

“Here’s real hope for the woman who has experienced so much relational pain and sexual brokenness. The editor, Ellen Dykas, has experienced freedom through Christ herself, and is a woman of wisdom and compassion. Because *Sexual Sanity for Women* gently but firmly gets to the root of the pain, the woman who opens her heart to this truth will truly be set free.”

Dee Brestin, author of *The Friendships of Women* and *Idol Lies (Facing the Truth about Our Deepest Desires)*

“Helping women understand God’s original design for sexuality is a critical need in our culture. So many of the conversations and resources focus only on the sin; *Sexual Sanity for Women* provides a way to experience healing and transformation through the study of God’s Word. It is not just another book; it is a discipleship tool to help bring true freedom that comes from living life the way God meant it to be. This is a resource I’m excited to share with others in our ministry.”

Donna Noonan, Director of Women’s Staff Development, Fellowship of Christian Athletes

“God’s design for sexuality is good and for our good. Harvest USA has provided a strong resource that brings a clear biblical foundation and the healing, redemptive, transforming gospel into a broken world and broken lives. This twenty-lesson guide offers opportunities for women to allow the Word of God to break into needy hearts. Whether for personal study or group mentoring, the body of Christ needs this equipping to hold before those who struggle to live out a godly sexuality.”

Jane Patete, Women’s Ministries Coordinator, Presbyterian Church in America

“Harvest USA is a time-tested ministry that changes lives with the gospel. They know how to speak the truth into your life with gentleness and love. Their skills and expertise have never been more needed by the church. Support it and become involved.”

Dr. Timothy Keller, Senior Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY and author of *The Reason for God*

“No aspect of postmodern life is more broken than our sexuality. Nothing brings more wholeness to broken sexuality than the gospel of Jesus Christ. No ministry is more helpful in applying the grace of the cross and the empty tomb to broken sexuality than Harvest USA.”

Dr. Phil Ryken, President, Wheaton College

“In our postfeminist, hypersexualized culture, women are confused about what the Bible teaches about sexuality. *Sexual Sanity for Women* is an eminently practical small group resource that will minister to women who are addicted to pornography, struggle with same-sex attraction, feel guilty from a lifestyle of promiscuity, have been sexually abused, or just need to understand what Christianity has to say about sexuality. It deals with the issues frankly while pointing women to gospel truths in a compassionate way. A must-have resource for every women’s ministry.”

Melanie M. Cogdill, Managing Editor, Christian Research Journal

“In an age where gender and sexuality are central battlefronts of the Enemy, the church must be ready to respond. *Sexual Sanity for Women* has broken the ‘louder silence’ for women. Many resources are merely academic or self-help in nature. Yet, this curriculum is a thorough, rare, and vital tool that will equip ministry leaders, counselors, and the church to bring hope and help to the sexually broken. Its comprehensive perspective effectively facilitates personal and corporate reflection while remaining Christ-centered, ultimately unpacking how the gospel speaks to gender and sexuality.”

Heather Evans, LCSW, Counselor in private practice, Coopersburg, PA and cofounder of The Valley Against Sex Trafficking (VAST) Coalition

“*Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Sexual and Relational Brokenness* is way overdue. A generation of iKids has known sexuality from the perspective of technology and the internet. We need solid resources to help us teach those entering our church settings with heart-wrenching stories how to push the ‘reset button’ on their sexuality. Ellen Dykas has edited a creatively useful handbook for the church and counselors working with any woman who needs to retrain her heart to think about sexuality as a gift from God. This is a solid resource to use with teens, college women, or new believers. Harvest USA has hit the nail on the head yet again.”

Dr. Penny Nelson Freeman, LPC, The Counseling Center at Cheltenham

“Ellen Dykas and the staff of Harvest USA have written a compassionate, insightful, and practical book that is faithful to God’s Word in addressing the relational and sexual brokenness unique to women. This book speaks with truth and love to the issues that women in our churches are facing. The gospel of Jesus Christ applied in this way will bring hope and freedom to many.”

Ron Lutz, Pastor, New Life Presbyterian Church, Dresher, PA

SEXUAL SANITY FOR WOMEN

HEALING FROM RELATIONAL AND SEXUAL BROKENNESS

Harvest USA
Ellen Dykas, Editor



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! The women's ministry of Harvest USA exists to minister the gospel of grace to women who are struggling with relational and sexual brokenness. We hope this study, *Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Relational and Sexual Brokenness*, will provide a tool that can be used in churches, communities, and life-on-life relationships. Our desire is that women would be equipped and encouraged by the gospel of Jesus Christ, so they love him and grow in freedom from the sin and pain of relational and sexual brokenness.

What does it mean to be relationally and/or sexually broken? The Bible clearly states that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The impact of sin has had a devastating effect on all of creation. One aspect of this utter ruin is that nothing functions in the way our Creator originally intended. Our world is broken. Relational and sexual brokenness thus refers to the sin struggles and temptations that women and men battle against while they live on this earth. Relationships become a prime ground for our idols to be nurtured and developed, as we seek people to be what only Christ can be. Sex becomes a way to medicate the pain within our hearts—or to feel anything at all. Our gender and sexual identity become confused, blurred, and even frightening. All things may have been created through Jesus and for Jesus (Colossians 1:16), but no one experiences life entirely according to his good design. Our lives are broken—but the gospel of healing, restoration, and forgiveness *has broken into our brokenness!*

Women are sexual beings just as much as men are. However, they often experience an even “louder silence” regarding their sexual sin and temptation. The Christian community has taken slow steps in recent years to address issues of sexuality, including addictions of a sexual nature. However, the opportunities for women to have the gospel specifically applied to their areas of relational

and sexual brokenness have been few and far between. It's our hope that *Sexual Sanity for Women* will provide opportunities for women to gather together and receive encouragement and teaching that will help them to, "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let [them] run with endurance the race that is set before [them], looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

A few thoughts as you begin to work through this study. Although an individual could journey through it herself, this material is meant to be used in a group setting. There is power in people coming together to walk in the light with one another, confessing weakness and sin, praying for one other, and urging each other on in the calling to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to make no provision for fleshly desires (Romans 13:14). This process of throwing off sinful patterns of life is just that—a *process*! This material will assist women to begin that process of freedom and change, and gives strugglers a place *to start* in addressing these deeply held and usually carefully guarded issues.

Many women who wrestle with their sexuality in sinful ways—including promiscuity, pornography, fantasy life, masturbation, and homosexuality—have other heart struggles as well. The Bible is clear that we all live out of our hearts, and yet our hearts have been impacted by living in a sinful world, where people sin against one another in traumatic ways. This study is not meant to provide in-depth counseling for the pain brought on by trauma and abuse. Professional counseling and/or pastoral counseling by wise, mature Christians is highly recommended as part of this process of opening up one's personal history and struggles. Ultimately, healing and change is the work of our Savior Jesus Christ, who came to heal the brokenhearted and to set the captive free—including female captives and daughters of God who are brokenhearted!

For groups, here are several guidelines that each woman should commit to:

- Faithful attendance and commitment, for the duration of the group (twenty sessions)
- Wisdom in sharing of struggles and sin patterns. This means sharing enough to be known, but not details that will leave graphic images in the minds of other women.

- Engaging the homework and reflective questions/readings, with a commitment to learn and grow
- Seeking to be a trustworthy woman by not sharing anything outside the group, except for her own personal stories of growth
- Keeping a private prayer and processing journal of what you are learning is also encouraged, but not required!

Talk to your group leader if you have questions or concerns regarding these important guidelines.

One final note about the process of change: Remember, change *is* a process and, generally, it's experienced over time. It may involve a person going back briefly to familiar sin, or learning to accept that certain temptations may remain while one lives out her earthly life. In other words, the very definition of what change *is* often changes in a women's life. Hence, earlier expectations of what one hoped for may not be met—or may be exceeded. Either way, the Lord is faithful to transform our lives as we surrender to him, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit to conform us more and more into women of whom it could be said, “*She lived a life of following Christ, and his presence was increasingly evident in her life!*” May God grant you wisdom, hope, and grace as you go through this material. Our prayer is that much glory will come to King Jesus as women are set free to love, serve, and worship him.

SESSION 1

GETTING STARTED

KEY CONCEPT: In order to experience freedom from sinful relationships, sexual patterns, and desires, we need to understand that these behaviors are expressions of a sinful heart that has been influenced by a sinful world. Change begins as we address the deeper heart issues in our lives, through the truth and grace of God's Word.

SESSION 1—GETTING STARTED

Welcome (20 minutes)

Ask the women to read the following passage to themselves. Then discuss the questions that follow:

Today’s culture shouts out messages promising ultimate satisfaction in this life—often through relationships and sexual experiences. The Bible teaches that God created relationships and sexual intimacy as gifts for people to enjoy, but within his ordained context. God’s good design for sexuality is for both men and women!

However women, like men, wrestle with sexual brokenness through the pursuit of what God calls “broken cisterns” (see Jeremiah 2:13)—sources of life, security, and value that we look for in this world rather than in its Creator. Sexual and relational sin are examples of broken cisterns that women run to and have sought to find soul satisfaction in, rather than finding true life in God. *Sexual Sanity for Women* is for women seeking to grow in loving and obeying Jesus and to be increasingly free from sinful sexual and relational patterns. The sessions to come will guide women into a deeper understanding of God’s good design for sexuality, how and why women struggle with sexual brokenness, and how the grace and truth of Jesus Christ can be applied to these struggles.

1. What one or two hopes or goals do you have for yourself, as you participate in this group and work through this study?

2. What are you most excited and/or fearful about, as you seek change regarding your relational patterns, sexual behaviors, and desires?

“extra-abnormal” because sexual sin is typically addressed only as a man’s problem. When we consider female homosexuality and same-sex attraction, there is confusion in the way it is discussed and understood. We hear many explanations about why individuals are attracted to the same gender. There has been a major push in the media to say that homosexuality is something that’s inborn and unchangeable (“I was born this way”). Even within many faith communities, there has been growing acceptance of homosexuality as a God-blessed identity (“I’m a gay Christian”).

How does a biblical view inform not only the question, “Is being gay OK?,” but what homosexuality *is*? And does the Bible really address seemingly “private” sexual activities such as viewing and reading pornography or masturbation? And if I truly love and am committed to someone, what’s the big deal in expressing myself sexually with that person outside marriage? Finally, does God really have helpful advice about addictions in our lives, especially those of a sexual or emotional nature?

We’ll explore these hard but important questions in the sessions to come. What we’ll learn will give us hope and confidence that God’s Word *does* speak into all these sensitive areas. Through the person of Jesus, God has given us more than a set of rules to follow or a series of steps to complete. He loves us and is actually after so much more than behavioral change. He is able to transform our hearts and minds and grow us into Christlike women!

The gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to every struggler—woman or man, younger or older. And whether the sinful pattern takes the shape of sexual promiscuity (with men, women, or both), homosexuality, emotionally enmeshed dependencies, or habitual sexual patterns (such as masturbation, pornography, or an obsessive fantasy life), God’s Word has hope for real change. This study will explore how these patterns develop and how, through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to the truths of the gospel, new Christlike patterns can grow and flourish in the life of any woman.

6. What thoughts or feelings do you have in response to the above?

7. Consider the quote: “Through the person of Jesus, God has given us more than a set of rules to follow, or a series of steps to complete. He loves us and is actually after so much more than behavioral change. He is able to transform our hearts and minds, and grow us into Christlike women!” As you think about your own sexual and relational struggles, does this idea seem hopeful, scary, overwhelming, encouraging, or something else? Explain.

8. Another way of defining addiction is a habitual (but changeable) pattern of behaving, thinking, and relating. Do you agree? Why or why not?

9. Is it uncomfortable for you to discuss your sexual and relational struggles in the context of what God and the Bible say? Again, why or why not?

Making It Personal (15 minutes)

Read the following passage together:

Jesus consistently describes behavior as coming out of the heart of a person. He puts it this way, “The tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33; Luke 6:43–45). He also says that it’s not what we put into our mouths that corrupt

us, but what comes out of our mouths (our words) that corrupt us. He says the mouth speaks from out of the heart (Matthew 12:34). What Jesus seems to be saying is that the inner issues are what really drive us, and what we say or do reveals our hearts. Jesus consistently focuses on what's inside a person, not just on outward manifestations of behavior. He compared the behavior of religious leaders to cups that were clean on the outside but dirty on the inside (Matthew 23:25).

Jesus was very compassionate to individuals struggling with sexual sin. He showed great love and compassion to *women who are sexual strugglers* (Luke 7:36–48; John 4:7–26; and 8:1–11). If you were to encounter Jesus today, you could have confidence that he would not condemn you but would show you love and mercy. You could also be confident to know that he would not focus exclusively on your outward behaviors and sins, but rather on the deeper motivational issues that arise from the core of who you are in your heart.

Beginning to deal with your sexual behaviors, relational struggles and emotional attractions can be very scary and difficult. The purpose of this group is to provide a setting where you can deal with some painful and troubling issues within a caring and supportive group setting.

This study will guide you through a model for understanding behavior called the Tree Model. It's based on what Jesus said about being able to tell a tree by its fruit. This model will become critical to your understanding of why you do what you do. Remember, God is seeking much more than outward change through transformed behaviors! He is seeking heart change—which means that the deeper, inner issues in your life will be addressed and then “re-dressed” with the grace and truth of Jesus. True change and healing is possible, as we set our focus on Jesus Christ who has come to heal the brokenhearted and set the captives free!

On Your Own (5 minutes)

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–4. God is a gracious Father and is full of comfort. In what ways do you need to be comforted, as you consider the pain your sin has caused you and others?

2. Read Luke 6:43–45. Reflect on how your specific sin struggles are the fruit of deeper issues within your heart.

SESSION 2

OUT OF THE HEART: THE TREE MODEL

KEY CONCEPT: Scripture often compares people to trees—and from the fruit it bears, we can tell what kind of tree it is. The Harvest USA Tree Model is a way to understand how our sin patterns develop as a result of our sinful hearts being impacted by a variety of influences, and how through Jesus Christ, our hearts (our *real* problem) can be transformed more and more into his likeness.

SESSION 2—OUT OF THE HEART: THE TREE MODEL

Review and Reflect (15 minutes)

Review last week's Key Concept, and then discuss the questions that follow:

Last Week's Key Concept: To experience freedom from sinful sexual and relational patterns, we need to understand that these behaviors are expressions of a sinful heart that has been influenced by living in a sinful world. Change begins as we address the deeper heart issues in our lives through the truth, grace, and wisdom of God's Word.

1. What insights have you had over the past week, as you reflected on the idea that our sexual behaviors are the fruit of our hearts?

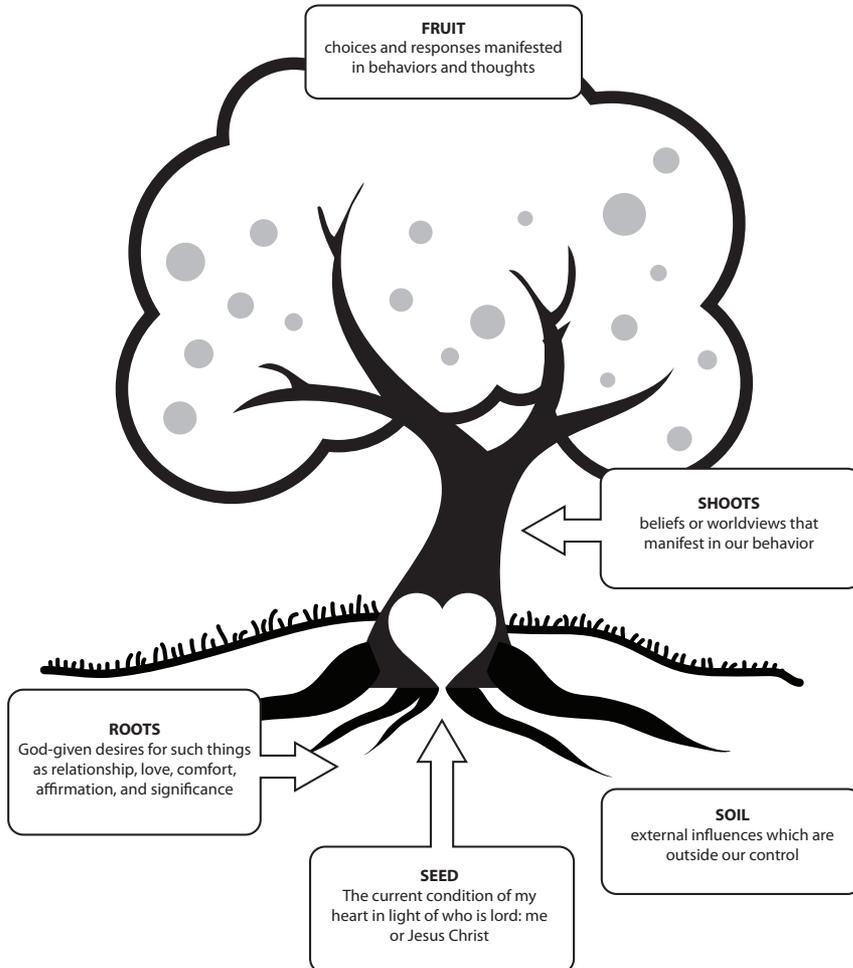
2. Share insights from 2 Corinthians 1:3–4. How do these verses speak to you in your desire to become more like Christ and to be free from sexual sins?

Exploring the Key Issue (60 minutes)

Key Concept: Scripture often compares people to trees—and from the fruit it bears, we can tell what kind of tree it is. The Harvest USA Tree Model is a way to understand how our sin patterns develop as a result of our sinful hearts being impacted by a variety of influences, and how through Jesus Christ, our hearts (our *real* problem) can be transformed more and more into his likeness.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:45 that our behaviors are not merely the result of something acting upon us from the outside (other people, pain, being sinned against, circumstances, etc.), but arise out of the heart. The Tree Model explains how the connection between our behaviors and our hearts can be understood. A tree is made of several parts—fruit, seed, roots, shoots, and the soil in which the seed is planted, and begins to grow. This session will give an overview for you to begin to interact with these concepts; the next several sessions will explore these components in more detail.

Review the Tree Model, and the descriptions that follow, as a group. After reading each description, take two to three minutes to quietly reflect and



write your answer to the question that follows. Do this for all five descriptions (questions 3–7).

Fruit—The fruit on our tree represents our behavior or present struggles. These are the reasons we ask others for help, or go see a counselor. Among these struggles are our thoughts, behaviors, and relational patterns. Examples include envy, anger, anxiety, overeating, gossip, homosexual behavior, sexual fantasies, looking at pornography, sexual promiscuity, and masturbation. However, fruit can also be holy and of the Spirit, as Galatians 5:22–23 teaches us.

3. What fruit in your life do you want to see changed? Share as much as you're willing.

Seed—The seed represents our heart, or soul, which is the spiritual center of each person. It's what makes each of us unique as a woman created by God. It's the seat of our will. It is "us." Yet the Bible teaches us that we all have a big problem: We're sinners! "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Our sinful heart/seed makes self the center as we experience life and relationships in this world. We are born sinners, completely in need of Jesus Christ to give us a new heart. Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, has made it possible for anyone who comes to him for forgiveness of sin to be made a new creation through a new heart that desires new—and better—fruit. While we live on this earth we'll continue to battle against temptation and won't live a sin-free life, but over time we will grow in Christlikeness as we turn from self toward our Savior. The Bible calls this process *repentance*. It is key that we understand this, in order to grow into increasing freedom over life-dominating sin patterns, whether they're are sexual, relational, or other.

4. Have you confessed your sin to God and received his forgiveness? First John 1:9 promises that if we confess our sins to God, he is faithful and just to forgive us of all sin, and to cleanse us of everything that is not right in our

lives. Write a few thoughts about your experience of God's forgiveness, as you understand it right now.

Roots—Roots refer to God-given desires for relationship, intimacy, and significance which, due to our sinful nature, are bent toward seeking satisfaction in selfish, me-oriented ways. The Bible calls this pursuit of self “idolatry.” Idolatry originates from a selfish sinful heart that craves satisfaction in ways outside of God's design. This is a woman, desiring to be loved and cherished, lusting for sexual attention from a man because it makes her feel loved. This is a woman enmeshed emotionally and sexually with another woman because it feels comforting and secure to be someone's #1. This is a woman who watches porn and escapes to a fantasy world of her own making because it's a world of relationships in which she feels no pain and always gets what she wants. Common desires, when expressed from a self-serving heart, quickly grow into selfish demands, thus bearing the fruit of sexual and relational sin.

5. What desires can you identify in yourself that seem to exert the most control over you and that have fueled your patterns of sinful relationships and sexual behavior? (Desires for comfort, love, intimacy, control, to feel significant, to not feel pain, bodily pleasure, etc.)

Soil—The soil represents influences upon our lives that shape us, influence us, and encourage us toward certain patterns for dealing with life. Although they can be positive or negative, hurtful or praiseworthy, we ultimately cannot blame them for where and who we are today. We've already seen how our behaviors are born out of our hearts. However, living in a broken world of

sin—in which we are sinned against and experience pain, suffering, joy and blessing, healthy and unhealthy relationships, etc.—*does* impact us. Various soil influences include:

- Temperament and emotional makeup
- The voice and values of culture, peers, and society
- Family dynamics
- Gender
- Body type
- Talents and personal strengths/gifts
- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Trauma through death, abandonment, painful losses, etc.
- Physiology and other biological factors
- Spiritual warfare (the kingdom of darkness which opposes God and his purposes in our lives)

6. What aspects of soil jump off the page immediately as ones you can recognize as having a strong influence in your life? Why those?

Shoots—The shoots of the tree are the conclusions or worldviews we've developed over the years. Think of the shoots as the lenses through which we view and interpret our world—how we believe “life works.” Our interpretations, however, are always tainted by self, thus proving our lifelong need for transformed minds to think according to God's truth. We live, relate, respond, and behave out of our faulty understandings of God, men, women, relationships, sex, gender, etc. For example: “I must speak only nice things so that others like me”; “I'm worthless and undesirable”; “All men want one thing from women”; “Emotional pain is death to me, so I need to avoid any discomfort and pursue only what feels good”; “I'm valued and secure if others need me”; “People are untrustworthy, so it's best to just stay to myself and let no one really know me”; “God didn't protect me, so God doesn't love me”; “Being a woman is power”; “Being female is worthless.” Although these

convictions fuel our choices, they often develop unconsciously and thus are not on our mental radar screen most of the time. When we are unaware of the inner beliefs which drive our behavior, it's challenging to understand why we do what we do—the fruit being born out of our hearts.

7. Think of the primary focus of your sin struggles: a mental fantasy world and/or pornography, men, women, both, sex with yourself. What do you crave from this experience, type of person, or type of relationship? What are you seeking to avoid and escape through it?

Discuss the following questions as a group:

8. When we consider a person as a “tree” it may seem overwhelming to put it all together! Let's take the example of a woman who comes to you for help in her Christian life and:

- Identifies herself as a gay woman
- Desires to love and obey Jesus
- Knows that she can't have both a homosexual lifestyle and a life of obedience to God
- Desires having a person with whom she can share life
- Believes that men are unsafe, as most of her experiences with men have led to her being taken advantage of and misused sexually
- Is having a difficult time cutting off contact with her recent girlfriend, even though she knows she must take this step of obedience. They continue to keep tabs on each other through social media and texting, and occasionally see each other when mutual friends get together.

What do you think are the first steps to take to help her? Why?

9. Read these passages together, and discuss how they correspond to the individual components of the Tree Model:

- Mark 12:28–31
- Colossians 3:1–3
- 2 Corinthians 5:14–17
- Romans 12:1–2
- Isaiah 61:1–3

Making It Personal (10 minutes)

For some people, it's a major shift in thinking to begin focusing on deeper issues rather than surface behaviors. We often want to feel better or get fixed so badly that we simply want the behaviors to stop. We want a program that will do a quick fix or provide a series of steps that will change our behaviors. In most cases a programmatic approach to changing behavior fails because behaviors are merely symptoms of a deeper problem: Our hearts are sinful and in need of change. Our desires need to be understood as our servants and not our masters. We let them serve us in leading us to God in a variety of ways—asking for help or blessing, crying out for comfort or encouragement, giving thanks, praising him, etc. Our thought lives need radical transformation in order to be aligned with God's truth and ways.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news not only that he *said* he came to save, change, and heal us, but that he's *able* to do this! The next several sessions will further explore the inner dynamics of your heart and how life in this world has impacted and shaped your thoughts. It may be very painful and frustrating. It may seem like you're getting nowhere and that your struggles only intensify. Don't give up. Healing and change is a process. A broken bone does not heal overnight—neither does a spiritually broken heart!

On Your Own (5 minutes)

1. Review the scriptures in Question 9, and journal about how they encourage and help you to have your heart set on Jesus more than on your struggles.

2. Fill in the “My Tree” sheet, and come next week prepared to share two or three details from each component. Review the guidelines on sharing in a group context, on p. 2 of the Introduction.

