can ask for God's help to keep us safe from sin and from the influence of Satan.
- *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)*
 >> In this verse we are encouraged to pray about anything we want; but we should mix our prayers with thankfulness.

- As we read through those Biblical examples of prayer and their explanations, are there any of them that presented a new idea to you, or a principle that you intend to adopt right away in your prayer life?
- Which of them have you been neglecting, and plan to include in your prayers more often?

[Have one or two people read the next section about "I want answers!" Read up to the "Personal Commitment" section.]

“I want answers!”

God will answer *every* prayer that you pray in faith. Every one. But the thing to keep in mind is that, if we have submitted ourselves to Him as our King and Guide, He gets to decide how to answer our prayers. His answers will always be what's best for us and for His Kingdom. And since He's all-knowing, all-powerful and timeless, He probably knows exactly what's best!

- Sometimes He might answer our prayer “**No**. It wouldn't be good for you.” Like the good father saying no to the young child who wants to play with the nice, round hand grenade that looks like a ball.

For deeper study: *Examples of God saying “No” (even to His Son!): 2 Samuel 12:15-18; Mathew 26:37-42; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.*

- Sometimes He might answer our prayer “**Wait**. This would be a good thing for you, but not right now. Be patient. Soon the conditions will be right.” Like what I said to my friend who wanted to cross the street as a truck was speeding toward us.

For deeper study: *Examples of God saying “Wait”: Genesis 15:2-5; Genesis 50:24,25; Exodus 5:22,23; 6:6-8. In each case, the fulfillment of the promise happened many years later.*

- Sometimes God might answer our prayer “**Yes!** This will be a *good* thing for you!” Like what I said to my wife when she asked, “Would you like to go out on a date with me tonight?”

For deeper study: *Examples of God saying “Yes”: Psalm 32:5; 1 Samuel 1:11,19,20; 1 Chronicles 4:9,10; 2 Kings 6:15-18. In each case, God said “Yes” to their request.*

Obviously, we would like to increase the number of “Yes” answers we get. Psalm 37:4 gives us some great insight on how to do this:

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” – Psalm 37:4

What can we do to give the Lord unhindered access to our spirits so that our desires *will* align themselves with His before we even begin to pray? We need to make Him our delight, to have an attitude toward Him of love, acceptance, and submission.

We can cultivate a quiet confidence that He always knows what is best for us. We should be willing to allow His will to be done instead of ours when the two clash. Then we'll be able to pray boldly the way Jesus prayed:

“Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” – Matthew 26:39b

[If you have time, have group members look up and read some of the verses after each of the three types of answers, as Biblical examples of each type of answer God may give to our prayers.]

- Obviously, we would all like to increase the number of “Yes” answers we get from God. According to the verse we read – Psalm 37:4 – how can we work with God to see this happen? What would “Delighting ourselves in the Lord” look like in our lives?
- Why do you think the mindset of Matthew 26:39b is so important to us?

- Let's take a minute or two of silence, and I'd like each of you to prayerfully read the "Personal Commitment" to yourself and – as the Lord leads you – fill in the blanks.

Personal Commitment. Consider making this intentional promise to God (and to yourself):

I will commit to a period of personal prayer – either by myself or with others – lasting no less than _____ minutes, _____ days a week, for the next _____ weeks, beginning on _____ (date) I will ask _____ to check up on me, give me encouragement, and help me find answers to questions I come up with.

- Did any of you feel motivated to fill in the blanks? If so, would you care to share what you wrote?
- Do you have any ideas how you will be able to hold yourself to this commitment?

[How about designating a "battle buddy" who will help hold you accountable?]

[Have someone read the next section about "The Word of God," up to "Benefits of reading, studying..."]

2. The Word of God – your divine food and weapon

You know that your body needs food, so you go to great trouble to make sure it has what it needs. Hunger pains remind us when we aren't giving it enough, or when it's time to give it more. Now that you have been born spiritually, you have become a spiritual being who needs spiritual food. As the Bible teaches:

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."
– Matthew 4:4

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow by it."
– 1 Peter 2:2

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A Christian who doesn't get a regular diet of God's Word will end up with a starved, weak, and sickly spirit. Perhaps you have spent time in a refugee camp, or have seen photos of people who have. It's very disturbing to see how dreadfully thin under-fed refugees can become. If we could take photos of the *spirits* of some Christians today, they would probably look very similar to the physical bodies of those poor men and women who had been deprived of proper nourishment for so long. Don't let this happen to you! Be sure that you're getting a steady diet of God's *spiritual* nutrition!

- Have any of you had to go a long time without food, as part of your trauma experience? What was it like? How did it affect your energy, motivation, ambition, ability to do what you needed to do, etc.?

[Leader, read the title and first paragraph of the next section, then go around the group and have each person read a scripture verse, and answer this question, "What benefit does this verse say I will receive by reading, studying, and applying the Bible?"]

Benefits of reading, studying, and applying the bible:

The following passages describe the benefits of regularly including God's Word in your life. See if you can think of at least one benefit you observe in each passage:

- **God speaking to Joshua:** “Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.” – Joshua 1:8
- **King David writing:** “*The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.*” – Psalm 37:31
- **King David writing:** “*How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word... I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.*” – Psalm 119:9,11
- **Jesus speaking:** “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” – John 15:7
- **Jesus speaking:** “If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” – John 8:31,32

- Do these all seem like good reasons to make it a regular habit to read your Bible daily? So, what might keep you from this daily diet of God's food?

[Have someone read the next section about “Taking the sword,” up to the Personal Commitment section.]

Taking the sword

God's Word has another function: it's a **weapon**. In Ephesians 6:14-17, the Bible talks about the spiritual armor that is available to every believer: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, sandals of the preparation of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation... these are all defensive tools of war. But the final item mentioned is “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*” This is *both* a defensive *and* an offensive weapon.

You can read a great story of how Jesus used God's Word in a battle with Satan in Matthew 4:1-11. Twice Satan launched an attack on Jesus. Twice He countered with a verse of Scripture – defensive moves. With the third attack, Jesus not only repelled the devil's assault, but sent him into a quick retreat with a counterattack using the sword of the Word. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...”

Learn how to use it.

A rifleman is intimately acquainted with every square millimeter of his weapon. Now it's time to begin a new training program to become as familiar with your new weapon – God's Word – as you were (or are) with your physical one. It will keep you alive.

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- How is God's word like a sword? [Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12] How can you use the Word of God like a weapon – and who would you use it against?

- Again, let's take a minute or two of silence and prayerfully read the “Personal Commitment” to yourself and – as the Lord leads you – fill in the blanks.

Personal Commitment

I will commit to a period of personal Bible reading/studying lasting no less than _____ minutes, _____ days a week, for the next _____ weeks, beginning on _____ (date). I will ask _____ to check up on me, give me encouragement, and help me find answers to questions I come up with.

- Would any of you like to share how you filled in your blanks? *[Leader – if people seem reluctant to share, don't push them to do so. You might at least be ready to share how you filled in your blanks.]*

[Have someone read the next four paragraphs about "The Christian Community...", up to "Here are a few verses..."]

3. The Christian Community – Divine Base Camp

God created the church to be like a military base camp. It's a place where His soldiers can come in from the battle, rest, get training, hear the latest intelligence, spend time with their mates, receive healing, and get ready to go out again. And who is supposed to provide all these beneficial services? The Spirit-filled Christians who occupy the church! God has designed us to be gifted and able to minister to each other as His Spirit directs us.

We're not necessarily talking about a building here – though that is often where "the Church" will be found. For many of you in Armenia right now, your church building may be gone, or you may have been forced to move away from it. But the Church is a vast, living thing made up of Christians all over the world. The Bible refers to it as "The Body of Christ." Christ is the head, and we are like His hands and feet, accomplishing His work on earth. His desire is that we work together – and in so doing it is much more likely we will accomplish His purposes.

"The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance." – 1 Corinthians 12:25,26 (The Message)

"Church" is simply a community of Christians. It could be a formal congregation based in a building, or it could simply be a collection of Christian friends who are looking out for each other in love, motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit. It could even be a small group of refugees meeting in a basement. Whatever it looks like, it is very important that you are closely connected with a group of believers who know and love you.

- I'd like a few of you to describe what your "Church" looks like. Is it a formal church with a congregation and a building? Or is it some other situation?

- Let's read around the group again, each person reading one of the verses in the next section, and then describe what the verse is saying should happen in a church. Then others in the group can add any insights they have to the discussion too.

Here are a few verses that describe what is supposed to happen when Christians form a community that makes a place where God can help and heal. See if you can think of at least one benefit that you receive as you “hang out” with other Christians:

- *Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.* – Proverbs 27:17
- *Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.* – Romans 12:15,16 (The Message)
- *Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"* – Romans 15:1,2 (The Message)
- *But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* – Hebrews 3:13
- *Let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions*
– 1 John 3:18 (TLB)

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- Which of those five benefits or characteristics we just read about would you say your church is really good at?

[Have someone read the next section on “PTSI, self-isolation, and the church.”]

PTSI, self-isolation, and church

If you are struggling with war-related trauma or PTSI, you probably don't feel very comfortable being with groups of people you don't know. It makes you nervous to think that there could be someone there who might want to harm you or others. For this reason, you may be tempted to stay away from church as a “safety measure.”

Social isolation may seem like your best option. It feels more comfortable at first, and it's easier than trying to deal with people who don't understand. But it's one of the worst moves you can make. Isolating yourself...

- severely diminishes your support network, which God will often use to supply what you need
- robs you of emotional closeness to people you like and who care about you
- gives you more time to worry and feel lonely, helpless, and depressed
- causes you to play into Satan's key tactic – isolate the prey, eliminate all avenues of support, turn up the heat, then offer destructive ways to “fix” your problems (drugs, alcohol, sex, crime, etc.)
- keeps you from experiencing the *good* relationships that are energizing and healing
- makes the world around you “encouragement neutral” – nothing negative but nothing positive either

In addition, isolating yourself goes against the basic plan for us from our Creator. He made us to be a communal species – like a herd. The network of fellow Christians was designed specifically for this kind of situation. There is strength and safety in numbers . . .

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

- Do you know anyone who is staying away from Christian fellowship because of their trauma symptoms? What do you think we can do to encourage someone like that to engage with a body of believers – for their own good?
- How about some of you? Does it make you anxious to go to church or to another form of Christian community, and therefore you stay away? *[If there are any...]*
 - How do you respond to that list we just read about the reasons self-isolating harms you?
 - What do you think it will take to get you going back to church again?

[Have someone read the next section on “Talking about your trauma” up to “Getting the secrets out.”]

4. Talking about your trauma

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One of the things you probably remember from Bridge 1 is that when you experienced your traumatic events, the self-defense mechanism God created in you took over – to help you stay alive. Part of this mechanism is that you were able to suppress your normal emotional and analytical reactions so that you could focus on the threat at hand. But God did not intend for you to *keep* these reactions suppressed. He expects you to bring them up again and “process” them in a safe place – with His help. He wants you to talk about them with someone who is a good listener – not for their sake, but for your sake.

These things now need to be thought about, judged, responded to, connected to your emotions, mourned, and filed away properly in your mind and your life. Your brain took those picture-memories of what was happening, and they’re in your mind, along with all the soul-ripping emotions that went along with them. But they weren’t meant to stay there. They’re like an infection, making you sick at the most inconvenient times, affecting your whole life. If the infection isn’t discovered and dealt with, it will get worse, not better.

There are hundreds of ways that professionals help people deal with trauma (both secular and Christian approaches), and *every one of them* involves some form of what we call “talk therapy.” When we allow our memories to go back to the traumatic event, experience them again in our minds, and talk about what happened and how it affected us, this helps us “process” the events. We bring those experiences up from the past, deal with them in the present, and they won’t continue to hobble us in the future.

King David probably suffered from PTSD. Can you identify with what he wrote?

When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans.
– Psalm 32:3 (The Message)

It's as simple as this: if your traumatic memories are exposed to God's light, their power over you can be weakened and removed.

- Do any of you find it difficult to talk about the trauma you experienced in the past?
- How do you feel about sharing the stories of your past trauma with this group?
- How do you think it might help you?

[As we have lead groups like this in the US and all around the world, one of the things we hear very frequently is: "I've never told anyone about this, but I'm going to share it now..." This happens when the group has bonded together and demonstrated to each other they everyone in the group is trustworthy and "safe." We want group members to feel secure and confident that they can share anything, and not worry about being judged or gossiped about. You might want to share this with your group.]

[Leader: read the first paragraph below.]

Getting the secrets out

We have no secrets from the all-knowing God. But sometimes one part of our mind tries to keep a secret from another part. We know what happened. And yet, in some kind of deep, self-defensive, self-deceiving plan, we try to keep the painful truth from our conscious self – and also from the rest of the world. But this plan is no longer helping – it's hurting. As David Grossman, author of *On Killing*, wrote, **"You are only as sick as your secrets."**

[Leader: before reading the next paragraph, say something like:]

This next section describes an exercise that you should consider doing on your own, or even better, together with one of your friends from this group. The exercise may cause you a little anxiety, but it is very powerful in helping you to connect with your past traumatic experience and process the trauma.

[Alternatively, if you have enough time, and if your group seems up for it, take them through the exercise and then have each one share what they experienced.]

Close your eyes for a minute. Let your mind go back and remember the sensory and emotional details of your traumatic experience(s). What did you smell? What did you hear? What did you taste? Describe the heat, cold, sand. How did the experiences make you feel? What were your emotional reactions to the trauma?

[Leader: assuming you don't do the exercise with the group right now, pause at this point, and ask:]

1. How do you think this exercise would affect you?
2. Do any of you feel like it would be too difficult to engage in this? *[If so, assure them that no one is going to force them into it, but they might want to begin praying that God will give them the ability, strength, courage, whatever, to do it at some point. It will be greatly beneficial for them.]*
3. Is there anything I or any other group members could do to help you with that?

[Have someone read the rest of this section up to the "Conclusions."]

Dr. Aphrodite Matsakis writes about the necessity of “feeling” to your recovery:²

“For you to heal completely, the trauma must be reworked not only on the mental level, but on the emotional level as well. This requires two further processes:

- First, the *feelings* generated by the trauma that were not felt at the time need to be identified.
- Second, and more difficult, the feelings must be *experienced*, at least in part, on an emotional level.

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The feelings trauma generates are perhaps the most powerful feelings known to human beings, among them are fear, anger, grief and guilt. If you think you don't have these feelings, think again. Do you still have PTSD symptoms? Are you struggling with an addiction? Do you have headaches, backaches, stomach problems or other physical symptoms of unexplained origin?

If so, this suggests that even though you may not want to deal with your feelings, your feelings are dealing with you.”

Researchers have learned that if you can “debrief” (talk about what happened) within three days of your traumatic episode, you are far less likely to develop PTSD. The longer you wait after three days, the more likely it is that you will struggle with it. If you experienced multiple or long-lasting traumatic events, and simply didn't have the opportunity to process your trauma within three days, or if it happened quite a while ago, it will still be very beneficial for you to talk about what happened to you.

Those with whom you share your story may have some encouraging words for you, some good advice, and some helpful direction. But the most valuable thing they can give you is a time and a place for you to *talk*. You need to allow the emotions that you suppressed to come up and be experienced and thought about. It's OK for you to get angry about the injustice of your experience so that you can then release that anger and bitterness. There may be tears, shouting, fear, anxiety, and it may even be hard for you to talk. But if you can push through, it will be one of the most helpful elements of your house of healing.

- **Homework Assignment:** Before our next meeting, I'd like for each of you to take a little time to write out your “Trauma Story.” This is how we “get the secrets out,” and it will be a very significant part of the fourth element of your house of healing: “Talking about your trauma.” Your story should be in three parts:

1. What my life was like before my traumatic experience.
2. A description of the trauma I experienced (including how it made me feel).
3. What my life has been like since the trauma

If you have experienced multiple traumatic experiences, just choose one of them – the one that causes you the most distress, or the one that has had the most long-lasting effect on you.

When we get together next time, I'm going to ask each of you to read what you wrote out loud.

[Either you or one of the group members read the “Conclusions.”]

² Quote from Robert Hicks, *Failure to Scream*, pages 60-61. For more excellent insights from Dr. Matsakis, read her excellent book, *I Can't Get Over It*.

Conclusions:

- **Building** this house of healing will counter any spiritual poverty you are currently living in.
- If you are serious about creating an environment of healing . . .
 - Make a plan to communicate with God in **prayer** regularly – about anything and everything. He wants to hear from you!
 - Commit to reading, studying, and applying **God's Word** regularly – every day if possible. It is your spiritual food, and it is your weapon.
 - Make an effort to be involved in **fellowship** with other Christians. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but it will become a source of strength for you.
 - Seek out a good friend, group of friends, or even a counselor who will help you process your trauma by **talking** through it. It may be difficult for you to bring back those disturbing memories and talk about your trauma, but it will help you cross this bridge.

- As a result of going through this chapter, what is one practical application that you are going to accomplish in order to help you cross this “Bridge?” What’s going to be different in your life?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 6:

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GRIEVING

...your loss

Crossing the River of Dark Sadness

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members understand what it means to grieve our losses and why it is so important.
- To share some practical advice on how to grieve and how not to grieve.
- To help participants feel more free and comfortable about grief and mourning.

>>[Bring a piece of paper for each participant to use in the "Name your loss" exercise.]

[Have someone read the opening verse.]

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. – Matthew 5:4

- What are your thoughts about grieving?
 - Is it important to not show emotion when suffering a loss?
 - Does grieving show a lack of faith?
 - Is openly mourning a loss considered un-manly or weak?

[Have someone read the opening story about "Denying grief, up to "Understanding Grief."]

Denying Grief

"I am fine. Just fine," Aram said with a strange half-smile. Then he looked at the ground. "There is no need for you to be concerned about me, Grandfather."

But Grandfather Davit was concerned. When the Azerbaijani military invaded Artsakh and began to commit atrocities, Aram joined the Armenian Army. He had just returned after a year of fighting. He wasn't the same young man. He was emotionally distant, cold. He wasn't eating much, wasn't sleeping much, wasn't talking much. When he *did* talk, Grandfather Davit could tell he was just putting on a mask, trying to look strong.

"Aram, I don't think everything is "just fine" with you. I can tell that you are carrying many wounds – besides the physical ones you have. Your soul is wounded, and it has not healed. Tell me about those wounds."

Aram sighed. He didn't want to talk about these things, but he wanted to show respect to his Grandfather. He shrugged his shoulders. "You know, Grandfather. It was war. Horrible things happen in war. Many of my friends died." Aram hesitated, then said quietly, "Maxim – he was captured, and was tortured before he was finally killed."

"You mean your neighbor, little Max, who you played with since you were both babies?"

"Yes. The same. But as I said, it was war. We must move on." Aram's face became like stone again.

Grandfather Davit put his hand on Aram's knee and said gently, "You have not grieved for your friends yet, have you, grandson?"

"They were soldiers, Grandfather. I am a soldier. Death is part of our job – we knew it when we joined the army. We can't make a big deal about it every time one of our comrades is killed."

"Who told you that?" Grandfather Davit said with a hint of anger in his voice. "Who said you can't 'make a big deal' about your friends dying?"

Aram was a little hesitant to reply. "Well, I don't know. No one actually commanded us. It's kind of an unwritten law. When your mates are killed, you can't get all emotional about it – you must keep fighting."

"I can understand that – *while you are in battle*. But once the battle is over, Aram, you *must* take some time to mourn your friends."

"Grandfather, believe me, I would like to. But I am afraid that if I allow myself to do this, it will be like a great dam breaking, and I will never be able to stop my tears. So I am just trying not to think about it."

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The wise old man thought for a moment. "Aram, you're like that old tractor in our village. Remember that spring when everyone was wondering why it kept smoking and running so rough and then shutting down? Hayk was supposed to put the oil in it, but he forgot. Without the oil, it could not function. As soon as he remembered and went to the trouble of putting the oil in, it worked just fine.

"You are not 'just fine' right now, my dear boy. Your soul needs the oil of your tears, or you will shut down just like that old tractor. You think your tears will never end once they start, but I guarantee you they will." Grandfather Davit got up from his chair. "Come walk with me, Aram. I will teach you about grieving. I am very experienced."

- How many of you can identify with what Aram was feeling, and how he was acting?
- I'm sure that several of you have lost friends in the war. I'd like to hear about them. Would a few of you tell us about a friend that you lost? *[If no one volunteers at first, share your memory of a loved one you have lost, hopefully to motivate some participants to share.]*
- *[After a few have shared...]* Remembering your friends who have died – like we have just done – is part of what is known as "grieving." This is one of the reasons we have funerals – to bring back memories of our lost loved ones, to honor them, and to tell others the good things we know about them (or to hear the same from others).
- What do you think about what Aram said, "We can't make a big deal about it every time one of our comrades is killed."?

[Have someone read the next section about "Understanding Grief" up to "Name your loss."]

Understanding Grief – a "sacred sorrow"

Whenever we experience any sort of loss, it is part of the normal and natural process for us to feel a wide range of negative emotions. Please note carefully: the process is *normal and natural*. It is built into us. God created it. God experienced it. *Everybody* experiences it.

The English word for “grief” comes from the Latin verb meaning “to burden.” That’s exactly what grief feels like, doesn’t it? A heavy load that you wish you could set down – but you can’t.

Grief is always triggered by a **loss** of some sort – losing someone or something we had an attachment to. Grief has different levels and intensities. We grieve a little when our favorite shirt is ruined and we have to throw it away. We grieve a little more when our favorite sport team has its hopes dashed for championship glory. But much more profound grief comes when our home is destroyed by invaders, or someone we love dies.

However, as grief and trauma counselor Dr. H. Norman Wright tells us “Loss is not the enemy. Not facing its existence is.” And as Dr. Gerald May writes: “Grief is neither a problem to be solved nor a problem to be overcome. It is a sacred expression of love ... a sacred sorrow.”

- This section describes grief as a “sacred sorrow.” How would you define the word “sacred?” [*The dictionary defines “sacred” as “devoted or set apart for God; holy; regarded with reverence.”*]
- What do you think Dr. Wright meant when he said, “Grief is neither a problem to be solved nor a problem to be overcome.”?
- Are you able to imagine the grief you feel as a “sacred sorrow?” What do you think having that attitude toward a lost loved-one would do to our normal tendency to avoid grieving, or to simply not think about the people or things we have lost?

[Have someone read the next paragraph about “Name your loss” up to “The Purpose of Grief.”]

Name your loss



You have suffered many losses throughout your life – as we all have. But your time in war probably brought you some new “lifetime lows” which you may have found difficult to deal with. Think about your losses – maybe even take a couple of minutes to write them down – specifically. You could write about physical injuries that resulted in lost capabilities, lost home, lost friends, wrecked plans, crushed dreams, shaken self-identity, lost faith, lost love – whatever comes to your mind. By naming your loss, you’ll be better able to accomplish the difficult work of grieving over it.

- Let’s take a couple of minutes now and do what was just suggested: to “name your loss.”
[Pass out blank paper and give them a few minutes to write down what comes to their minds.]
- Now let’s go around the room, and I’d like each of you to share what you wrote. This fits into the idea of “talk therapy.” If you want to give a little more detail about what you wrote, feel free to do so, or you can just read what you wrote without further comment. If you don’t feel comfortable sharing what’s on your paper, that’s fine – just say “pass” when we come to you.

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs of the next section, then go around the group and have each person read one bullet point in the two sections “When we grieve” and “When we refuse to grieve.”]

The Purpose of Grief

God built the grief response into us for the purpose of mentally, emotionally, and spiritually *processing* loss-producing events, mixing those events into our changed world, and helping us move on to a state of greater strength, resourcefulness, and faith. If we are not willing to face the

grieving process, or if we try a short-cut, we're left adrift in our sea of pain, never reaching the shores of strengthening that the Lord intends for us.

In order to motivate their people to push beyond what they think their limits are, military and athletic trainers sometimes tell them, *"Pain is simply weakness leaving the body!"* In a similar fashion, we would say, "Tears are a way God has provided for sadness to leave our body." If we resist this mechanism, our sorrow may never lose its intensity.

When we grieve:

- We are honestly linking up with the emotions that come with loss – rather than suppressing or denying them. As many grief experts say, "You cannot heal what you cannot feel."
- We are protesting the injustice of the loss – which we are truly convinced of – rather than acting like it was OK with us.
- We are expressing that we deeply wish that the loss had never occurred – rather than minimizing it.
- We are facing the devastating impact of the loss head on, absorbing it, and eventually mastering it – rather than running from it, or pretending it didn't happen, only to have its effects hit us again and again.
- We are allowing our brain to replay the tapes of our traumatic event memories in a safe environment, which robs them of their terror and allows us to include them in our post-trauma life.
- We are inviting Jesus to enter the dark jungle of our pain, experience it with us, comfort us in the midst of it, and walk us out the other side of it – rather than sitting passively alone and paralyzed at the edge.

When we refuse to grieve:

- Unresolved grief has been found to be a factor in the development of a wide range of psychological problems, including outbursts of rage, restlessness, depression, addiction, compulsion, anxiety, and panic disorders.
- Unexpressed grief can lead to medical problems or make current problems worse, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, cancer, asthma, and a variety of allergies, rashes, aches, and pains.
- We are at odds with our body's built-in physical processes to deal with a traumatic event.
- We are at odds with God's desire to meet us in the midst of the fire of our trauma, missing out on His plans to deepen our faith and strengthen our relationship with Him.

- Look over the two lists again. I'm sure several of the ideas expressed are new to you, and maybe surprising. Would anyone be willing share your thoughts on one of the items that stands out to you the most, and why?

[Give them a couple of minutes of silence to read over the lists again. Let them think!]

[Have someone read the next section on "How NOT TO Grieve," including all the bullet points and the final two paragraphs, up to "How TO Grieve."]

How NOT TO Grieve

Some people will do *anything* rather than engage in the hard work of grief – and think they are accomplishing something. These actions may make us feel a little better temporarily, but it doesn't move us out of our sad state. The following is a list of ways people try to cope with their situation without actually facing their grief. Put a check mark next to any that you think you might engage in from time to time.

- ☐ **Act out** – giving in to the pressure to misbehave or engage in destructive behavior.
- ☐ **Aim low** – to what seems more achievable; avoid challenging yourself to excel.
- ☐ **Attack** – beat down whatever – or whomever – you think is threatening you.
- ☐ **Avoid** – stay away from anything or anyone that may cause you stress.
- ☐ **Compensate** – make up for weakness in one area by trying to gain strength in another.
- ☐ **Deny** – refusing to admit that the event even occurred.
- ☐ **Displace** – shifting a negative action to a safer target (like kicking the dog).
- ☐ **Fantasize** – escaping reality to a false world of unachievable wishes.
- ☐ **Idealize** – overstating the good points of a desired action and ignoring downsides.
- ☐ **Identify** – copying others to take on their desirable characteristics.
- ☐ **Intellectualize** – avoiding emotions by focusing only on facts and logic.
- ☐ **Passive aggression** – getting your way by acting meek and unresponsive.
- ☐ **Project** – seeing your own undesirable characteristics in others.
- ☐ **Rationalize** – creating logical reasons for bad behavior.
- ☐ **Regress** – returning to a childlike state to avoid problems or responsibility.
- ☐ **Suppress** – consciously holding back unwanted urges while ignoring the root cause.
- ☐ **Trivialize** – making something minor when it is really something important.

If you recognize any of these behavior patterns in yourself, you first need to see them for what they are: hoped-for shortcuts to restoration which won't get you there at all. Ask a friend if they see you engaging in any of these behaviors. Then, make it a matter of prayer. Ask God to help you realize when you're avoiding your grief work by falling into these habits. Then ask Him to help you partner with Him in the process of grieving.

- Would a few of you like to share about which of these “short cuts” to grieving you have tried in the past?
- Did you find the short cut helpful, or not?
- Perhaps you have a friend or relative who has a tendency to take one of these grieving short cuts. Could you describe what it looks like in them?

[Have someone read the next section on “How TO Grieve,” including the seven stages of grief, up through the question, “As you think about the trauma...”]

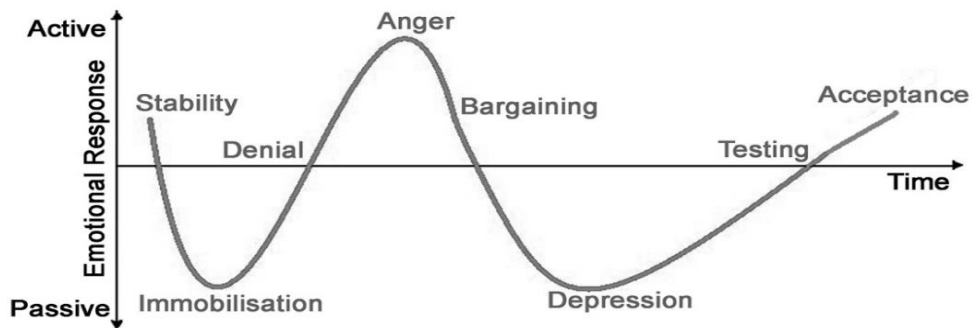
How TO Grieve

Be aware of the process. It is a process, for sure. But it's not a *precise* process. Everyone will process their grief a bit differently than the next person. However, there are some general descriptions that are useful – kind of like milestones along a journey – to let you know that you are making progress (or *not* making progress).

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was a Swiss doctor who studied the subject of grief for many years. In her book *On Death and Dying* she reports that there is a general pattern that most people experience when they encounter a life changing trauma or crisis. It's been called "The Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle." Here are the seven stages she describes:

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The Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle:



- **Immobilization stage** – Shock; feeling paralyzed after being exposed to the crisis or trauma; can't decide what to do next.
- **Denial stage** – Trying to avoid the truth. *No! This can't be happening! Or, It didn't affect me; it wasn't that bad. Or even, It never happened. I just imagined it.*
- **Anger stage** – Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion. *Life is horrible!!* Rage seething below the surface at all times; lashing out at anyone for the slightest reason; blaming others.
- **Bargaining stage** – Seeking in vain for a way out. Promising God that you'll perform a certain action if He'll fix things; setting conditions for healing, like: *When the war stops, then I'll get well.*
- **Depression stage** – Final realization of the truth. A very sad time, but also the turning point, because the griever finally understands that he or she won't be able to restore life to the way it was.
- **Testing stage** – Seeking realistic solutions. *Maybe I should try getting out more. Maybe I should talk with someone about my situation. Maybe I should join that Bible study I heard about.*
- **Acceptance stage** – Finally finding the way forward. They are now fully acknowledging the trauma or crisis. *It was bad – real bad – but I survived. I'm going to make it. My world changed, but I can live in this new world. I could even prosper.*



- As you think about the trauma you have experienced, and the grief you feel now over your loss, which of the above stages best describes your current state of mind?

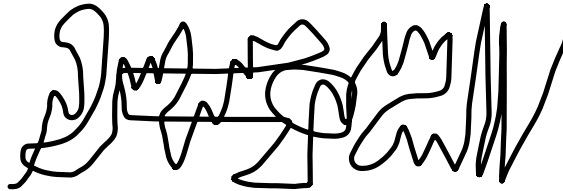
- How would some of you answer that question? Relative to the major trauma you've experienced, what stage of grief would you say you're currently in?

[Have someone read the next section about "A few words about the process" up to "How to Mourn Well."]

A few words about the process. As mentioned before, it's not precise. You may not hit all of these stages. You may skip a stage and then go back to experience it later. You may go through one stage quickly and easily and sit in another stage for a long time. You may find yourself going back and forth between a couple of stages, or looping around to various stages randomly. No one can say for sure how you will deal with your unique trauma. Some would say it ought to be called "The Kübler-Ross Grief Scribble" and looks less like a nice, neat "cycle" and more like this:

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Therefore, don't give in to the temptation to compare your grief process with someone else's.



If you will keep your connections with God strong during this process, He will take you through it in a way that will maximize every stage and bring you through to the final stage as soon as possible.

How long will it take? Honestly, probably a lot longer than you would like. In fact, if the trauma you experienced is very severe, the grief will always be there. It won't be dominating your life like it currently is, but there will always be that hole where the lost person or thing or dream used to be. That ache won't completely go away. But that's not all bad – consider it a memorial to the depth of the love and value it (or they) held before the loss. And God will use it:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. – 2 Corinthians 1:3,4

- This is a very important thing to understand: how each of us grieves can be unique. I cannot compare my grief process with yours. Just because you seem to "get over" your trauma faster or slower than I do is irrelevant. How many of you can understand that the grief process isn't a nice, neat "cycle," but rather a "scribble?"
- There are two important points brought out in the last two paragraphs we just read (including the Bible verse) describing two positive things that can come out of our trauma and grief. Can you identify them?
 - 1. *The grief we feel can be like a memorial to the depth of the love and value we place on who (or what) we have lost.*
 - 2. *God can use the affliction we have experienced and grown from to help others who have experienced trauma.*

[Have someone read the first paragraph and the first bullet point of the next section: "Remember where God is."]

How to Mourn Well

When we've experienced a traumatic event, grief is what we *feel*. Mourning is *what we do about it*. It is the action side of grief, the externalizing of our internal pain. And Jesus Christ – who knows *everything* – says that when we engage in it we are blessed and *will be* comforted (Matthew 5:4). Here are a few principles to keep in mind as you work out your grief through mourning.

• Remember where God is

Because of your wound, you hold a special attraction to the Lord. You've got His attention. He is a loving and merciful God, ready to aid anyone who will allow Him to. *Count on that!* You can expect Him to be present and responsive to your needs during this time. He is like your best friend who says, "If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask!" And He means it.

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
– Psalm 34:18*

Ask Jesus to enter your pain with you. Close your eyes and feel Him coming up behind you, wrapping His big arms around you and holding on tight. Let Him pull the pain out of your body, soul, and spirit into His.

- I'd like for us to take a couple of minutes, close our eyes, and do what is described here.

[After they have closed their eyes, quietly read the last paragraph out loud, a phrase at a time: "Ask Jesus to enter your pain with you... Feel Him coming up behind you, wrapping His big arms around you and holding on tight... Let Him pull the pain out of your body, soul, and spirit into His..." Close with prayer, thanking God for the peace He can bring to those who grieve.]

- What did you feel during that?

[Have someone read the next section: "Aim steadily at faith's target."]

• Aim steadily at faith's target

Ask yourself this question: "What do I have faith in?" How did you answer? Assuming you didn't say, "Nothing," perhaps your answer was like one of these:

- "That God will bring me out of this depression."
- "That my leg will heal."
- "That my home will not be bombed."
- "That I could quit drinking so much."
- "That I can get past my anger."

These are all great faith *goals* and excellent requests to make to God, but they aren't what you should put your faith in. If you do – and they don't come about – what happens to your faith? The only answer to the question, "What do I have faith in?" should be "**God.**" Whenever we tie our faith to our circumstances or to a particular desire, we take God off the throne of our life and set ourselves up for great disappointment.

Our real hope should not be in something we want to see happen, but in God, who is making something *good* out of our situation even though we can't see it. A person of mature faith will boldly express his strong desires to God, and then leave them in His wise and loving hands – no matter what. He'll always do what's best. Sometimes we may be trying very hard to get God to change our circumstances, while He is using our circumstances to change *us*!

- So, what's the difference between “faith goals” and the “object of or faith?” Can you think of examples?
- What's the danger of turning a specific experience or desired outcome into the object of our faith? What's the danger of turning that experience or outcome into a validation (or non-validation) of our faith?
- What should be our attitude instead?

[Make it clear that we are certainly not saying that we should not pray for specific needs we have or outcomes we desire. The point is that we need to always remember what we learned in Bridge 5 about prayer – “Not as I will, but as YOU will, God.” We leave the results to God. He is the one we look to and trust to bring about the best outcome.]

[Have someone read the next section: “Don't try to do it alone.”]

• Don't try to do it alone

Grief is hard on a person and mourning is difficult work. Effective grief work is not done alone. Don't try to be the pillar of strength to everyone around you. You'll crumble. Be sure to find a few people that you know you can count on to be there for you when you need them.

When you are grieving, it's like you have fallen down into a cistern. You can't get out by yourself – you need a friend to throw you a rope. Be sure you have friends around you who can help pull you up.

- In what ways can we involve another person in our grieving process? How have you observed it being done in the past?
- This is difficult, isn't it? Most of us don't want to admit we have any weaknesses, or that we're struggling, or that we might need some help or someone to lean on. Think about it for a minute. Who do you know that you could talk to and tell them about the difficulties you are experiencing without jeopardizing your personal sense of honor? Someone that you know understands you, and wouldn't judge you? Write their name in your manual.

[Have someone read the next section: “Do something with your anger.”]

• Do something with your anger

When anger is bottled up it changes into bitterness. And, as we learned earlier, bitterness will spread beyond the borders of your life. It's OK to be angry. It is a normal, reasonable emotion when we are confronted with unjust, hurtful, or grievous events. It is recorded in the Bible that Jesus Himself became angry on a few occasions (Mark 3:1-5; Mark 10:14; John 2:13-16). But it's what we *do* with that anger that can lead to sin.

The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, “*In your anger do not sin.*” When you feel the anger rising up within you, first remove yourself from the physical cause of your anger if you can. For instance, if it's a person, leave the room; if it's your location, go somewhere else. It's like removing wood from the fire. No wood, the fire soon goes out. Go out for a run; do push-ups and sit-ups, dig a garden; chop down a tree; plant a tree; ride a bike. Or if you're able, do

something truly constructive: go help someone who needs it; build something; get involved in some relief efforts; ask your pastor how you could help at your church.

- What do you do when you feel anger associated with your trauma rising in you? How do you keep it from boiling over?
- What are some ways you responded poorly in the past when you became angry about something?
 - How would you have done it differently now?

[Have someone read the next section: "Go with the flow (of tears)."]

• Go with the flow (of tears)

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Men normally find this harder than women. They seem to be reluctant to engage the strong emotions associated with grief. It has a lot to do with society's programming: "Big boys shouldn't cry." Maybe not – but big *men* should when it comes to grief and mourning.

How "manly" was King David? He beat a three-meter-tall giant in a fair fight, killed a lion and a bear in hand-to-hand combat as a boy, and took the foreskins of two hundred Philistines as a dowry for his bride. He had a man under his command who single-handedly killed eight hundred men in one battle (that's in the days before automatic weapons, by the way). He had another who successfully defended a strategic position against the entire Philistine army and another who killed three hundred men in one battle with a *spear*. And David was their boss. We can rightfully assume he was "all man."

And yet, David did not hesitate to fully engage his emotions during times of grief:

I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. – Psalm 6:6

I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. – Psalm 35:14

I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me. – Psalm 69:3

- What were some of the elements of how King David mourned?
- Why do you think it is difficult for most men to connect with their emotions when grieving?
- Do most men suppress their emotions only when in public, and they tend to allow our emotions to flow when alone?
- Why would we want to be more open about our grief in public? Or do we need to?

[Have someone read the next section: "Make a Grief Memorial."]

• Make a Grief Memorial

Researchers in the field of grief and mourning have learned that memorials play a very important role in starting the grief process and bringing healing. That's why we have funerals and memorial services. That's why we have gravestones. These things are meaningful experiences and symbols of our grief. We need them.

How can you memorialize the grief that is attached to your trauma? What can you do or construct that will provide a physical expression of your pain, something that will symbolize your loss? This needs to be a personal gesture that you and God decide upon. It could be as simple as a smooth stone in your pocket from the battleground, a poem that you write and put up on the wall, or as obvious as a brick tower in your yard. You and God decide.

- What ideas come to your mind about building a Grief Memorial? What can you produce or build that would honor who or what you lost, and remind you of your connection?

[As was pointed out in the last paragraph, it doesn't have to be some kind of structure in a permanent place. It could be some meaningful item that you keep in your pocket or purse or on your desk, a photograph, a pressed flower, etc.]

[Have someone read just the first paragraph and the question in the next section.]

Signs That Your Mourning is Working

As the consequences of your trauma and its effects sink in, a person in crisis asks a lot of “Why” questions. *Why did this happen? Why to me? Why now? Why did I do that? Why did she do that? Why did God let this happen? Why won't this pain stop? Why must I suffer so deeply?* These questions are all normal, typical and expected. No one faults you for asking them.



What were (or are) some of the “Why” questions you’ve asked? Can you write them down?

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- Let's take a minute and think about this, and write down some of the “Why” questions you’ve asked in the past.
- Would a few of you like to share some of the questions you wrote down?

[Have someone read the rest of this section, up to the “Conclusions.”]

The frustration of the “Why” questions is that most of them will never be answered this side of heaven. We are serious when we ask them, and we really do want answers. But the answers just don't come.

When you start asking the “How” questions, that will be a good sign that you are making progress. *How can I build new dreams? How can I move on? How should I deal with my pain and loss? How do I get back into normal life again? How can I learn through what I've experienced?* These are all questions that *can* be answered. They look to the future, rather than the past. They spark action, rather than only thoughts. They invite help from God and from others.



How can you change some of those “Why” questions you thought of a minute ago into “How” questions? What other “How” questions should you be asking?

- Now let's do that. Take the “Why” question(s) you wrote down a minute ago and turn them into a “How” questions. *[Give them a few minutes to do this.]*
- Would anyone care to share how they turned a couple of their “Why” questions into “How” questions, or any new “How” questions you came up with?

[Have someone read the "Conclusions."]

Conclusions:

- When you encounter a traumatic situation which involves any kind of loss, if you don't allow yourself to fully experience the emotional grief of that loss, you will make it impossible to move past your sadness.
- It does no good to deny that the trauma happened or to act like it was a minor thing.

God wants to walk with you through your time of grief. There are specific attitudes and actions that you can engage in that will help you in **grieving** your loss and move you further along in your journey toward your place of healing.

- What have you learned in this Bridge that is going to make a difference in how you grieve the losses you have experienced – both in the present and in the future?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Bridge 7:

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...yourself spiritually

Crossing the River of Spiritual Vulnerability**Objectives of this Chapter:**

- To help group members understand that Satan is a *real* enemy, and that we can withstand his attacks much better if we understand his tactics.
- To teach group members the simple, practical truths about Doorways and Footholds, and how to identify and eliminate them.
- To make participants aware of the armor and weapons God has given them.

*[Have someone read the opening verse.]****Submit therefore to God.******Resist the devil and he will flee from you.******Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.******– James 4:7, 8***

- What are some basic strategies of war that you are aware of? For those of you that are or have been in the military, what have you been taught in your military training? Can you relate these strategies to our spiritual war with our ancient enemy, Satan?

*[Have someone read the story about Petros and Levon up to "Know Your Enemy."]***Resistance = Victory**

Petros and Levon were friends. They knew each other from church since childhood and they loved each other like brothers.

When Azerbaijan began its latest offensive, Levon was already in the army, in the hot spot of the battle. From the moment Petros received news of the war, he wanted to go to the front line to be with Levon.

The battles were going on, but the boys were fighting in different places. These two friends were able to communicate, and even prayed together at the same time and asked God to give peace and protect each other from the enemy's bullets.

In the hot days of the battle, seven days after Azerbaijan attacked, Petros tried several times to call Levon, but the connection failed every time. Petros felt some anxiety in his heart.

In the evening Petros received the news that Levon had been killed.

Petros's inner world turned upside down. He heard a clear voice saying: "See, your prayers did not save your friend. He died. Where was the God whom you loved so much? Why didn't He protect him?"

Petros listened to that voice and shouted loudly, "That's it, I won't pray anymore. Never. If my prayers didn't help Levon, it won't help me either. It's pointless to pray. God doesn't hear me. He does not even like me."

Petros was kneeling on the ground and crying loudly when suddenly he felt and heard God's light in his heart. The voice of the Lord said. "Petros, why are you interfering in my affairs? Don't you know that I control everything?"

It seemed like a dream. He got up, wiped his tears, looked at the sky, and prayed.

"Forgive me, Lord, forgive me. I heard Satan's voice and let him get close. I hesitated and denied You. I'm sorry that I thought all that. I thank You for helping me to hear Your voice and overcome Satan."

At that moment, Petros felt the peace and tranquility that is beyond everything.

- What caused Petros to decide he no longer wanted anything to do with God?
- Have you ever felt so disappointed with how things have gone that you decided you wanted to abandon your relationship with God? *[Probably all of us have at one time or another.]* Do you think it's possible that you might feel that way sometime in the future – or even presently?
- How do you think Petros' decision made Satan feel? How did it make God feel?
- What made the difference for Petros? What made Satan leave, and restored Petros' faith in God?
- How does this relate to our opening verse of James 4:7,8? *[Especially the part about "submitting, resisting, and drawing near to God."]*

[Have someone read the next two paragraphs about "Know your enemy" up to "His Tactics."]

Know your enemy

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There is an ancient Chinese warrior named Sun Tzu whom military commanders have studied for centuries because his wisdom concerning how to successfully defeat an enemy is so effective. One of his sayings is: **"Know the enemy and know yourself. In a hundred battles you will never be in peril."** The Apostle Paul expressed the same idea regarding our need for preparing to defend ourselves against our spiritual enemy in 2 Corinthians 2:11: *"We are not ignorant of his schemes."*

We must always remember that – whether we are on a physical battlefield or not – we are locked in a desperate war against a deadly enemy: Satan. It may not seem like it sometimes, because the devil is a master of deception. The spiritual war our souls are engaged in is as real as the ones that use bullets and bombs. But many soldiers of God's Kingdom don't know their enemy, and don't even know there is a war! May this not be true of you.

- Sun Tzu and the Apostle Paul strongly advocated that we need to know as much as we can about our enemy. Let's spend a couple of minutes sharing what you already know about Satan – anything at all that you know about him: his origin, his tactics, what he hates, what he loves, how he can be defeated, etc.

[Have someone read the next section and all the bullet points about "His tactics" up to "Satan's primary tactic..."]

His tactics

Most of Satan's tactics have to do with **deception**. As Sun Tzu also said, "**All war is based on deception.**" Here are some of the ways Satan uses deception to try to defeat us:

- Sometimes Satan will appeal to your pride to get you to sin. (Matthew 4:8,9)
- Sometimes he will focus on your needs, and appeal to the logical conclusion that you should have your needs met. *After all, God wouldn't want you to suffer, would He? He wants you always happy, right?* (Matthew 4:3) Satan loves to hit you when you are down – sick, depressed, in pain.
- Sometimes he will offer his temptations disguised as a suggestion for improvement. *If you do this, you will be better off, more successful.* (Genesis 3:4,5)
- He will never seem terribly evil to you; he will make himself appear like "an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)
- He will always seek out your areas of vulnerability, your weaknesses, areas of your life where you frequently have trouble, places where your spiritual armor has slipped. (Ephesians 6:13) If you are struggling with war-related trauma, your symptoms show your vulnerable places – so these must be especially defended. Be aware that a smart enemy will always attack the place that is the least protected. He won't come at you in your areas of strength.
- He will try to get you alone, where no other Christians are available to help you. (Matthew 4:1)
- He will try to snatch away or drown out God's voice and His Word in your heart. (Luke 8:11,12)

- Look over the list we just read. Can you think of an example of some of those tactics – maybe some that he has used on you in the past? For instance...
 - How can Satan appeal to your pride to get you to sin?
 - How can Satan convince us that certain sins aren't really sins, because they are natural needs and urges?
 - How can a natural need be twisted and become sinful?
 - How can Satan make certain sins seem to be a way of improving yourself?
 - How does he sometimes appear as an "angel of light?"

[Have someone read the next section about "Satan's primary tactic..." up to "Footholds."]

Satan's primary tactic – Doorways and Footholds

>>Doorways

Genesis 4:1-12 records the birth of Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel. Unfortunately, it also records the first murder in history – inspired by The Murderer himself. Cain and Abel had made offerings to God, and for some reason Cain's was not acceptable. We are not sure why – perhaps it had to do with Cain's heart attitude as he presented it. Cain became

very angry and resentful. God could see what was in Cain’s heart and told him about it, giving him some very valuable advice – which Cain did not take. In verse 7, God tells Cain,

*“Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the **door**, eager to **control** you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” – Genesis 4:6,7 (NLT)*

What? Control? I thought Satan was offering us freedom! Anyone who has given in to the “freeing” temptations of Satan knows they all eventually lead to bondage. It’s interesting that in the last book of the Bible, Jesus also talks about standing at the door:

*“Here I am! I stand at the **door** and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the **door**, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.” – Revelation 3:20*

The door that is being spoken of at both ends of the Bible represents our **will**. Whatever we allow to come through that door will influence our choices, our life, and our destiny – for good or for evil. And in both verses, we have control of the door. *We* decide who or what comes in, and who or what does not.

God describes sin (Satan) as crouching just outside the door of your will, trying to convince you hold it open for him – because he wants to control you, little by little. You’ve got two options. You can slam that door shut, sending a loud and clear message to both him and God that you’re not interested in his ideas, or you can leave it open a crack. By doing that, you’re saying, “Satan – I’m open to suggestions. How would you meet my needs?” He’ll make his proposals. And if you’re foolish you’ll listen to them. He makes them sound *very* good and smart. So after a short period, you may find yourself opening the door to him.

- Can you think of any examples where Satan is offering a person “freedom” but it turns out to be bondage and control?
- From this section, we read that there are two possible beings standing at the door of our lives, wanting to get in. Who are the two? [*Satan and Jesus.*] What does the door represent? [*Our will.*]
- What do you think each of these two beings want to do for you?

[Have someone read the next section about “Footholds” up to “Defending our areas of weakness.”]

>>Footholds

The same principle is presented again in the New Testament:

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. – Ephesians 4:26,27 (NIV)

As we mentioned earlier, being angry is not a sin. But what we *do* when angry *can* be sin, or our anger can eventually *lead* us to sin if we don’t deal with it early. If we let negative attitudes stay in our minds, we run the risk of giving the devil a “foothold.”

What is a “foothold?” When climbing up a steep cliff, you need to find a series of footholds to make progress. One foothold will not take you to the top – each one enables you to make it to the next. This is a key point to remember about how Satan will try to influence your life. He won’t blast in and take over all at once. He can’t – you would notice such an obvious move. But if he can gain

a little foothold – get you to agree to letting him have just a tiny bit of control in a small area of your life, he's gotten just a little closer to conquering you in larger areas. God's advice to you: Don't give him even the first foothold! Once you've given it to him, it will be difficult to get it back!

One other important point: How does Satan get a foothold? **We give it to him.** He cannot seize it by force. He can't control our will. But he can deceive us into thinking that we will benefit by agreeing to his suggestions. So we give him that tiny foothold in exchange for something we think will be of more value. We are always wrong.

- Let's think for a minute about how Satan can gain one foothold after another to bring a person to a disastrous end. As an example, consider the sin of adultery. The Bible makes it clear that adultery is against God's law. But Satan wouldn't just tempt a person – especially a Christian – to go from being completely faithful to his wife to jumping into bed with some other woman. Let's do a little brainstorming. What are some of the small, subtle temptations that Satan might introduce to a person – little footholds – to gradually hook that man and bring him to the point of committing adultery?
- How is Satan able to gain a foothold in our life? *[We give it to him. We think we are giving in to a "helpful" suggestion by him, and in exchange we give him a little more control in an area of vulnerability. It is accomplished through an act of our own will. He can't force us into it – we agree to it.]*

[Have someone read the first two paragraphs of the next section, and then give the group several minutes of silence to go through the list on their own and put a check mark next to any possible doorways that they may have opened (or have been opened for them) in the past.]

Defending our areas of weakness

Each of us has areas of weakness and poorly-defended places in our lives. Satan is aware of them, and *that's* where he waits. He won't waste time in your areas of strength – he's a skilled strategist patiently seeking out your soft spots and looking for an opportunity to strike. You will do a better job of setting up a good defense if you take the time to figure out where your weak places are. Spend a few moments right now and ask the Lord to reveal to you where they might be. Where are your areas of frequent defeat? Which temptations are difficult for you to handle? Where have you fallen before?



Possible Doorways and Footholds

Please keep in mind that this list represents *possible* doorways. Just because you have experienced one or more of the occurrences listed below, it doesn't mean that you have opened a doorway or provided a foothold for the enemy. But you *may* have. Ask God if one of these represents an open door in your life.

1. Listening to occult (Satanic) music	13. Involvement in or attending occultic rituals, festivals, masses, sacrifices, etc.
2. Possessing occult pictures, charms, books, games	14. Participation in false religions or cults.
3. Holding on to grudges or bitterness against God and others.	15. Wrong use of drugs, alcohol, or herbs
4. Rebellion against authority	16. Hedonism; an absorbing pursuit of entertainment and/or body pleasure.

5. Dating relationships or close friendships with demonized people	17. Fascination with violence and death.
6. Sexual immorality with demonized people	18. Killing people or animals for “fun.”
7. Participating in sexual immorality with anyone.	19. Long-lasting jealousy or anger.
8. Sexual involvement with a prostitute, even once.	20. Pornography; especially child porn.
9. If you have ancestors or dead relatives who accepted Satanic influence	21. Going without sleep for a long period.
10. If you have parents, relatives or other close authority figures who have accepted Satanic influence, such as a witch, spirit healer.	22. Meditation on anything other than God's revealed truth.
11. Going to a fortune teller, having an astrological chart or forecast made.	23. Chanting or other cultic/occultic forms of worship.
12. Involvement in psychic phenomenon, such as astral projection, levitation, spells, magic, fortune telling, séances, channeling	24. Rape/incest (whether victim or victimizer)

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[Tell the group that we're not going to go through the process of closing doorways right now, but that you strongly suggest that they spend some time thinking about any issues that God has brought up and dealing with them on your own or with a trusted friend. Let them know that if they would like to discuss an issues that came up while they were reading through the above list of possible doorways, you would be available to meet with them and talk about those issues on more depth.]

[Have two or three people read each of the three steps listed in the next section, including the prayer. You may want to stop the reader after each step and ask, “Does anyone have any questions about this part?”]

Closing Doorways

“You must subdue it and be its master.” (Genesis 4:7) Whenever you become aware of an open door in your life, there are three steps you need to take in order to shut it:

>>1. Confess and repent of opening the door. If it was due to a willful choice on your part, this step is obvious. Go back to Bridge 4 for a review on confession and repentance. But some doorways may have been opened when you were in a passive state, and not disobeying God at all – like when you were under anesthesia or traumatized in a battle. It may be that you later made a willful choice due to something that began then. It could be something like becoming addicted to pain medicine after surgery, or a strong urge to kill that developed sometime after your war experiences. In those cases, you should confess the sin, but also make the decision to close the original door.

>>2. Take action to demonstrate repentance and purify your life.

- Release resentment, anger and bitterness.
- Seek forgiveness from anyone you offended or hurt.
- Restore anything that you stole or destroyed.
- Renounce occultic (Satanic, non-Christian religious) involvement.
- Destroy any offending objects (occultic charms, crystals, games, pornography, books, Satanic music, drugs, alcohol, etc.).

- Break off any harmful relationships (prostitutes, drug dealers, lovers outside of marriage, criminals)
- Put yourself back under God's authority (re-filling of the Holy Spirit).

>>3. Once again ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Bridge 3) Suggested Prayer:

Father, I confess that I have opened a door to my enemy. I have given him a foothold. I was vulnerable and deceived when I made the decision, but I'm still responsible for it. I confess to You that I [describe what you did to open the door]. I agree with You that it was sin, and I'm sorry for it. Please forgive me. On the basis of Your promise in Your Word, I accept our forgiveness of my sins. Thank You.

And now, Father, before You and before all the forces of darkness, I renounce my decision and renounce my opening of that door. I shut that door and take back that foothold. Satan, I remove your authority and ability to influence me in that area any longer. I bind you back from it in the name of Jesus Christ, who is my Lord, Savior, and King.

Father, please strengthen that area of vulnerability. May it no longer be an undefended place. I commit to taking any further action You tell me to regarding this matter.

I give the throne of my life back to You once again. Please fill me, control me, guide me, and empower me with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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[After you go through the prayer, urge them not to be passive about this. It's very important that they take action, and SOON! Satan will try to snatch this good seed out of their hearts (like in the Parable of the Sower), so they shouldn't delay!]

[Alternatively, if your group has become very close to each other, and they find it non-threatening to talk about difficult things in their life, ask if there are any in the group who would like to share a doorway they may have opened in the past, what action they would like to take (Point 2 above), and how the group could pray for him or her.]

[Have someone read the next section about "Our Weapons; Weapon #1: Authority" up to "Your place of warring."]

Our Weapons

>>WEAPON #1: AUTHORITY

The weapons of our warfare are not physical weapons of flesh and blood, but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds. – 2 Corinthians 10:4

Being one of the most powerful beings God ever created, and perfecting his warfare skills for centuries, Satan is an enemy more powerful and deadly than anything we can imagine. If we had to go head-to-head with him in our own strength, he would squash us like bugs.

But the Bible talks about the authority we have been given as servants and soldiers of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for it is:

Exousia: "Right, power, authority, ruling power, a bearer of authority."

It's more than *just* power – it's power *plus* authority. It's like in rugby. There are thirty men on the field with awesome power. They are strong, fast, and can cause pain in many, many ways. But they are not in authority. There are five or six other guys down on the field wearing different-colored shirts and blowing whistles called referees who have exousia. The rugby players can put people *down*, but the referees can put people *out*. That's *exousia*!

Ephesians 1:19-23 has much to say about Jesus Christ's *exousia*.

That power is like the working of His [the Father's] mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority (exousia), power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

Colossians 2:9,10 states that someone else besides Christ *also* has this same fullness and *exousia*. Who is it?

*For in Christ all the fullness of God lives in bodily form, and **you** have been given this fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority (exousia).*

- Do you see this idea of “exousia” or authority in the military? How?
- In this section, we learn that the authority God gives us – the weapons, the strength, the resilience, the insight, and God's back-up – is far greater than Satan's resources. But sometimes we don't use this authority. Why do you think that is?

[Have someone read the next paragraph about “Your place of warring” up to “Weapon #2...”]

Your place of warring:

There is no authority in the universe higher than Jesus Christ's. No king, no general, no president, no demon, no angel – not even Satan himself can stand before Christ's *exousia*. And since we are now the children of God, He has equipped us to operate in that same authority as we deal with the forces of darkness. And we have this authority because of Christ's willingness to die on the cross and rise again, thereby defeating Satan, sin, and death once and for all. We fight from a place of **victory** and **authority**, seated with Christ in His heavenly command center (Ephesians 2:6).

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- So Jesus Christ owns this infinitely powerful authority, and He has given it to you and to me. Obviously, there is a patchwork of other authorities on this earth – civil authority, political authority, family authority, financial authority, etc. So we can't just do anything and everything we want to do. I don't know about you, but I can't be trusted with THAT level of authority! But when it comes to spiritual warfare with Satan – how much authority do we have?

[Have someone read the next section about “Weapon #2: Our Spiritual Armor” including the six elements of our armor. Alternatively, have each person in the group read the description of each armor piece.]

>>Weapon #2: Our Spiritual Armor

In rugby, football, and war, we have learned that without a good defense, we have no offense. In the heat of a military battle, it doesn't matter how skillful we are with our offensive weapons. If we take a bullet in the chest, we're done. That's why men invented armor. But God created *spiritual* armor long before that for our spiritual battles.

Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then,

*with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate of righteousness** in place, and with your **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**. In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the **helmet of salvation** and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God. – Ephesians 6:13-17*

Consider briefly each element of the armor God has given us:

Belt of Truth. Satan's chief tactic is deceit. Our only counter move is truth. As we strap on this Belt of Truth, it alerts us to the lies and deceitful tactics of the enemy and helps us fight with efficiency.

Breastplate of Righteousness. The breastplate's main function is to protect the organs that are vital to your life. You can function without a hand or a leg, but if you lose a heart – that's it. Our spiritual heart – the seat of our emotions, will, and identity – is guarded by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which was given to us when we were saved.

Sandals of the Gospel of Peace. Sandals protect your feet and give you traction and stability. Without them those who haven't walked barefoot a lot would move too slowly and fearfully – an easy target in battle. Since we have responded to God's "good news," He gives us peace even in the midst of the battle.

Shield of Faith. As we believe in and count on His power and authority to protect us, our shield will stay solid and we will be protected. If we shift our focus to our enemy and his strength, our faith can waiver. Our faith repels the spiritual "arrows" that our enemy shoots at us hoping to wound and defeat us.

Helmet of Salvation. As the breastplate protects our body's vital organs, the helmet protects our other vital organ and the command center of our lives: our brain. If the head is injured, the rest of the body will not work. Satan's *main* attacks will focus on our *minds* – the seat of our intellect and thinking. God's salvation protects us from Satan's influence.

Sword of the Spirit. This is a unique element, because it can be both a defensive *and* an offensive weapon. The sword is the Word of God. When Jesus was attacked by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), He turned aside every thrust of His adversary with a verse of Scripture and defeated him.

- No one goes into battle without armor – at least, not if they're smart. It's the same thing with going into spiritual battle. God has provided us with armor that will keep us safe from the enemy's attacks. The important thing is to *put it on*, just as it says at the beginning of the verse we just read. Some of these pieces of armor were put on us upon our salvation (for instance, the Breastplate of Righteousness). Other pieces require that we intentionally put them on new every day. How do we go about "putting on" the armor of God?

[You may only get confused looks at this question – it's a tricky one! The answer is pretty simple: we pray and ask God to do it! Each morning, spend a few minutes asking God to strap on each piece of His armor so that you will be protected from the spiritual bullets, arrows, spears, land mines, and bombs of our enemy Satan.]

[Have someone read the opening paragraph of the next section about "Weapon #3" (not reading all the Bible references), and then ask three or four people to look up and read three or four of the verses to give people an idea of how the Bible shows spiritual work getting done by the spoken word. Alternatively, if group members don't normally have easy access to a Bible, look up and write down four or five of the verses on cards before the group meets, pass out the cards, and have group members read each one. After each is read, ask the group...]

- How do each of these verses demonstrate God's "work" getting done using the spoken word?

>>Weapon #3: The Word of God

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The way things are accomplished in the spiritual realm is not through muscle-power, electricity, computers, bulldozers or bombs. They are accomplished by *the spoken word*. For an interesting study on this, look up the following verses and see how God, Jesus and His disciples used the spoken word to accomplish spiritual work:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Genesis 1:3 | • Mark 4:39 |
| • Matthew 4:10 | • John 11:43,44 |
| • Matthew 9:6 | • Acts 3:6-8 |
| • Matthew 12:13 | • Acts 13:8-11 |
| • Mark 1:25,26 | • Acts 16:18 |

[Have someone read the rest of this section up to the "Conclusions."]

In the listing of your spiritual armor, the Sword of the Spirit is clearly equated with God's Word. When God wanted to create, He commanded matter into existence. When Jesus wanted to defeat Satan, heal, calm a storm, raise the dead or control a demon, He spoke a word of commandment. When Jesus' disciples needed to heal or do spiritual warfare, they followed His example and spoke commands as representatives of their Master.

This is also how Jesus wants *you* to fight your enemy. You occupy the high ground, you have superior fire power, righteous authority, and spiritual allies (angels). You accomplish spiritual war by *speaking* your commands to your enemy, just as Jesus did when He fought Satan in the wilderness in Matthew 4.

Here are some important "spiritual combat" tactics that Jesus employed in his fight with Satan:

- He addressed His enemy directly when He knew He was being attacked.
- He resisted Satan, using the authority He had been given by God the Father.
- He got out His sword – He used the Word of God as the legal basis of His resistance.
- He verbally commanded Satan to be silent and to leave.
- Immediately after the fight, He communed with God.

Let's do a little practice warfare. In each case listed below, how would you use your sword (your words and the Word of God) to counter Satan when he is attacking or tempting you, using the five tactics that were just read?

- Sexual temptation
- Discouragement and depression
- Anger, rage, and thoughts of revenge
- Dishonesty

[Here is an example of how someone might handle the first one: Sexual temptation...]

"Satan, I am a child of God, redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I belong to Him. I am addressing you now in the power and authority of Jesus Christ which He has given me. I see what you are trying to do. You are trying to get me to have sex with that woman. But God has said in His Word, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11). Since you are trying to get me to disobey the Word of God, you are in the wrong, and I condemn you. I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be silent, stop what you're doing, and get out of here!"

Then, spend a little time in prayer, thanking God for your victory, and meditating on the verse you used.]

[Have someone – or you – read the "Conclusions."]

Conclusions:

- Satan, like a roaring lion, is seeking to devour you (1 Peter 5:8). He doesn't want to trip you up, make you feel bad, embarrass you, or injure you. He wants to destroy you. Take this *very seriously*.
- However, God is on your side. He has provided you with a vast array of defensive and offensive weapons which – if used properly – will keep you safe from the influences of your enemy.
- Be sure that Satan has not already wounded you, by checking for Doorways and Footholds.

As you become more aware of the tactics of your enemy and more skilled at **DEFENDING** yourself, you will move ever-closer to your place of healing.

- In closing, look back over this chapter, and I'd like to hear each person share one new thing they learned that is going to make you a more skillful fighter when it comes to spiritual warfare.

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Bridge 8: SEEING

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. . . who you really are

Crossing the River of Self-Hatred

Objectives of this Chapter:

- To help group members recognize how trauma can open the door to a negative, destructive self-perception through the agencies of Satan, the world system surrounding us, and our own negative self-talk.
- To counter Satan's lies with the truth of God found in His Word.

[Have someone read the opening story, "Forgetting the truth."]

Forgetting the truth

Tigran was walking down the main street of his town, on his way to visit a friend. As he crossed a street, he glanced down the sidewalk to his right and saw a man sitting on the ground staring straight ahead. His clothes were dirty and torn, his hair had not been groomed for quite a while, and there was an empty vodka bottle on the ground next to him. There was something familiar about him, so Tigran slowed down and looked harder at the man.

Finally, he recognized him. "Sargis? Is it you?"

The man slowly turned his head, looked Tigran in the eyes, and then looked away again. "No, you've got the wrong guy."

Tigran walked over to him. "Sargis it's me, Tigran. I remember you from school. We played football together. Don't you remember me?"

Sargis looked down at his hands. "Yes, I remember you, Tigran. It's good to see you. But I'm not who you remember me to be."

"The last I heard, Sargis, you had gone off to military training school. They had made you an officer, and everyone was very proud of you! Something . . . something must have happened. How have you come to this?"

Sargis squinted up at Tigran. "You don't want to know. Nice seeing you – now go away."

Tigran sat down next to Sargis and said, "Sorry, it appears my legs won't hold me up any longer. I must sit down. So while I'm here, tell me what happened, and why you are sitting here like this."

Sargis put his hands over his bloodshot eyes, shielding them from the sun. "Tigran, you shouldn't waste your time here with me. You were going somewhere, I'm not. So go. I'm not worth your concern."

"Sargis, my friend, I don't believe that for a moment. We are friends. We were teammates. We grew up together. I *am* concerned about you, and I want to hear your story."

Sargis looked over at Tigran and smiled a crooked smile. “Do-gooder. You always were a do-gooder.”

“And you always were the best player on our football team. The fastest, the strongest, the craziest – we had a great team, didn’t we?”

Sargis put his hands back over his eyes. “Well, those days are gone. I’m nothing now. Tigran, my body and my mind are broken. I am a drunk, a cripple, I can’t keep a job, my wife has left me and took the children, and I don’t know how I’m going to keep alive. The war did this to me. There is no hope for me now. I am a worthless nobody.”

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No. I don’t accept that. I know you, and God knows you – even if *you* have forgotten who you are. You are *not* broken, you are *wounded*, and you’re not dead yet. Let’s go get some coffee. I’m going to remind you who you are.”

- Do you know anybody like Sargis? Tell us a little about him/her. What were they like before the war? What are they like now?
- How have your war-related trauma experiences changed your opinion of yourself? Has your self-perception become more positive or more negative?
- What did Sargis think about himself after his war experiences?
- Was he correct? *[In terms of how Sargis was currently living his life, yes – he was a drunk, disabled, etc. But that isn’t who he is. Proverbs 23:7 says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” What we think about ourselves will strongly shape how we act, how we see ourselves, and how others see us. That’s why it’s so important that we tell ourselves the truth.]*
- What do you think Tigran meant when he said, “I’m going to remind you of who you are.”? (Did he mean to say, “Who you were” or “Who you are”?)

[Have someone read the next section about “Combat Trauma and self-hatred” up to “Self-perception...”]

Combat Trauma and self-hatred

Call it what you want – it has many names. Low self-esteem, negative self-image, broken self-identity, poor opinion of yourself, pessimistic self-view . . . but it all comes down to this: *self-hatred*. If Satan can get you to be overly critical of yourself and to judge yourself so harshly that you hate yourself, it’s only a short walk from there to suicide, which is your enemy’s ultimate objective for you.

When a person – especially a soldier – experiences severe trauma, how they see themselves is often shaken to the core. While they used to see themselves as clear-thinking, self-sufficient, capable, strong, and worthy, those characteristics are replaced by feelings of fear, confusion, powerlessness, and helplessness.

The effects of this negative self-image bleed into a person’s behavior too – destroying their plans, activities, priorities, reactions, values, hopes, dreams, ambition, social interaction . . . the list goes on and on.

While trauma may have begun the fire of your self-hatred, there are three other factors that continue to add fuel to that fire: **Satan, the world around you, and negative self-talk**. These three work together to make you believe in yourself less and less, and rob you of your hope for a

good future. We must expose these three enemies, see the damage they have already done, and recognize their attacks as they come.

- What forces are at work that will fuel a combat veteran’s fire of negative self-image and self-hatred?
- How will Satan use this self-hatred as a doorway or foothold to defeat someone who suffers from war-related trauma?

[Have someone read the first paragraph of the next section – not the Assessment pairs yet...]

Self-perception Assessment – How you see yourself

Dr. Steven Stosney, an international authority on trauma and victimization, has developed a very useful tool that will help assess your current self-perception – how positively or negatively you see yourself. Dr. Stosney’s normal approach goes much deeper than we’ll be able to apply in this writing, but some of the parts will be very useful here. There are eight types of self-perception listed below – the positive side and the negative side. Place an “X” somewhere on each line that indicates how you currently see yourself. In each category, would you say you are farther to the left, or to the right?

- Let’s take a minute and do this Assessment by yourselves silently. As the directions say, put an “X” on the line between the matched pairs that best describes your current opinion of yourself. *[Make sure that everyone understands each of the terms used.]*
- When we’re done, we’ll share our assessments with the group and give them a general perception of how you have “scored” yourself.
- At the end of this Bridge, we’re going to re-visit this Assessment and see how it has changed.



Respected ----- Not Respected

Important ----- Unimportant

Forgiven ----- Accused/Guilty

Valued ----- Not Valued

Accepted ----- Rejected

Powerful ----- Powerless

Lovable ----- Unlovable

Connected ----- Separated

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[After everyone has finished their self-assessment...]

- Let’s go around the group and share your general observations about the self-assessment you just did. You don’t have to talk about each pair of characteristics. Consider these questions:
 - Which assessments do you feel pretty good about?
 - Which ones concern you?
 - Do you think where you put your X on the lines can move more to the left?

[Have someone read the rest of this section, up to “Deception #1...”]

Obviously, your enemy want your X's as far to the right side as possible, which keeps you in a defenseless position. If that's where your X's are today, it's because you have been fed **LIES!** Here's what the Son of God says about Satan:

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

– John 8:44

At this moment, you may not be on a physical battlefield, but you *are* in a war. And as you learned as you crossed Bridge 7, all war is based on deception. Satan has been perfecting his deceptive tactics for thousands of years. In this chapter, we're going to expose as many of Satan's lies as we can. When deception is exposed, the ones who *used to be* deceived now have an advantage. We want you to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "We are not ignorant of his schemes." (2 Corinthians 2:11)

These lies were created by Satan himself. He'll whisper them in your subconscious at your weakest moments. You'll be reminded of incidents in your childhood that "prove" them. He'll tell you how your current traumatized condition also "proves" his lies. He'll reinforce them with messages coming at you from the world system that surrounds you. He'll be sure you're listening when your friends echo the same lies either accidentally or on purpose. And before long, he'll have you telling *yourself* the lies. And we all know how closely we listen to our own opinions.

But why should you believe the lies of your enemies? Instead, you should feel confident about believing the truths that come from the One who created you and who loves you enough to send His Son to die for you. Following are **eight deceptive traps** Satan and the world have laid for you. Consider whether or not you've heard them before. Each lie will be followed by the countering **TRUTH** that God wants you to hear and believe.

- Why do we tend to believe the lies of our enemy? Why don't we naturally recognize them and reject them?
- Why is it so destructive to hang on to these lies? What can happen to us if we continue to believe them?

[Have someone read "Deception #1," up to "Your TRUE Identity: Respected."]

>>Deception #1: Not Respected

Lies of the enemy:

- You are a nobody.
- No one cares about you. Why *should* they?
- No one wants to know you.
- You don't deserve the respect that others receive.
- Who do you think you are, anyway?

Have you heard any of those comments before? Have you made them to yourself? Maybe those exact words weren't used, but after their world has been turned upside down, many war-related trauma victims hear and believe these satanic messages. "You've proven to be someone who should not and must not be respected." You hear that, you look at your situation, you look at how people respond to you, and you believe in the "truth" of those lies.

Spiritual IEDs (Improvised Explosive Device – like a hidden roadside bomb). To be effective, every lie must have an element of truth. No good deception ever *looks* like a deception. The IEDs that are so effective at wounding and killing people look harmless: a tuft of grass beside the road, a bit of trash, a little rubble. That's why they work. If we don't have some information to the contrary, we assume that the lies we see and hear are the truth.

Well, God wants to give you *true* information that counters Satan's deceptions. Your trauma has changed you – that's the element of truth. But to say, "Because I have changed and I am not functioning as I used to, I am not worthy of respect" is an absolute lie and needs to be opposed by God's truth.

Not only is God's Word *true*, but it is also *living and active* according to Hebrews 4:12. That means that the Bible is not just words that some ancient prophet scribbled on paper several centuries ago. It continues to live today. And as you read those words, and as the Holy Spirit energizes and breathes life into them, they become the words of God spoken directly to *you*, right here in the twenty-first century.

The above facts hold true for all eight of the lie-countering truths that we'll be examining below.

- Have any of you ever heard and believed any of those five "lies from the enemy" listed at the beginning of this section? If so, why did you think they were the truth?
- Think about one of the times you heard and believed one of those lies. We just read that every lie must have an element of truth in order to be effective. What was the element of truth that convinced you to believe that lie?

[Leader: before the class, think about a time when this happened to you, and be prepared to share it if the participants need a little prompting.]

- Let's read each of these scripture verses and answer the questions (filling in the blanks) one at a time. Who will read the first one?

[Leader: let anyone answer each question who would like to. Finish this section by having someone read the final paragraph.]

Your TRUE Identity: Respected



Fill in the blank after each verse. These verses tell the truth about who you *really* are.

[Jesus speaking:] *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. – John 15:15*

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, calls you His _____.

So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters.

– Hebrews 2:11

- Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call you His _____.

Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. – Ephesians 1:4

- You were known, loved and chosen by God how long ago?

_____.

Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir. – Galatians 4:7

- You are God's child and also His _____.

The above Scriptures describe *you* as a friend, brother (or sister), child and heir of the King of the Universe! He has had plans for you even since before He created Adam and Eve. And you can be sure He is really excited that you finally showed up! You are ***loved*** and ***highly respected!***

[Have someone read "Deception #2," up to "Your TRUE Identity: Important."]

>>Deception #2: Not Important

Lies of the enemy:

- No one wants to hear your opinions.
- You're a little fish in a big lake.
- Go sit on the sidelines.
- Don't call us, we'll call you.
- What have you ever accomplished?

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- Why do you think that Satan would want you to think you are not important?

- Again, let's go around the group and read each scripture verse in the next section, and answer the question associated with it. Be sure to write your answers in the blanks provided. [Then have someone read the final paragraph.]

Your TRUE Identity: Important



After each verse, answer the questions which identify who you *really* are.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. – John 1:12

- Assuming you have received Christ, you have rightly been designated as what?

_____.

- When you consider all of eternity and all the other animals and angels that God created who are *not* called His children, how important would you say *that* was?

_____.

You are the salt of the earth. – Matthew 5:13

- God has made you His _____ on the earth. As such, what will your influence be?

_____.

You are the light of the world. – Matthew 5:14

- God has made you His _____ in the world. How will this help the world?
_____.

Not only do you hold important status as an eternal child of God, but you are also His seasoning of a godless civilization, His light in this dark world, and you have been trained and qualified for unique future leadership in Christ's Kingdom on earth. He was wounded, and all those who follow Him also receive wounds, as you have. You've been through the refiner's fire. The Bible predicts that in the end times society will crumble and treacherous times will come – and those times may come very soon. We may already be experiencing them. Who better to lead us through those traumatic times than someone like you? As a soldier, you have been to hell and back. It is hated but familiar territory for you. You are *important* now, but in the coming years you will be *extremely valuable*.

- In what ways do you think you could be considered “extremely valuable” in the coming years?

[Have someone read “Deception #3,” up to “Your TRUE Identity: Forgiven.”]

>>Deception #3: Accused/Guilty**Lies of the enemy:**

- You did a terrible thing.
- You are unforgivable.
- You need to be punished.
- You can't be trusted.
- Everyone knows what a hypocrite you are.

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- How do you think it would affect you if you were constantly weighed down with heavy feelings of guilt?

- Let's go through the next section, reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Forgiven

You already learned a lot about this when you crossed over Bridge 4, but a little more input shouldn't hurt. After each verse, consider what each says about who you really are.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. – Romans 8:1

- Assuming you're a Christian, what will you *not* experience?

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:1

- You have been _____ by faith, which means “declared not guilty.” So you are no longer at war with God. Now you have _____ with Him. You and God are no longer enemies. Your war crimes are no longer being held against you.

Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. – Hebrews 10:17

- What does God think about your sins and lawless acts?

[Note: He doesn't think about them at all – He doesn't remember them!]

- So, when we confess our sins, and then – because we still feel guilty – we bring them up to God again and ask for forgiveness, somebody do an impression of God – what would He say to us in response? *[Something like, "Huh? What are you talking about? I don't remember you ever doing anything like that!"]*
- How does knowing that you are in a right relationship with God, and not carrying around a load of guilt, make a difference in your attitude, your energy level, your relationships, your ministry, etc.?

[Have someone read "Deception #4, up to "Your TRUE Identity: Valued."]

>>Deception #4: Not Valued

Lies of the enemy:

- We don't need you.
- You're not good enough.
- You don't have what it takes.
- You are absolutely worthless.
- We will find someone better than you.

- If someone were to say these things to you, how would it make you feel? What would it do to your self-confidence, your ambition, and your motivation to do good for others?

[Can you see why Satan would want you to believe it?]

- Let's go through the next section on "Valued," reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Valued



After each verse, see why your true designation is "Valued by God":

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness." – Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)

- Who loves you? _____ How long has this been going on?

- How valuable do you think being loved eternally by God and brought into an everlasting love relationship with Him makes you?

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

– 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 (NLT)

- What has your physical body become?

- When Israel was strong, and before Christ came, the Temple in Jerusalem was the one place on earth where God met with mankind. It was the most magnificent and expensive building on the planet at the time for that reason. Since Christ's resurrection, we have become the Temple of God. Now we are where God is manifested and represented. So, would you say we are valuable or not valuable?

- Additionally, this verse says we were bought for a high price. What was the price that God the Father paid to buy us? _____

- Name something you own that you value highly. How is your attitude toward that item similar to God's attitude toward you?

[Have someone read "Deception #5, up to "Your TRUE Identity: Accepted."]

>>Deception #5: Rejected

Lies of the enemy:

- You are a failure.
- Please leave.
- No one wants you. No one needs you.
- You are not qualified.
- Everyone else is better than you.

- Can anyone here share a time when they were rejected in their pursuit of something that was very important to them? A job, a spot on a sport team, a relationship?
 - Once you truly realized you were rejected, how did that change your attitude toward what you previously desired so strongly?
 - How did it change your attitude toward yourself?
 - If you believed you were rejected by God or His people, how would your attitude toward Him (or them) change?

- Let's go through the next section on "Accepted," reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Accepted



After each verse, observe why your true designation is "Accepted by God":

To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. – Ephesians 1:6

- God's grace made you what in the Beloved (Christ)?

As you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:4,5

- The “living Stone” is Jesus Christ, who was rejected by mankind (when He was crucified), but chosen and precious to the Father. In the same way, you were selected by the Master Stonemason to be part of His spiritual house, and you are therefore shown to be what to God through Jesus Christ? _____

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – Hebrews 4:16

- Since we are allowed to approach God’s throne “boldly,” would this indicate that we are barely acceptable or totally acceptable to God?

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- Satan says you are unacceptable. God says you are totally acceptable. On what basis are you now acceptable to God? What changed?

[Have someone read “Deception #6, up to “Your TRUE Identity: Powerful.”]

>>Deception #6: Powerless

Lies of the enemy:

- You are weak.
- You are damaged goods.
- Can you do *anything* right?
- How helpless can one person be?
- Someone always has to take care of you.

- Why would your enemy want you to believe that you are powerless?

- Let’s go through the next section on “Powerful,” reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Powerful



After each verse, answer the questions which indicate your **power** as a son or daughter of the King.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. – 2 Timothy 1:7

- What kind of a “spirit” has God given us? _____

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. – 1 John 4:4

- “He who is in the world” refers to Satan and his allies. Between us and them, which one is the more powerful? _____

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. – 1 John 5:4,5

- As a Christian, you are “born of God.” “The world” referred to is the world system that is ruled over by Satan. When you and the world have a fight, who has the power to win? _____

- Can anyone describe a person who has a “spirit of fear” in contrast with someone who has a “spirit of power?”
- If you have a “spirit of fear,” where did it come from? *[Not from God! See first verse above.]*
- What is the role of “faith” when it comes to living a life of “power?” *[See third verse.]*

[Have someone read “Deception #7, up to “Your TRUE Identity: Lovable.”]

>>Deception #7: Unlovable

Lies of the enemy:

- Who would ever love you?
- You are so ugly and boring.
- You really have no good qualities.
- You are beyond being loved – by God or by other people.

- If a person is convinced that they are unloved and unlovable, how do you think they will act toward others?
- What will their attitude be toward God?

- Let's go through the next section about “Lovable,” reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Lovable

You are of *infinite* worth. God was so much in love with you that He was willing to sacrifice His Son to redeem you from your sins. Even if you were the only person on earth, He would have done it for you. Obviously, there is *something* about you that is *infinitely* lovable! Answer the questions following each verse...



For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38,39

- Make a list from the above verse of the things that God would fight through in order to get to you because of His love for you:

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. – John 15:13

- Jesus made this statement shortly before He was crucified. Who were the “friends” He was referring to, for whom He was about to lay down His life?

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. – Romans 5:8

- How much love would it take for you to be willing to die for someone else? Would you do it for your mother? Your child? Your best friend? You may have had an experience in this war where someone got in harm’s way so that you could live. *That* was a supremely unselfish, loving act. But could you imagine being willing to die for someone who had betrayed you the night before, spit in your face, punched you in the stomach, stole your wallet, your car, and your wife? Would you be willing to die for an Azerbaijani soldier? You would have to hold incredible love and forgiveness to die for *that* person – probably beyond what we humans are capable of. And yet, that’s who we were when Christ died on the cross for us. That’s how much He loves us.

- What do you think you need to do to earn God’s love? *[Nothing. He has loved you with “an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3), from even before you were born (Ephesians 1:4).*
- What will make God stop loving you? *[Nothing – see first verse above.]*

[Have someone read “Deception #8, up to “Your TRUE Identity: Connected.”]

>>Deception #8: Separated

Lies of the enemy:

- You are alone and you should stay that way.
- No one wants you on their team.
- You have no tribe, no group to belong to.
- People wish you were not here.
- You don’t need anybody else anyway.

- Often, when a person leaves the military or a career in law enforcement, they feel cut off from the “tribe” that they belonged to for years. The core of their identity is gone. They feel adrift, alone, without purpose. What do you think this can lead to if not countered? *[Suicide.]*
- Have any of you ever felt separated and alone, without a “tribe?” Tell the group what brought it on, what it was like, and if it ever got resolved.

- Let’s go through the next section on “Connected,” reading the verses and then answering the questions.

Your TRUE Identity: Connected



Answer the questions following each verse related to how connected you are to God and to His people.

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You are connected to God:

[Jesus speaking:] I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. – John 15:5

- What picture of “connectedness” did Jesus use to show how attached we are to Him? _____

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:26

- What are some deep, meaningful ways that children and parents are connected?

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. – Galatians 2:20

- This verse indicates that Christ lives where? _____ Can you imagine being any closer than *that*?

You are connected to the Body of Christ – other Christians:

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:27

- What are all Christians a part of? _____
- How connected are the various cells and organs of your body?

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. – Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)

- This verse gives us two pictures of our “connectedness” with other people. What are they? _____

[Have someone read the next paragraph.]

As you work through the difficulties of your war-related trauma, there will be times when you feel alone, rejected, unlovable, devalued and unimportant. That's when Satan will do all he can to affirm and magnify those thoughts. It's at that time that you need to recognize his tactics. He's using deception to move you closer to defeat. He is **lying**. How can you tell when Satan is lying? Whenever you hear his voice! Counter his lies with the truth from God's Word.

- As we have read through these eight sets of character qualities, what is the general effect that Satan's lies tend to have on a person who believes them?

[Leader: after they've shared their thoughts on this, read the next paragraph...]

Here is a proclamation that declares the truth about who you really are in opposition to the lies of Satan. Make this proclamation daily, out loud if possible, based on what you just learned about yourself from God's Word.

- Let's go around the group, and have each person read a TRUE identity characteristic and the bullet points beneath it. *[They don't need to read the Bible references out loud.]*

[Alternatively, if you'd like to make it more of a group bonding experience, have everyone stand up in a circle, hold the manual in their left hand and put their right hand on the shoulder of the person next to them, and all read the Proclamation together out loud.]

THIS IS WHO I AM:

Respected

- I am a friend of the Almighty God of heaven and earth. (John 15:15)
- Jesus is not ashamed to call me His brother (sister). (Hebrews 2:11)
- I am chosen by God, holy and without fault in His eyes. (Ephesians 1:4)
- I am an heir to the riches of the Creator of the universe. (Galatians 4:7)

Important

- I have been rightly called a child of God. (John 1:12)
- God has made me His salt and light in the world. (Matthew 5:13,14)
- I am an eternal being. (John 3:16)

Forgiven

- I am no longer condemned. (Romans 8:1)
- I have been justified before the righteous Judge. (Romans 5:1)
- I am at peace with God. (Romans 5:1)
- God no longer remembers my sins. (Hebrews 10:17)

Valued

- God loves me with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)
- I am God's temple, bought at a great price. (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)
- God knows, chose, called, justified and glorified me. (Romans. 8:29,30)

Accepted

- I am accepted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:6 NKJV)
- I am a chosen, costly, living stone in God's building. (1 Peter 2:4,5)
- I have bold, unrestricted access to God's throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)

Powerful

- God has given me the spirit of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)
- God's Spirit in me is greater than any unholy spirits in the world. (1 John 4:4)
- I am born of God and believe in Jesus – I am a world overcomer. (1 John 5:4,5)

Lovable

- I am loved by God and *nothing* will keep us apart. (Romans 8:38,39)
- I am loved supremely – enough for God to die for me. (John 15:13)
- I am loved unconditionally, *even* when I sin. – (Romans 5:8)

Connected

- I am intimately attached to Christ and bearing fruit. (John 15:5)
- Christ is as close to me as my heart and lungs. (Galatians 2:20)
- I am a member of God's eternal family. (Galatians 3:26)
- I am part of Christ's body with millions of brothers and sisters. (1 Cor. 12:27)
- I am an eternal member of God's Kingdom and household. (Ephesians 2:19)

- I'd like to strongly recommend that you read this Proclamation and even say it out loud every day for the next month. You might even consider making a copy of it and putting it in your Bible, so it will be convenient to refer to. I think you'll notice a BIG change in how positively you see yourself.
- Now I'd like you to turn back to the Self-Perception Assessment you took a little while ago on page 78 & 79. Look where you put your "X" on each line. Has that assessment changed? If you feel differently about yourself now, just put a straight up-and-down line on the continuum where you think you are now.
- Would some of you who changed your assessment on one or more of these characteristics share with us why you changed it? What's different now?

[Leader: read the "Follow-up" paragraph below and have them put today's date in the blank.]

Follow-up:

What is today's date? _____ One month from today, re-take the "Self-Perception Assessment" that you completed at the beginning of this chapter. If you have been regularly thinking about and proclaiming the above truths concerning your true identity, you should notice that your "Xs" have traveled a lot farther to the left!

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[Have someone read the "Conclusions."]

Conclusions:

- Satan and the world are constantly telling you lies about yourself. His objective is to cause you to hate yourself and become so depressed that you no longer want to live. Rather than believe the lies from the Father of All Lies, you should believe what the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life says about you.
- How you see yourself is very important. It will affect a great number of important areas of your life. Be sure that your self-perception is lined up with how God sees you.
- When you are **SEEING** yourself the way God sees you, you will cross this bridge. As long as you aren't going back over the other bridges the wrong way, you will be in a place where your healing can proceed rapidly, and you will be moving toward a place of every-strengthening stability in Christ!

FINAL MEETING

Your final meeting should be a great time of celebration and honor. Plan on having a dinner, invite spouses and family members. Have each group member come to the front and say a few words about what they experienced during the time the group met, and then you should lead the group in prayer for that person.

It would also be appropriate to present each group member with a memento of some sort – a certificate (see next page for an example), a medal, a coin, a small carving – something physical that will remind him or her of their time in this group, and of all God did during that time.

Your next job – if it hasn't already been accomplished – is to get the group members involved in some sort of service to others. A great idea would be to encourage them to lead a Bridges to Healing group, or to assist you in your next one. Don't let them stop growing now! Keep them motivated to continue seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33)!

Here is an example of a Graduation Certificate you could make for your group members...



YOU DIDN'T START THIS.

You didn't ask for this war. You weren't looking for a fight. The trauma you have experienced was not your fault. **But HEALING is your responsibility.**

Whether you are a soldier on the ground, a pilot flying an attack jet, an officer, a medic, a clerk, or a truck driver hauling ammunition and supplies, even a civilian just trying to survive and keep your family safe, if you've been operating in the war zone and have feared for your life, you have experienced war trauma. And it has changed you.

We know that a person in combat can receive physical wounds. We are also familiar with psychological wounds. But have you ever considered that you may also have experienced a "soul wound?" Many people go to war feeling three-meters-tall and bullet-proof. But then they experience trauma that is beyond what they expected, trained for, or had ever experienced before. It rattles them to their very core and their self-image is altered significantly. The part of them that relates to the world around them and to God, the part that interprets and explains to themselves what has happened to them doesn't function as it did before. Fear, anger, hypervigilance, and despair take control.



But it's important to understand that you are not broken. **You are wounded.** And wounds can heal – if they are properly cared for. You didn't start this war. You didn't want to experience trauma. But you did. And if you want to heal, the worst thing you can do is be passive about it, to pretend it didn't happen, to stuff down the painful memories and hope they don't come back. They always will. But if you take the initiative, if you are diligent about seeking your healing, and partner with God in the process He lays out to bring you once again to a place of strength and stability, **you will heal.** Things won't go back to the way they were before your trauma. That's a bell that can't get un-rung. But God can bring you to a *new* place, a *better* place, a *stronger* place, a place from which you can help others who experience trauma and be better prepared for future trauma. Because of your wounds, when you heal **YOU** can help lead us through these traumatic times.

This manual will help you to do all that.

Don't give up. Don't go passive. You may be down, but you are not out. Your wounds can heal. We say to you the same thing that the Angel of the Lord said to Gideon, the great Judge of Israel: "The Lord is with you, valiant warrior!" (Judges 6:12)

REBOOT RECOVERY
OVERCOMING TRAUMA **TOGETHER**

Reboot Recovery USA: RebootRecovery.com

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