Benefits of Addressing Emotional Pain

We believe that addressing emotional pain from your past can do the following:

1. Give you the freedom to intimately relate to your spouse and family. If you leave behind the anger, fear, guilt, and shame of your past, you will remove many of the hindrances to intimacy in your relationships.

2. Give you the freedom to trust God to meet many of your unmet needs through your spouse, according to God’s timetable and agenda.

3. Give you the opportunity to enjoy adult-to-adult relationships with your parents or other childhood caregivers. Receiving healing for childhood emotional wounds frees you to move out of a dependent, care-receiving role.

4. Give you a new appreciation for the positive aspects of your relationships with your family of origin. Unhealed hurts can blind you to the positive qualities of your parents or other childhood caregivers.

What thoughts do you have about these benefits that you may experience as a result of addressing your emotional pain? __________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
# Emotional Pain Over the Life Cycle

“In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

## Prenatal/Birth Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Sources</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Maternal bitterness and resentment of pregnancy</td>
<td>• Emotional, pre-verbal pain (no thoughts associated with this emotional pain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional rejection of the developing fetus</td>
<td>• Emotional “flashbacks” of rage, fear, insecurity, or helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attempted but unsuccessful abortion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict-filled prenatal environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Problematic/traumatic delivery of the infant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Childhood Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Sources</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Physical or sexual abuse (rape, incest, beatings)</td>
<td>• Childhood dysfunctions (withdrawal, rage, bedwetting, nightmares)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional or verbal abuse (criticism, ridicule, blame)</td>
<td>• Adult dysfunctions (addictions, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional neglect (lack of affection and empathy)</td>
<td>• Relationship difficulties brought on by avoidance, “clinging,” using others, rejecting others, and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parental divorce, parental death, or adoption (leading to feelings of abandonment or rejection)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer ridicule or rejection (cruel insults, humiliating pranks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-inflicted (Narcissistic) pain (brought on by placing unreasonable demands on oneself)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Adolescent Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Sources</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parental domination or intolerance (produces anger and lack of trust)</td>
<td>• Moodiness, withdrawal, or silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parental withdrawal or neglect (produces fear and low self-esteem)</td>
<td>• Rejection of home environment in favor of a more accepting environment that offers a sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marital discord or divorce</td>
<td>• Addictions/self-destructive behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer ridicule or rejection (romantic breakups, betrayals by friends)</td>
<td>• Sexual experimentation in an attempt to find intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-inflicted (Narcissistic) pain (brought on by placing unreasonable demands on oneself)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Adult Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Sources</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Misplaced marital priorities (pain experienced when a person senses that his or her spouse values work, children, parents, church, hobbies, or something else more highly than the marriage relationship)</td>
<td>• Isolation in place of intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marital infidelity, separation, or divorce</td>
<td>• Conflict and manipulation in place of mutual giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marital replication of childhood hurts</td>
<td>• Mutual accusations and defensiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pain caused by children (disrespect, rebellion, rejection)</td>
<td>• Attempts to find a more “ideal” spouse/infidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pain caused by friends (betrayal, broken promises)</td>
<td>• Anxiety/depression/substance abuse/suicidal thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pain related to one’s career (stress, frustrated dreams)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five Options for Dealing with Inevitable Pain

Option #5: Heal the Pain (Healthy Mourning)
Grief Process:
- Acknowledgment ➔ Expression ➔
- Comfort ➔ Acceptance ➔
- Forgiveness ➔ Resolution

Relationship Implication: “My heart remains clear, open, sensitive, and receptive to ongoing intimacy with you.”

Option #3: Medicate the Pain (Addiction Cycle)
- Alcoholism Relationship
- Workaholism Implication: “My heart is anesthetized to the point that I have no emotions with which to achieve intimacy with you.”
- Religious Addiction
- Perfectionism
- Compulsivity
- Money Addiction
- Food Addiction

Option #4: Deny the Pain (Relationship Addiction)
- Collapsed Boundaries Implication: “I deny my pain by:
  - Attempting to lose my pain through merger with you.
  - Rescuing you from your pain.
  - Carrying your pain for you.
  - Inflicting my pain on you.
  - Allowing you to control me.”
- Artificial Roles
- Pseudointimacy
- Possessiveness
- Control
- Struggles

Option #1: Turn Pain Outward (Projection)
- Criticism Relationship Implication: “I push you away from me out of fear that you may reject me.”
- Attacks
- Blame
- Rageaholism

Option #2: Turn Pain Inward (Introjection)
- Anxiety Relationship Implication: “I have no ‘me’ to bring to you in a relationship.”
- Depression
- Self-Destruction
- Self-Denial
- Psychosomatic Illnesses

PAIN
Healing Emotional Pain—An Overview

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

Healing emotional pain is not simply a matter of dismissing the past. It requires active work in each of three dimensions—the emotions, the mind, and the will. The emotions need to be freed to face and feel the hurt, the mind needs to be renewed in order to fully understand the truth concerning the hurt, and the will needs to be turned toward the task of forgiving the offender for inflicting the hurt. All three steps—(1) Facing the Hurt, (2) Understanding the Truth, and (3) Forgiving the Offender—are essential to the healing process.

Furthermore, the order of the three steps is also critical. We must begin the process of healing by facing our hurts. We cannot understand or forgive something that we refuse to acknowledge. If we try to understand our hurt before we face and feel it, we may tend to minimize, excuse, or rationalize it with statements such as, “I am sure that many others had it worse than I did,” or, “I know that they really did the best that they could.” These may be true statements, and they are important concepts that help us choose to forgive. But if they lead us to think, “I should not feel hurt,” they have diverted us from experiencing the necessary emotional aspects of our healing. Similarly, if we attempt to forgive before we have felt our pain, expressed it, received comfort, and come to understand the truth about it, our forgiveness will tend to be a product solely of the will, with little emotional depth or mental clarity. We can only truly forgive that which we have first deeply felt and truly understood.

Consider the example of Jesus as He faced crucifixion:

- First, He faced His hurt, refusing to deny, minimize, or spiritualize the pain: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38).
- Next, He came to understand the truth about His hurt as He viewed the offense and the offenders in the light of God’s truth: “They do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
- Finally, He forgave His offenders, extending to them the grace of the Father’s forgiveness: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

As we follow this pattern that Christ exemplified, we too can find healing for our emotional pain.
Healing Emotional Pain—Facing the Hurt

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38).

This first step in the three-part process of healing emotional pain deals directly with the emotions (although the mind and will are obviously also involved to some degree). We must fully face and feel our hurts if we hope to be able to understand the truth about the offense and the offender, and to extend genuine forgiveness. This process of facing our hurts includes three important components:

• First, we must establish what is to be forgiven. A good way to do this is to spend some quiet time reflecting on your pain and recording your thoughts in a journal. What hurtful things have you experienced? Have you been despised, rejected, abandoned, ridiculed, or neglected? Which of your relational needs have gone unmet? This process of identifying your hurts often takes some time, as different layers of pain are gradually uncovered. You may wish to review the handout Emotional Pain Over the Life Cycle as a means of identifying potential sources of your pain.

• Next, we must grieve the loss associated with the pain. To grieve is to focus on the emotions behind the pain we are experiencing, just as we would in the case of the death of a loved one. As you continue to reflect, begin recording your feelings in your journal. How did it make you feel to be despised, rejected, abandoned, ridiculed, or neglected? How did you feel when your need for acceptance, affection, attention, encouragement, or support went unmet? How do you feel as you consider the various hurts that have been inflicted on you over the course of the life cycle?

• Finally, we must receive comfort. God desires to comfort our grief, and He will often involve other people in this process. Identify a special “journeymate” (spouse, pastor, counselor, family member, or close friend) who is willing to grieve with you and minister comfort. Share with this person your written reflections concerning the hurts that you have experienced, the relational needs that have gone unmet, and the feelings that these painful experiences have produced. Allow him or her to grieve with you and offer words of comfort.
Healing Emotional Pain—Understanding the Truth

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

This second step in the three-part process of healing emotional pain deals with the mind. The pain that we feel as hurt is inflicted upon us and relational needs go unmet often causes us to embrace distorted perceptions of our offenders, ourselves, and God. In order to experience healing of our emotional pain, we must replace such distorted perceptions with accurate ones that reflect the truth, as follows:

Common Distorted Perceptions of Our Offenders
- They are evil villains.
- They are worthless.
- They can never be trusted.

Accurate Perceptions of Our Offenders
- They are more than villains—they are victims of the offenses of others.
- Underneath their hurtful behaviors lie unmet relational needs.
- They have a God-given worth that is not determined by their behavior.

Common Distorted Perceptions of Ourselves
- I have never done anything to deserve the hurts that I have received.
- I deserve to be treated badly.

Accurate Perceptions of Ourselves
- Like my offenders, I am both villain and victim—neither fully blameless nor fully deserving of the pain that I have suffered.
- I am capable of any sin.
- I need forgiveness of my offenses against others just as others need forgiveness of their offenses against me.

Common Distorted Perceptions of God
- God is too uninvolved to really care about my pain.
- God cannot be trusted.

Accurate Perceptions of God
- God proved his love by sending Jesus to die for me (Romans 5:8).
- Both I and my offenders have inestimable worth in God’s eyes.
- God can be trusted with my needs and pain.
Healing Emotional Pain—Forgiving the Offender

“Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

This final step in the three-part process of healing emotional pain deals with the will. After facing our pain and coming to understand the truth about the situation, we must make a conscious choice to release our pain and anger and to forgive, thus freeing both ourselves and our offenders. Before forgiveness can occur, however, several obstacles may have to be overcome. First, we must deal with any unresolved guilt by repenting and confessing our wrongdoing to both God and others and gratefully receiving forgiveness. Second, we must be willing to forgive ourselves, thus neutralizing any feelings of shame. Finally, we must counteract the fear that often serves as our defense mechanism against further hurt by receiving comfort and empathy from our “journeymates.”

Even if our guilt, shame, and fear can be successfully overcome, we may still be reluctant, for any number of reasons, to freely offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Listed below are some of the most common objections to the idea of extending forgiveness, along with important counterarguments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Objection</th>
<th>Truthful Counterargument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The offender has not asked for forgiveness.</td>
<td>Forgiveness is for your benefit — do not wait!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The offender has not changed.</td>
<td>What if God waited for you to change before forgiving you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The offender does not deserve forgiveness.</td>
<td>You do not deserve forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment is appropriate, and I will give it.</td>
<td>“Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord (see Romans 12:19 NASB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is my right to hold a grudge.</td>
<td>Holding grudges hurts you, not the offender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will forgive when I feel like it.</td>
<td>Forgiving is primarily a choice, not a feeling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once such objections are successfully overcome, forgiveness may proceed as follows:

- Release your pain and anger.
- Verbalize your choice to forgive each hurt to your “journeymate.”
- Destroy your list of offenses.
- Thank God for His forgiveness, which you have chosen to extend to others.
- If possible and appropriate, express your forgiveness to your offenders.
Therapeutic Letter Writing

(To be completed after reading through the Healing Emotional Pain—Facing the Hurt handout.)

These letters are to be written and then read aloud to your spouse, not mailed.

Dear Dad/Mom/Step-parent/Grandparent/Other,

I have been thinking about our relationship—about how I felt growing up and about some of the things that I needed, but did not receive from you.

• Some of my earliest emotional memories are of feeling . . .

• I know that I really needed . . .

• It hurt me so much when . . .

• I now often feel . . .

• It would mean so much to me if . . .

• I wish I could hear you say to me . . .

Sincerely,

After you and your spouse have both completed your therapeutic letters, take turns reading them to each other. Remember to emotionally respond to one another.
Dear God,

Thank you for revealing Your truth concerning those who have hurt me, myself, You, and Your work in my life. Your truth sets me free to move forward in my healing process.

It is true that I was hurt by ________________________________ in the following ways: __________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________.

I have believed the following lies about my offenders, myself, and You:
1. _____________________________________________________
2. _____________________________________________________
3. _____________________________________________________
4. _____________________________________________________

I reject these lies, and I affirm the following truths about my offenders, myself, and You:
1. _____________________________________________________
2. _____________________________________________________
3. _____________________________________________________
4. _____________________________________________________

Thank You for revealing Your truth to me in Your Word, the Bible. Help me to reject and refute any falsehoods that may come my way. Help me to believe only the truth and to express only the truth to others.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who is the Truth,

Amen.
Dear Dad/Mom/Step-parent/Grandparent/Other,

Your behaviors that hurt me were . . .

I felt . . .

I am making these choices for my own health . . .

I am choosing to forgive you, and I am letting go of . . .

Sincerely,
Marriage Staff Meeting: Session 12

You will probably either need to set aside two hours for this staff meeting or split it into two parts. Make sure that you have both completed your Therapeutic Letters, Understanding the Truth Prayer-Builders, and Letters of Forgiveness before the meeting. Then, after completing any necessary planning, calendar coordination, and discussion, do the following:

1. Take turns reading your Therapeutic Letters. Before you begin reading, tell your partner what you need from him/her. (For example, “Honey, I have been thinking about my childhood, and this is all pretty hard for me. I think I need for you to just listen, and maybe hold my hand.”) Remember to emotionally respond to each other. As you sense your partner’s hurt and feel hurt for him or her, verbalize your emotions.

2. Discuss with each other any insights you gained as you completed the Understanding the Truth Prayer-Builder. In particular, share with each other any false perceptions that you realized you have had about those who have hurt you, yourself, or God. Then take turns praying your “understanding the truth” prayers aloud.

3. Share your Letters of Forgiveness with each other. Be alert for opportunities to comfort each other even in this process. After verbalizing your choices to forgive, destroy the letters. Doing this helps bring closure to the healing process and solidifies the decision to forgive.

Note: This process of facing the hurt, understanding the truth, and forgiving the offender may need to be repeated from time to time in order to keep our emotional cups emptied of negative feelings.