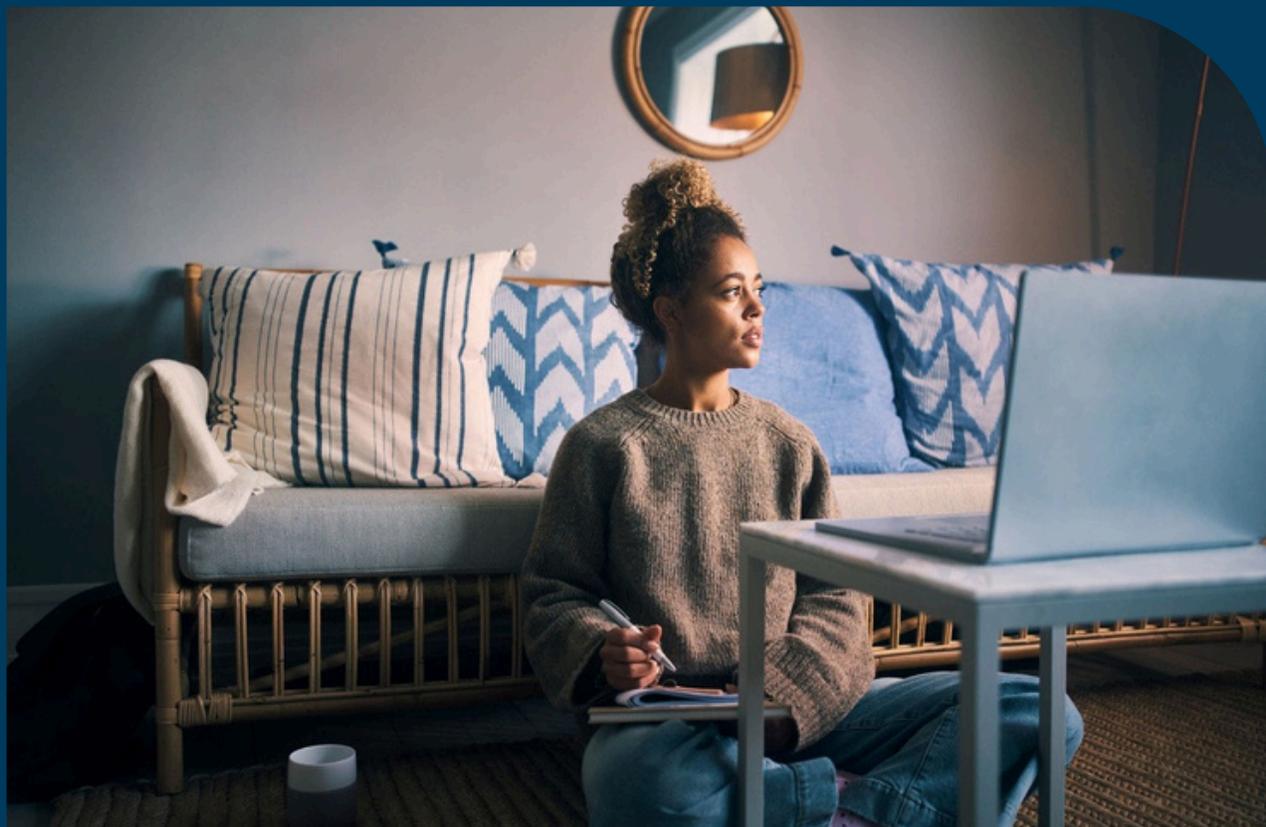




FRESH START



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

Participant Guide

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Fresh Start Process  
*Welcome*

 FRESH START

# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

Participant Guide

# Introduction

## Welcome to Fresh Start!

Whether you found us on social media, someone sent you a link, or you are following along with your group, we believe it's no coincidence you are with us. You may be seeking answers, healing, or even just curious about what true freedom for your heart looks like. You have come to the right place.

So, what is the Fresh Start process all about? Simply stated, your freedom. This may sound cliché, but if we could step into the room with you right now, and look you in the eye, we would say, we are serious. This is a chance to have a Fresh Start. Although our circumstances may be different, we can relate to where you might be. Bitter? Angry? Hopeless? Desperate? Confused? It's never too late or too dark. Freedom is available. You're not too far gone. Real transformation for your heart and your mind is available now, for free. No catches or gimmicks.

Fresh Start exists to see all people set free from the effects of offense, hurt, and loss. None of us escapes this life without being offended, hurt, or having some kind of loss. And we all know, there was an opportunity to be offended before breakfast this morning.

You see, Fresh Start is a ministry, yes! But, the heartbeat of this ministry is just real-life people, like you and me. People who have walked and crawled through tragedy and suffering. We are people who have been through heartaches, disappointments, and relational conflicts. We want to help you get your life back, so you can live to share your battle wounds and victory stories. We want you to experience the freedom that is available. Freedom to be known. Freedom to love and be loved. Freedom to truly forgive through Jesus.

Consider this your invitation to join us as we unpack how to get free and stay free. Through these videos, we will help you identify sources of pain, learn the process of forgiveness, and find your pathway to freedom.

**Let's set some ground rules before we get started, okay?** No pressure, just opportunity! We are going to challenge you to keep taking steps toward truth and transformation, but we will not force or pressure you. When you are ready, you get to take the next step. Deal? We will only speak the truth. No sugar coating. No weird stuff. We tell the truth, and we ask the same from you. Your story is not ours to share. What's heard or shared will remain confidential.

So how does this work? Let's take a deeper look.

## Introduction continued

### **What freedom do you need today?**

What's keeping you in chains? Maybe it's an addiction, betrayal, grief, feeling hopeless in a relationship, or even distorted thoughts rolling around in your own heart and mind. True freedom has no limit to what's available. Nothing is too dark, and no heart is beyond the touch of God's intervention.

Your goal in this process may be to have a better marriage, healing for your body, live a debt-free life, get rid of anxiety, or finally have healthy relationships with your family. These are wonderful things. And God cares about them.

But, we are going to let you in on one of the 'keys' to the process from the beginning:

### **The Ultimate Goal in this Six- Part Process is freedom for your heart.**

True freedom comes from intimacy with God above all else. So, let's start with a question to ask yourself: Do I desire intimacy with God more than I desire \_\_\_\_\_? Fill in the blank in with whatever you are choosing to process.

You don't have to have your answer right now. Your answer may be a flat out, "NO!" The hope is that over time, you will be able to say without a shadow of a doubt, 'YES!' I desire intimacy with God above all else. Many of us are not here yet. You may not even have the desire to know God at this point.

This six-part process will help guide your heart to the areas where God wants to bring in more of Himself to heal and love you. If you are willing to go on this journey, He can do a miracle!

So how does this work? Let's take a deeper look.

### ***In Proverbs 4:23 God says,***

***"Above all else guard your heart, for from it flow the well-springs of life."***

If your heart was the only wellspring or drinking source from which others could drink, how "healthy" would they be? A sobering question, isn't it? Whose heart hasn't been affected by someone or something? But even if your wellspring has become "polluted" with unforgiveness or bitterness, you can still have a "Fresh Start" for your heart! We pray as you process the issues of your heart by writing out your responses to the questions, you will be free from your past, thrive (not just survive) in the present, and reap the benefits of a hope-filled future!

# An Overview of the Fresh Start Process

There are six parts to this process. Each part is designed to help you unpack and resolve the issues of offense, hurt, and loss in your life.

## **In Parts 1- 2- 3, we focus on “Going Horizontal”**

In the first three parts, you will identify one relationship, hurt, or offense you want to process. It’s about getting all the details out of your heart and explaining what happened, how did it affect you, and what was your response? This is what it means to “Go horizontal”. God cares deeply about everything that has happened to you. He doesn’t want you to ignore, minimize, or forget about all that you have been through in your life. Things that have been done to you or things you have done. He cares about all the details of your life. He not only wants to hear about it, He also wants to hear how it impacted you and made you feel, think, and respond. Then, He wants to heal it.

## **In Parts 4 - 5 - 6, we focus on “Going Vertical”**

In this section, you are moving from just sharing your story and feelings with others to sharing them with your Heavenly Father. That’s what it means to ‘Go Vertical.’ In part four, you will pour out your heart to the Lord, sharing with Him the offense, hurt, and loss you are processing, and how it is impacting you. He wants to listen to your heart. All of it. This is the beginning of intimacy with Him! You are sharing how this part of your story is impacting you. In parts five and six, you will learn how to forgive, and truly release the heart wounds that have been keeping you chained.

Here, it’s important to know that there’s a difference between dumping or venting your feelings, as opposed to taking them to God who has the ultimate solution. This is what makes the Fresh Start process different and biblical. God cares about every detail of your story, and He has the answer!

Now, this part of the process is for everyone but will be incomplete without you having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When you have a relationship with Him, you receive the gift of forgiveness and grace He freely offers through His sacrificial death on the cross. If you don’t have that today, you can still start the process. We will come back to that later. So, let’s get started!

**If you haven’t yet, download the Processing the Issues of Your Heart Booklet, grab something to write on (we recommend a notebook to give yourself plenty of space), and something to write with!**

Before you begin, it is necessary to pray. By praying and dedicating your time to the Lord, you give Him permission to do the healing work that only He can do. You are saying you are willing to cooperate with what God wants to do in your heart and life for your good. You are participating with God’s mission for Your life. He is after Your heart, desiring to see all of Your story redeemed for Your good and His glory.

# An Overview of the Fresh Start Process

## Let's pray:

*Father, I praise Your Holy and Mighty Name. You are Creator, Sustainer, Healer, and my Protector. You are the Great I AM. I thank You for leading me to this time with You, to hear from You, sit with You, and reveal my whole heart to You. I give You total access to my heart and ask You to, 'search me, know me, test me, and fully examine my heart and mind.' I desire to be free from all that is impacting my heart, mind, and body.*

*Help me, Lord, to identify the offenses, hurts, and losses in my life. Show me the effects they have had and are having on me. Lead me each step of the way. Show me where to start, and give me the strength to finish the process fully. I desire full healing. I need a miracle, Lord. I am weary from carrying this.*

*Open my heart, mind, eyes, and ears to hear You, Lord. Give me Your heart for my story. Illuminate any details, memories, or pieces of my story I may have forgotten. I give You total access, Lord. Above all else, I desire intimacy with You.*

*I dedicate this entire process to you and the work I will do with You. Give me the strength and space to get through what You are asking of me. Block out distractions and all that would keep me from finishing well. I am choosing to trust You, Lord. and I entrust the outcome to You. In Jesus' victorious Name, I pray, Amen.*

## Are you ready? Let's go!



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

## Part 1: Offense/Hurt/ Loss

*"Who or What is in your "Gap?"*  
*"Who or What has offended or hurt you?"*  
*"What have you lost?"*

Let's start with your story.

In this part of the process, you will identify one significant area of offense, hurt, or loss that is hindering your life. Whether it was an event that happened recently or something from when you were a child; no detail is too small. No pain is too great. Your goal is to choose one person or event to process.

### **You may be thinking- "Why do I really need to process all of this?"**

This is a totally normal response. You might even have some of these common questions rolling around in your heart: "I already forgave or let go." "I don't think about this or hardly even remember what happened." "I don't want to make a big deal of this." "It's nothing compared to what he/she has or is going through." "I don't want to rehash all of these things."

*In Psalm 66:18, God says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."* No one lives up to God's design. Not one of us is perfect or righteous in the eyes of God. This is not a statement of condemnation, but rather an invitation of freedom offered to your heart: Surrender to the reality that we all have 'stuff' God wants to heal at a deeper level.

One of the biggest lies we can succumb to is, "My story is not worth investigating or digging into because it's not going to change anyway, and it's not that big of a deal." But, if we "agree with God," and what He thinks about what hurts us, and what He says He can and will do with sin and pain, then we can be free!

God NEVER dismisses what's important to us.

God NEVER ignores our aching hearts.

God NEVER gives approval to sin we commit, or sin committed against us.

God NEVER compares our pain to others. So, why should we?

To understand how God sees our stories, it's helpful to think of our offenses, hurts, and losses as, 'GAPS.'

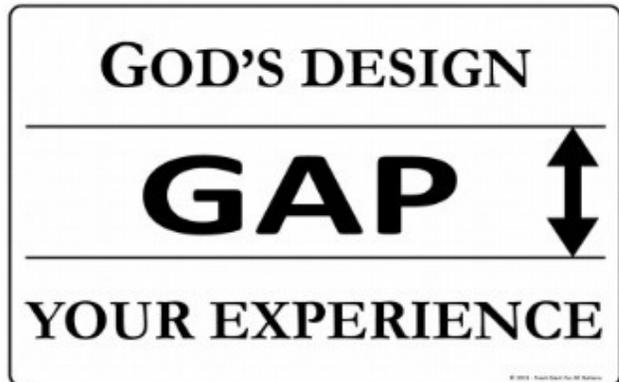
## Part 1: Offense/Hurt/ Loss

### Who or What is in the GAP?

The GAP is the difference between God's design for relationship and your life's experience.

The offenses, hurts and losses you experience in your life are what we call the GAP. Your experience will always fall short of God's design until you get to Heaven.

Until you agree with God's design for relationship, you will not experience the freedom and peace that is available to you. So, we compare our stories only to God's design, which is found in His Word.



Only Jesus can fill the GAP in your life. If you desire or experience anything instead of intimacy with the Lord, you will always be disappointed. Only Jesus fills the GAP. Only Jesus satisfies.

When you allow Jesus to fill the GAP in your life, you can begin to experience the freedom and peace that God always had in mind for you.

### So, Who or What is in the GAP in your story?

In what ways does your story, relationships and heart not line up with His design? This is what you process. When you process, you must consider all the ways the other person or situation is not according to God's design.

To help you better identify where to begin, let's start by looking at the questions in the booklet.

# Part 1: Offense/Hurt/ Loss

**Start by praying through the scripture, and asking the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know. What does the scripture say to you?**

*"Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind..." – Psalm 26:2 NIV*

## **A. List specific offenses or hurts, and the person(s) involved:**

- People who have rejected you in some way
- People or situations where you have been violated or abused
- Conflicts involving family, friends, work, church, or others
- Divorce or separation
- Other examples through your life

## **B. List significant losses that you have experienced in your life:**

- Loss of job
- Loss of health
- Loss of job
- Loss of a relationship due to conflict, separation, divorce, or death
- Loss of a dream for your life or future involving marriage, children, or career

## **Two Key Notes:**

-Think of Parts a and b as an inventory of all offenses, hurts, and losses. You may find it helpful to write out your story or a timeline of your life. This allows you to identify themes showing up. Once you have written specific hurts, offenses, or losses, begin to ask God where He wants you to start processing.

-It is not biblical to process yourself. Only God can forgive you. When you follow the parts of the process, you will deal with the thoughts, behaviors, and wrong related actions or attitude you had toward yourself or others.

## Part 1: Offense/Hurt/ Loss

*"Who or What is in my Gap?"*  
*"Who in my life is least like Jesus?"*

**C. From your previous responses, choose one person or loss to process:** Once you have decided where to begin, you will answer the questions from here on, in relation to that one person you are processing. There may be many offenses, hurts, and losses that come from this one person or event. List them. But, in regard to your list, stay focused on the one person or loss you are processing.

Tip: You may find it helpful to start with the earliest wound or someone from your immediate family of origin (father, mother, sibling, grandparent, or someone who represented them). We often find what we are experiencing today is an effect or direct result of a past experience of offense, hurt, or loss—typically from the family of origin.

### Here are some examples:

- The offending person is: My Mom
- The offense, hurt, or loss is: Loss of a relationship, loss of a dream, loss of protection, loss of childhood

### Illustration: The Weed



When you want to pull a weed, it may be tempting to just yank at the top—the part you can see with your eyes. But we know if we don't dig down a little, remove some dirt, get to the root, and eliminate the pesky thing growing, it will just be a matter of time before it comes back. Our hearts and stories are much like the weed. We all have areas that need attention and care to get healthy, so let's start with the root. For processing, we find that dealing with the root of the problem—your earliest wound—will almost always take care of the whole weed and root out problems you may be currently facing. God is in the healing business, not the bandaid business! He doesn't just want to cover up the roots so problems can come back. He wants to completely remove them.



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

## Part 2: Affect

*"What is in your heart?"  
"How have you been affected?"*

**In Part 2, we begin to explore the ways you have been impacted by this offense, hurt, or loss.**

What is in your heart? How have you been affected by this offense, hurt, or loss?

Take some time to pause and consider what your thoughts have been toward this person or event. What have your thoughts been toward yourself? Toward God? What have your feelings been- or have you been numbing them for so long you don't even feel anymore? Describing your thoughts and feelings in detail begins to release the weight in your heart. Present feelings are indicators of past pain.

### **Illustration: The Water Bottle**



Would you be able to hold an unopened full plastic water bottle in one hand for 5 minutes? You may say, "Yes, no problem! If we asked you to hold your arm straight out and hold the same bottle, you probably could do that, too, for a time. But, if I asked you to hold it for seven, eight, nine, or ten minutes while talking about something else, you may begin to feel the weight of the bottle is too much to handle. "I can handle it," is what we say to ourselves. But over time, the weight of our struggles (from the past or present) begins to be too much to carry on our own. When dealing with the effects of the 'GAP' we are processing, the stress of life is too much to handle in our own strength. It is important to acknowledge the weight and resolve it according to God's design. You weren't designed to carry the weight of your struggles alone.

Let's dive in to the questions in the booklet.

## Part 2: Affect

*"What is in your heart?"*

*"How have you been affected?"*

**Start by praying through the scripture below, asking the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know. What does the scripture say to you?**

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."  
– Psalm 139:23 NIV*

### **A. What have your thoughts been?**

These could be thoughts toward yourself and/or toward God as well. Think of this as the 'internal conscious tapes' in your mind. Things you may never say out loud, but have thought or continue to think. Ex: "I will always be this way." "I am so fat." "God, you must hate me." There are endless possibilities of what our thoughts could be. These are just a few examples. The goal is to begin to get in touch with the way you thought or maybe are still thinking.

### **B. What have your thoughts been toward the person involved (as applicable)?**

Narrow in your focus a little more now and specifically write out the thoughts you had or have towards the person you are processing. Ex: "I hate it when you do that." "He is so dumb" "I want you to hurt just as much as you hurt me!" "You make me feel gross." It may take some time to really 'go back' to the way you used to think, especially if this was a formative relationship from the time of your early childhood. Give yourself time, and ask God to help you. It's critical to begin to understand the ways you have been thinking. It helps you to understand your current struggles.

### **C. What have your feelings been?**

Feelings indicate something is going on internally. If you have been a person who has learned to numb or shut off your emotions and feelings, this part may take some time and soul searching. You may think you are 'just fine,' but over time, the weight of your struggles becomes too much to handle. Be specific and transparent with how your heart is feeling. Use the word bank as a tool to get you started. You may also have other words that apply. Many times, it helps to put our feelings into sentences. Write out how this specific offense, hurt, or loss has affected you.

Here are some examples:

*"I feel anxious when \_\_\_\_\_"*

*"I felt lonely when \_\_\_\_\_"*

*"I feel angry when \_\_\_\_\_"*

*"When he \_\_\_\_\_ it made me feel rejected."*

Do not move forward until you have been able to identify the feelings in your heart and how this specific offense, hurt, or loss has been affecting you.



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

## Part 3: Response

*"How have you responded to this specific offense, hurt, or loss?"*

*"What have you decided?"*

How have you responded to your pain? What have you said or done in response to the offense, hurt, or loss you experienced? Have you made any decisions because of your pain? This is about full disclosure...getting real with God. What has your part been?

**Start by praying through the scripture and asking the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know. What does the scripture say to you?**

*"See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." –  
Psalm 139:24 NIV*

### **A. What have you said?**

Ask God to show you YOUR part in relation to this offense, hurt, or loss. What have you said? It could be something you said to the person you are processing, to others about the person or situation, or just said internally to yourself. It could also be things you did not say, but perhaps should have. Ask God to help you. Acknowledge your role and response. Seek to get all of your offensive ways disclosed.

Write them down. Don't leave anything hidden or in the dark. It is imperative for you to be totally honest here. There is no shame when coming to God with a humble heart seeking to get free. He can handle it. Keeping any response you are ashamed of, secret, will keep you from being free. You don't want to unwittingly leave any opportunity for the enemy to get a foothold here and keep you from the freedom that God wants you to experience.

### **B. What have you done?**

This could be something you did when you were little, growing up, or even today. Think of these as the actions beyond the words: the ways in which you've acted out, tried to protect, comforted or even punished yourself. Examples: canceled all interaction with friends or family, drug or alcohol abuse, self-harm, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts/attempts, sexual promiscuity, lying, seeking pleasure outside of God's design, etc.

You may also have examples of things you have 'not done' but could have. Examples: Should have spoken up but were afraid, should have told the truth, etc.

\*It is important to remember, no one is perfect! Not one of us lives up to God's design. As you acknowledge and begin to release these responses, remember it is for your freedom, not for condemnation.

## Part 3: Response

*"How have you responded to this specific offense, hurt, or loss?"*

*"What have you decided?"*

### **C. What have you decided?**

These are internal decisions you have made regarding the offending person, yourself, God or the loss you have experienced. What have you decided internally? We call these internal decisions judgments and vows.

A judgment is a negative decision made about or against someone or something about ourselves, about others, or even about God.

A vow is an internal promise we've made "with self" that we consciously or subconsciously feel obligated to carry out. Vows generally come from making a judgment.

Typically (not every time), we will find decisions, judgments and vows, in 'always' and 'never' statements. They can also be an 'I am' statement.

#### **Examples of judgments:**

- He will always be that way.
- She is such a...
- She deserves to lose everything.
- He deserves to rot in prison.
- She lives to divide people.
- All men are...
- I am unremarkable.
- I am a failure.

#### **Examples of vows:**

- I will never be hurt again.
- I am not worthy of love.
- I will never marry again.
- I will not be like my parents
- I will be at every sporting event for my kids
- We will never be poor.
- I will never be in an out-of-control situation again.
- I will never amount to anything.

This might also be the first time you are aware of all the ways you have been 'deciding' to do things or not to do things because of these hurts. It's also common to begin realizing there have been negative conversations going on within your heart and mind for years.

## Part 3: Response

*"How have you responded to this specific offense, hurt, or loss?"*

*"What have you decided?"*

### **What's wrong with making judgments and vows?**

**Disobedience to God's Word** "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. Matthew 7:1

**Judgments keep you focused on others and not facing your own issues of the heart and taking responsibility accordingly.** "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Matthew 7:3

**Judgments hinder your ability to clearly see and help the other person with their issues.** How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? Matthew 7:4

**Judgments will make you a hypocrite.** You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Matthew 7:5

**Vows are statements of control.** Although the examples on the previous page aren't all "bad" things, whom do they put in control? You! These 'promises to self' or statements of independence keep us in control. But God created us to be dependent upon Him, not live life independently of Him.

**Judgments AND Vows produce strongholds that distort our view of reality and adversely affect and hinder our relationship with God and others.**

Identifying these vows and judgments are CRITICAL to the process and your freedom. These words (spoken or unspoken) as well as our decisions, have the power to bring life or death. You may begin to realize the destructive power these words and decisions are having on your relationships with others and also on your heart. Make sure you leave plenty of time to explore this area.

*\*\*By acknowledging your role/response, you are in NO way saying that you are the sole one responsible for the offense, hurt or loss. You are NOT approving and excusing what the offender did. You are not saying the pain did not matter. This is the first step in doing things God's way and beginning to lay down the hurt in a new way, so that healing can begin.*



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

*"Go vertical"*

*"Prayer to the Lord"*

You are now shifting your focus from just telling your story and experience to others to pouring out your heart to your Heavenly Father. That's what it means to go vertical. This is your time to get real. Get all those thoughts, dreams, hopes, and unmet desires out of your heart and onto paper. What do you really want? What is the true desire of your heart? What could have been different? What's been missing?

Note:

This part can be done by anyone, but the process will seem awkward and is incomplete if you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are interested in beginning a personal relationship with Jesus, please see "The Ultimate Fresh Start" at the end of this participant guide or talk to a leader if you are in a group. Let's get started.

**Start by praying through the scriptures below and asking the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know. What do the scriptures mean to you?**

*"Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge." – Psalm 62:8 NIV*

*"I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before Him; before Him I tell my trouble. Psalm 142:1-2 NIV*

**A. Pour out your heart to the Lord. Write out exactly how you feel.**

Lord, this is how I feel...

Write out your prayer to the Lord, including any and all complaints, how the ongoing effects of this pain are hurting you, and acknowledging any poison in your heart. Don't hold back, be vulnerable and share it all. If you don't get it all out, it can still allow bitterness to fester in your heart. God wants to hear your heart. This is your time to get it all out.

**B. Express your unmet desires to the Lord.**

Lord, this is what I'm disappointed or upset about, or wish would have happened (or not have happened)...

Tell the Lord in writing what you are disappointed about, what you wish would've happened, or not have happened. There is nothing too foolish, too small, or too dark to share. He can handle your sadness, anger and pain. He already knows and sees. And, He cares deeply. He is waiting for you to come to Him, maybe for the first time in a long time, or maybe ever.

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

*"Go vertical"  
"Prayer to the Lord"*

### **C. Express your current desires to the Lord.**

Tell God what you *currently* want in this relationship. This is your "best case or ideal scenario." Think and dream BIG! You can trust God with your dream, even if it seems unattainable. Don't let 'reality' or 'expectation' keep you from expressing to God the true desires of your heart. When pain comes, dreaming can shut down. This is your permission to dream again. There are no limits when it comes to sharing your desires. What has been hidden or lost for so long, or seems impossible, but is still the desire of your heart? Write that down. It matters.

**D. Choose to give thanks to the Lord** Up until this point, you have been getting all the poison out. You have been detoxifying yourself of all sin's poison that has been impacting you emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Here you are choosing to make an active declaration of trust and surrender as you step into giving thanks.

Before we unpack this together, spend some time reading and reflecting on the following scriptures.

..."give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."  
1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

..."always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:20 (NIV)

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me...He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." Psalm 50:14-15, 23 (NASB)

"I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD."  
Psalm 116:17 (NIV)

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV)

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son..." Romans 8:28-29

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

*"Go vertical"  
"Prayer to the Lord"*

### **What does it mean to "Give Thanks?"**

In 1 Thessalonians 5:13-18, the Apostle Paul is instructing the church in how to live as followers of Jesus in relationship to one another. He provides a list of exhortations and then ends the passage with, "rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks *in all circumstances...*" In Ephesians 5:20, Paul exhorting again says "...always giving thanks to God the Father *for everything*, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What kind of thanksgiving is Paul referring to in those two passages? It feels natural to give thanks in the good circumstances and for the good things, but what about the difficult circumstances or for difficult or even painful things?

Let's add another question, what about sin? Should we give thanks for sin? What about evil, or abuse? Is Paul saying we are to thank God specifically *for* those things? In short, no.

Let's take a look at some scripture together.

In 1 John 1:5, it says that God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." In Psalm 5:4, "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you." Thanking God FOR sin and evil things contrary to his own will and character would be counterintuitive to His Design. Simply put, God hates evil and wants to deliver us from it (Matthew 6:13) and we should not thank God for it nor accredit that to Him

But *even when* walking through painful moments, we are *still exhorted* to give thanks. So again, what kind of thanksgiving is Paul after here? Let's dive a little deeper into Ephesians 5:20 for a moment, "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" and unpack that word "for."

In the original language in which that word and passage is written, Paul used the greek word "ὑπέρ" transliterated "hyper" that sounds like hoop-er'. And that word means "in behalf of," "for the sake of," "beyond," "more than," but ultimately "*over*."

Here's what that passage looks like when expanding upon those definitions:

- ...always giving thanks to God the Father...*for the sake of everything*
- ...always giving thanks to God the Father...*beyond everything*.
- ...always giving thanks to God the Father...*more than everything*
- ...always giving thanks to God the Father...*over everything*.

If we fix our eyes and hearts on the pain and difficulty, our peace will fade, the pain becomes unbearable, and the situation seems hopeless. But if we fix our hearts and minds on "giving thanks," it turns our eyes toward God, and motivates us to look higher for His purpose in everything that has happened.

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

*"Go vertical"*

*"Prayer to the Lord"*

Paul is saying, no matter what, over all things, over all circumstances, over all pain, over all hurts, over all sickness and loss you have experienced or are experiencing, above and beyond everything happening in your life, turn to God and give thanks. Paul is getting at an attitude of heart...a posture of the heart. And because we have a great and wonderful loving God, He has a promise and a purpose for us, even in and with the most difficult situations.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, "And we know that causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son..."

God promises to use all things, the good and the bad, and work them for our good. Whether we understand the situation or not, no matter how painful or unfair the circumstance was, we can put our hope and trust in God and thank Him for the good He's promised to produce in our lives from it, according to His good and perfect will. And His purpose is to conform us into the image of Jesus.

Since God works all things for the good of those who love him, and that good is that we become more like Christ, then we can expect that He will even use the hard times, to mold us, shape us and transform us into the very likeness of his Son. And this should fill our hearts with gratitude "in all circumstances" and "over everything." Although God hasn't promised to explain why we go through certain pain or hardship, He has promised to be with us and enable us to face it. Giving thanks reminds us that we don't have to understand the situation; we just have to be obedient in the process and trust Him with the outcome.

It's important to know that giving thanks is certainly more than being happy or feeling grateful in or about a circumstance. It's about a heart posture. In the midst of hardship, when we don't feel grateful, although the hurt may be extravagant that we cannot feel joy in the moment, we can choose to give thanks with our lips until it becomes a reality in our heart.

Referring to Paul's exhortations, a posture of "always giving thanks" isn't about the specific circumstances or the "for everything's," but about trust, surrender and submission; trusting God in, through and with the circumstance, surrendering the outcome to him, and submitting to His mission of transforming us into the likeness of His son Jesus.

Thanksgiving is a vital element of worship, a way to honor God not just for what He does but for who He is. Thanksgiving transforms our prayers and worship, turning them into a rich tapestry of praise and adoration for God's character and deeds. Giving thanks is a personal declaration and act of humility, reflecting our heart's posture toward the Creator and acknowledging His sovereignty, mercy, and provision.

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

### "Go vertical" "Prayer to the Lord"

Why is giving thanks important to this process?

- Giving thanks is your verbal act of surrendering yourself and the circumstances to the sovereignty of God.
- Giving thanks is proclaiming trust in God to use the circumstances for your good, your transformation, and His glory.
- Giving thanks takes away the power these offenses, hurts and losses have had over you, reclaiming ground from Satan.
- Giving thanks positions you for the grace, peace and power to forgive.

When you choose to give thanks, you are letting go of the circumstances, giving up control, and surrendering your ways, your plans and the way you wish things would have gone or will go, completely to God and His will for the situation and people involved. God loves you and cares for you, and loves to bring new life out of ashes. He's asking you to release control of all these areas giving them to Him. Are you ready?

**Tell the Lord in writing that you are choosing to give thanks, that you are surrendering to His sovereignty over the situation and the circumstances, and that you are trusting Him in however He uses it in your life for His purposes, for your good, and for His glory.**

**Lord, I choose to give thanks...**

Example prayer:

*Lord, I want to bring some things to you that have been nothing but painful to me. It has been so heartbreaking. I was bullied by my father when I was 4. When I was older he never gave me any attention, actually just the opposite and chose to have an affair on Mom and abandoned me and her. I've been nothing but angry, bitter and filled with rage. You know how much that hurt my heart. I don't understand it at all. Why would this happen?*

*But even so, in and with those circumstances, I'm choosing to give you thanks. Not because I'm happy. I know you aren't happy about this hurt in my life. But I submit to you and your sovereignty, and I surrender these things to you and to your will.*

*I don't want to carry this anymore. I don't want to suffer anymore. I give each one of these circumstances and situations to you and I give you thanks.*

*Thank you for never abandoning me through them. I choose to give you thanks and I trust you, even with \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Please take it from me. Lord, I'm choosing to give you thanks. Use it all for my good according to Romans 8:28-29. I trust you and surrender to your sovereignty .*

## Part 4: Pour Out Your Heart

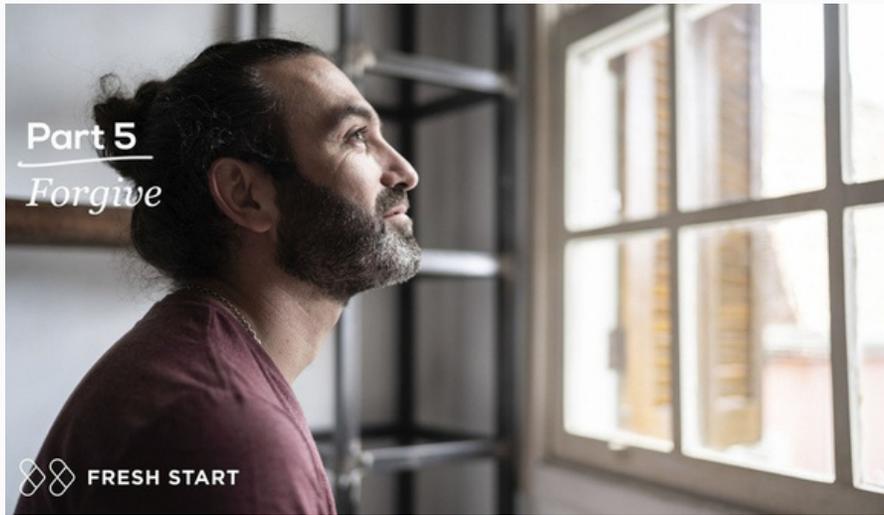
*"Go vertical"*

*"Prayer to the Lord"*

A reminder:

Remember, this is not about *feeling* grateful or about being thankful *for* the hurt or sin against you. It's also not saying it is okay or excusing the offender. It's about positioning your heart to a heart of trust, a heart of surrender, and a heart of submission to the sovereignty of God in, and over all circumstances. It might feel foolish or backward, or like a death in your heart. But, remember, you are being obedient to the Lord, not your feelings. Ask the Lord to cause your feelings to catch up with the act of your will. He is faithful. He will do it.

You may need to take a break. Go for a walk. Turn on some worship music. Do not skip over or rush this part. Let the concept settle into your heart. This is a pivotal point to your freedom.



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

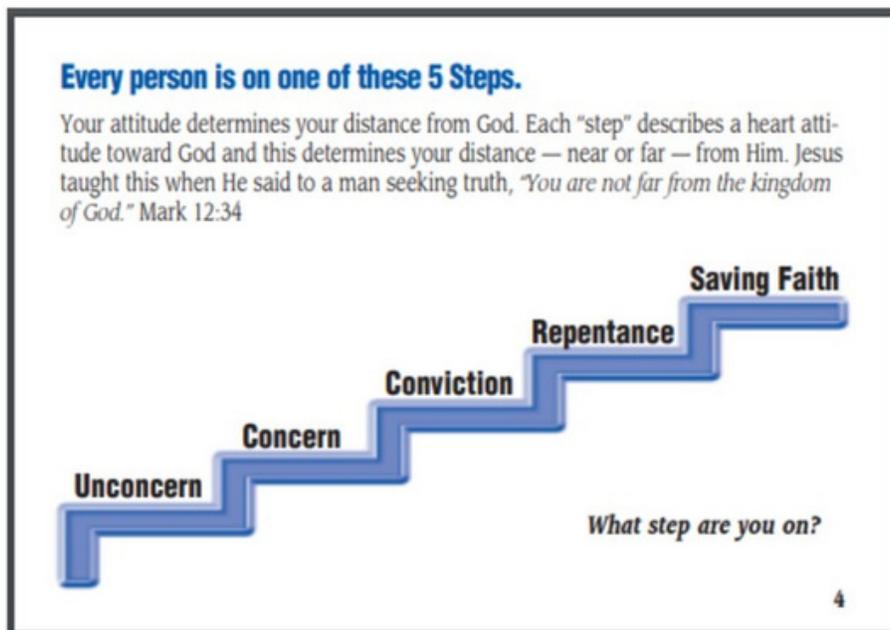
## Part 5: Forgive

*"Forgive the one who has offended or hurt you."*

*"Cancel the debt."*

It's easy to think someone "owes" you because they hurt you. While you are waiting to be "repaid," your *own heart* remains chained. Forgiveness doesn't excuse what he or she did. Forgiveness cancels the debt, so that YOU can be free. In order to forgive, however, you must first be forgiven. Ask God to forgive you first for any of your wrong attitudes, responses or decisions. Then, you are ready to forgive those who have offended or hurt you. Forgive just like you were forgiven.

Once you have a relationship and have entered into saving faith through a total surrender of your life to Jesus, you can truly understand and fully receive His forgiveness, and then freely offer it. If you have any questions about your faith in the Lord, be sure to watch the attached video, "The Ultimate Fresh Start: You Can Be Forgiven," the biblical pathway to saving faith in Christ Jesus.



## Part 5: Forgive

*"Forgive the one who has offended or hurt you."*

*"Cancel the debt."*

***Start by praying through the following scripture. Ask the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know.***

### ***The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant***

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

The servant's master took pity on him canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV84)

***What does the scripture mean to you?***

## Part 5: Forgive

*"Forgive the one who has offended or hurt you."*

*"Cancel the debt."*

**A. Take responsibility for your sinful responses.** Write out your confession of unforgiveness to the Lord, along with related wrong attitudes and or responses.

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)*

### **"Lord, would you forgive me for my sinful actions and attitudes..."**

This is where you take responsibility for your part in this situation by confessing your sinful responses (in parts 3a and 3b), and then asking the Lord for forgiveness. Write out the ways in which you have been unforgiving or any other wrong attitudes as it relates to your process. Be totally honest here. It may be tempting not share all you have done, especially how you have responded to personal relationships, but know that God is calling you to be completely honest and transparent. Be specific and thorough for the sake of being obedient and getting free! It will be worth it.

### **"Lord, would you forgive me for my judgments and vows..."**

Go back to Part 3c. This is where you listed any judgments and vows. Confess each one you have made and then ask God's forgiveness for them.

Example: "Lord, I confess that I have judged \_\_\_\_\_. Please forgive me.

It's also important to break and renounce each of these unholy decisions in the name of Jesus. If you gather with your group or even another trusted leader online or in person, this is the process you will use to break unholy vows you have made.

The format will be like this:

#### **Repent**

Example: "Lord, forgive me for saying I am not loved."

#### **Renounce**

Example: In the name of Jesus, I break the vow that I am not loved."

#### **Replace**

Example: I replace it with the truth that I am a dearly loved child of God."

## Part 5: Forgive

*"Forgive the one who has offended or hurt you."*

*"Cancel the debt."*

**B. Choose to forgive the person who has offended or hurt you. Write out your prayer to the Lord expressing your decision to forgive.**

**"CANCEL THE DEBT!"**

**Include the specifics of those hurts or offenses and how they have affected you in the past, are affecting you in the present and may affect you in the future.**

Go back to Part 1 where you listed your offenses, hurt, and losses. Use this list as a guide to reference when being specific with what you are choosing to forgive.

Example: "Lord, I choose to forgive my dad for never spending time with me, for being critical of everything I did..."

**C. Declare to the Lord: "I cancel the debt! For my sake, they owe me nothing!"**

### **Important note on forgiveness.**

Forgiveness does not mean the behavior is ok. The person is not off the "hook." This individual is now on God's "hook." If you don't forgive, you're saying that YOU holding the offender responsible is more important than allowing GOD to handle it. Forgiveness is a COMMAND, not an option. It is not based on feelings. Forgiveness is a decision to obey God. Forgiveness does NOT equal trust and does NOT automatically require entering back into that former relationship. This may not be wise or possible.. Ask the Lord to help your emotions catch up with the act of your will to forgive.



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

## Part 6: Release

*"Let God handle it!"*

*"Release the offense, hurt, or loss to the Lord!"*

Many times we hear people say, "I have forgiven!", but they realize they have never actually released the person who offended them and/or the circumstances back to the Lord. In holding on, they don't realize they are still trying to control. So, in this part, you are now ready to fully release this person, situation and effects to the Lord. It is time to get your heart back.

Release the person (the one you have forgiven) to the Lord. This painful situation is no longer yours. Let God handle the situation and/or the person involved.

Release is getting the space in your heart back that was once leased out to pain. Take this person or painful circumstance off your hook, and place the person on God's hook. It's now His to deal with. Be willing to pray for the person.

Be forgiven. Be forgiving. Be free to be the person you were created to be!

Forgiven, Forgiving and Free!

***Start by praying through the scriptures and asking the Lord to reveal to you anything He wants you to know. What do the scriptures say to you?***

*"Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall. But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in You."*

*-Psalm 55:22-23 (NIV)*

*"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. It is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:16-21 (NIV)*

*"...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." 1 Peter 2:23 (NASB)*

**What do these verses mean to you?**

## Part 6: Release

*"Let God handle it!"*

*"Release the offense, hurt, or loss to the Lord!"*

### **A. Entrust the person and/or the situation to the Lord.**

Write in the form of a prayer, who or what you are now entrusting to the Lord.

### **B. Bless and pray for the person who has offended or hurt you.**

*"Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing...'"*

*-Luke 23:34 (NIV)*

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..."*

*-Matthew 5:44 (NKJV)*

Note:

You may want to include forgiving any future offenses or hurts with this person or anyone else related to this relationship, hurt or loss. (Ongoing effects)

### **C. Express to the Lord in prayer your desire to actively live out the truth God has shown you in your process.**

For closure purposes, we want to encourage you to take your thoughts captive to obey the Lord. What this means is: the enemy will try to re-infect your heart. This is where you will need to remember that you have chosen to forgive the person who offended you! You are not going to listen to the lies of the enemy. He will try to remind you again of all the hurt you once experienced. You have forgiven! Stand, and hold fast to your decision! Resist the enemy to take up an offense again, and praise God for the victory He has given you through forgiveness!

*"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NASB) 1995*

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2 (NASB)*

*"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." Psalm 19:14 (NIV)*

**From this point going forward, you are choosing to renew your mind—actively living out the new revelations and insights God has given you through forgiveness.**

**Lord, help me to take my thoughts captive to obey You...**



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

# Next Steps: Your Journey to Freedom

*"Let God handle it!"*

*"Release the offense, hurt, or loss to the Lord!"*

Congratulations!! You have walked through the first of what we hope to be many processes in your journey to freedom. There is a reason we break this process into parts and not steps that you check off your list. Simply put, it is a process of obedience to the Lord leading to freedom.

Fresh Start is the gospel applied to your heart. This process is designed to be a tool in your tool belt for the rest of your life. Learn it! Use it! And Repeat because there is always more with the Lord!

## **So, what are your next steps?**

No matter where you are on your journey, we hope that you will stay connected and that this is the beginning of an exciting and worthwhile journey in becoming whom you were created to be.

- Get in a processing group! \*Check the website for availability in-person or online.
- Begin another process!
- Receive more freedom through Fresh Start's resources.
- Or, maybe you need to connect with someone to ask more questions about your first process.
- Consider leading a Fresh Start group or process
- Share your story with us at [stories@freshstartforallnations.org](mailto:stories@freshstartforallnations.org)
- Discuss implementing this with your local church! Email us at [info@freshstartforallnations.org](mailto:info@freshstartforallnations.org)

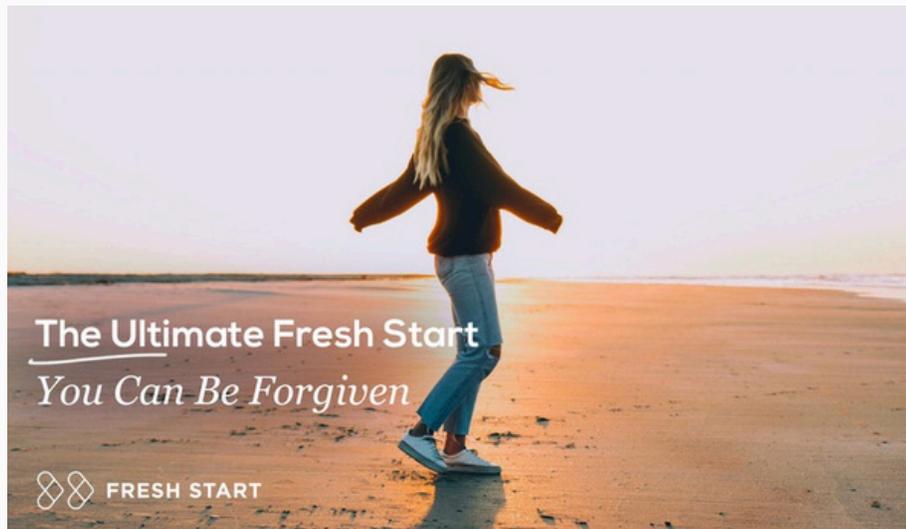
## **Let's Pray:**

*Father God, thank You for the healing we have seen and experienced today. We know this is just the beginning, and we invite You into all the next steps for each heart. Lord, be with these brothers and sisters as they continue on in their journeys toward total freedom for their hearts, minds, bodies, and souls.*

*We believe You are on a mission to see every heart in every nation free from the effects of offense, hurt, and loss. Help each of us to do our part in getting right with You, so we can help others to live the life they were created to live while here on earth.*

*God, for those who have come to know You for the first time, we ask that You would meet them right where they are. Speak to them. Heal them. And give them comfort that in You, they are finally home and loved. Let them know they will never walk this road alone.*

*We are excited about all that You have for each one of us. Help us to take the next step of obedience with You. We trust You, Lord, and we thank You for the gift of freedom that came from Your Son, Jesus Christ. It cost Him everything, including His life, so we could be free. Thank you, Lord. We love You, and pray all this in Your Holy Name, Jesus. Amen!*



# Processing the Issues of Your Heart

*Participant Guide*

# The Ultimate Fresh Start: You Can Be Forgiven

We are so glad you are here!

It takes courage to continue to step forward into the necessary, but unknown parts of your story and journey. Up until this point in your life, you may have held back parts or all of your heart from fully surrendering to God. So, we want to extend an invitation to you. You can be forgiven!

**We invite you to follow along in prayer in one of these ways:**

1. Follow the prayer in the back of your "Processing the Issues of Your Heart Booklet."
2. Follow along with the prayer in the "Ultimate Fresh Start Video."
3. Read the, "You Can Be Forgiven," prayer on the website, app, or attached here.

You may have your own words and that is okay. As you follow these prompts in faith, trust Jesus to do the work only He can do, redeeming and cleansing your heart and making you His son or daughter.

We are excited about all that God is doing in you and are trusting the Holy Spirit to bear witness to your spirit that you are now in the family of God. And, as you have been forgiven, now you can forgive because the Forgiver has moved inside you by His Holy Spirit!

*For more information, please stay connected with us:*

**[freshstartforallnations.org](https://freshstartforallnations.org)**

# You Can Be Forgiven

*(Sample Prayer from Fresh Start For All Nations)*

"Lord Jesus, I desire to experience the ultimate Fresh Start and to be truly brought into Your family as Your son/daughter.

I confess and acknowledge that until this time, I have lived a "me first" life.

I confess that I have had pride, jealousy, envy, judging others, and (fill in the blank with other wrong attitudes).

Will you please forgive me for my wrong thoughts, words, and actions? (be specific here).

Lord, I am choosing to repent, to turn from my "me first" life, my own sinful ways, to Your way. I want to obey and follow You. Please forgive me for each and every one of the sins I am now naming (fill in the blank with the sins you are confessing....)

I now choose to yield totally to You as my Lord and leader of my life, knowing You can make any changes in my life that You consider best for me. I put my trust in You and You alone!

Thank You for forgiving and saving me! Thank You for moving inside me by Your Holy Spirit. I can now forgive others as You have forgiven me.

I pray all of these things in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!"