

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”

1 Peter 3:15

Welcome to NEXT!...

...the “next” step in your journey of becoming increasingly FORGIVEN, FORGIVING and FREE!

The primary objective of these five sessions is to help you become better equipped in sharing **YOUR** “Fresh Start Story”.

To do this we are going to focus on 3 things:

1. The Biblical Basis of each part of “Processing The Issues Of Your Heart”: knowing and understanding the truth of God’s Word on which each part of the process is based.
2. The Big Ideas: a focus on learning the Fresh Start principles and perspectives, or “big ideas”, of each part of the process.
3. Communication Skills: equipping you with skills in communicating your story - to make your experience as understandable, relatable and relational as possible.

Let’s Get Started!

A core value of Fresh Start is sharing the hope that is within you (YOUR Fresh Start Story) – as you give away what you have received! As you consider your story, how would you answer the following questions?:

1. Before you entered this process, what ONE WORD would you have used to describe the condition of your heart regarding your offense, hurt or loss?
2. After completing your process, what ONE WORD would you now use to describe the condition of your heart?
3. Was your situation an offense, hurt or loss?
4. Which part of the process was the most impacting for you? Why?
5. How would you describe the impact this process has had on your heart and life?
6. How have you changed as a result of your process?
7. Based on your experience, what were the benefits of processing an offense, hurt or loss?
8. What is next for you? (Desires, dreams, other)

Application:

Each **NEXT** participant will now share his/her own Fresh Start story. (From their heart, without assistance from notes and without referring to the Processing The Issues Of Your Heart booklet)

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“Processing the Issues of Your Heart” is one booklet which can be viewed as having two distinct themes:

- A. Parts 1-3, a Discovery Theme: discovering what is in your heart, how you have been affected and how you have responded.
 - 1. OFFENSE/HURT/LOSS**
 - 2. AFFECT**
 - 3. RESPONSE**
- B. Parts 4-6, an Application Theme: the opportunity to participate in being set free from the debilitating effects of offense, hurt and loss through the transforming power of forgiveness and freedom in Christ!
 - 4. POUR OUT YOUR HEART**
 - 5. FORGIVE**
 - 6. RELEASE**

The Biblical Basis and “Big Ideas” for Parts 1-3

1. OFFENSE/HURT/LOSS

- a. The Biblical Basis:
 - i. Psalm 26:2, “Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.”
- b. The Big Idea:
 - i. **Who or What is in your gap?**

THE GAP represents the difference between God’s design and your experience – and the difference between God’s Character and the character of any given person. God’s design is always good and perfect. God’s character is love, forgiveness, mercy, kindness, justice, holiness, faithfulness, peace, joy, patience and MORE! There is ALWAYS a GAP when we compare UP. (When we compare what any person is like at a given point in time with God’s Character and Design)

2. AFFECT

- a. The Biblical Basis:
 - i. Psalm 139:23, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”
- b. The Big Idea:
 - i. **What is in your heart?**

How has your heart been affected? Perhaps, in ways that you were not even aware of – or could really understand?

This is an opportunity to consider your initial thoughts and feelings toward a specific offense, hurt or loss – and to begin to recognize and acknowledge anything that has impacted your heart.

3. RESPONSE

a. The Biblical Basis:

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

b. The Big Idea:

i. **What have you decided?**

What have you said or done in response to your specific offense, hurt or loss? And ultimately, what have you decided? (For example: "Because of how I was hurt by a certain person, I have **decided** I am not going to let anyone ever hurt me again.")

Application:

1. As it relates to your story, which Bible verse(s) from Parts 1-3 was the most helpful in your process? Please explain.

2. As it relates to your story, which Big Idea from Parts 1-3 was the most helpful in your process? Please explain.

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The Biblical Basis and “Big Ideas” for Parts 4-6

4. POUR OUT YOUR HEART: *Pouring out your heart includes “Telling God all about it” but is incomplete without “Giving thanks”*

- a. The Biblical Basis for “Telling God all about it”
 - i. Psalm 62:8, “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”
 - ii. Psalm 142:1-2, “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.”
- b. The Biblical Basis for “Giving Thanks”
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “... give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
 - ii. “Ephesians 5:20, “...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - iii. Psalm 50:14-15; 23, “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.”
 - iv. Psalm 116:17, “I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.”
 - v. Romans 8:28-29, “And we know that God 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.”
- c. The Big Idea
 - i. **Go vertical!**

Whatever we are going through, thinking or feeling, we can take it to God and “tell Him all about it” and no matter what the circumstances or potential outcome, to give thanks.
 - A perspective: **Settle it at the extreme!**

Imagine the “worst case scenario” for anything that could or might happen to you. At that place, ask yourself these questions, “If this should actually happen, will Jesus be enough? If the whole world should reject me, is Jesus’ acceptance enough? If I should lose everything, will having Jesus be enough? Whether I ever understand why this has happened to me or not, Is Jesus worthy of my life, love and worship?” If you can answer “Yes” to the above questions and give thanks even though the outcome is uncertain, you are “settling it at the extreme”. And, when you Settle It At The Extreme, you have settled it everywhere short of the extreme - even if the extreme never happens.

5. FORGIVE

a. The Biblical Basis:

- i. Matthew 18:21-35, The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant- 18:35, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

b. The Big Idea:

i. **Cancel the debt!**

If unforgiveness is characterized by the attitude of “pay me what you owe me!”, then forgiveness can be described as an attitude and choice to “cancel the debt”. It is a perspective that no person owes me **anything** for my sake or satisfaction because God, through Jesus, has given me **everything**. Especially as expressed through His forgiveness – and in His “cancelling my debt” of sin that I could **never** pay. (REMEMBER: Even after forgiving, you may continue to be affected)

6. RELEASE

a. The Biblical Basis:

- i. Psalm 55:22-23, “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.”
- ii. Romans 12:17-21, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If 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.”
- iii. Psalm 19:14, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and Redeemer.”
- iv. Matthew 5:44, “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...”

b. The Big Idea:

i. **Let God handle it!**

Even after forgiving, you may still experience the ongoing effects of a particular offense, hurt or loss. Your process now continues as you offer up those affects to God and even forgive the offender for those affects if you haven’t done so already - and entrust the care of your heart and any related circumstances (physical, financial, etc.) to Him. This allows for further healing and freedom and invites God’s blessing and empowerment – and positions you to receive God’s heart for the offender, and to even bless, love and pray for them! (Matthew 5:44)

Application:

1. As it relates to your story, which Bible verse(s) from Parts 4-6 was the most helpful in your process? Please explain.

2. As it relates to your story, which Big Idea from Parts 4-6 was the most helpful in your process? Please explain.

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Communication Skills in sharing YOUR Story

When communicating, consider that what you say, how you say it and how you listen and care are all critical parts of “building a bridge” of relationship. You will have opportunities to share your Fresh Start Story as you build a relational bridge with others – a bridge over which the **hope** conveyed in your story can travel.

What is Communication?

Simply put, communication is the individual sharing of ideas and information for mutual understanding. Here’s some Biblical guidance to successful communication:

- ✓ James 1:19, “... be quick to listen, slow to speak.”
- ✓ Proverbs 18:13,15: “The one who gives an answer before he listens—this is foolishness and disgrace for him... The mind of the discerning acquires knowledge and the ear of the wise seeks it.”
- ✓ Proverbs 19:8, “...he who cherishes understanding prospers.”

Some ways of “building a bridge” when communicating include:

- Positive/engaging body language (active listening)
- Maintaining and expressing sensitivity to the other person’s time
- Remembering that most people do not care what you know – until they know that you care

Understanding vs. Agreement

Communicating in a Godly way always seeks to understand the other person. However, too often we find ourselves seeking to persuade the other person, or to make them agree with our opinion.

Proverbs 18:2, “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions.”

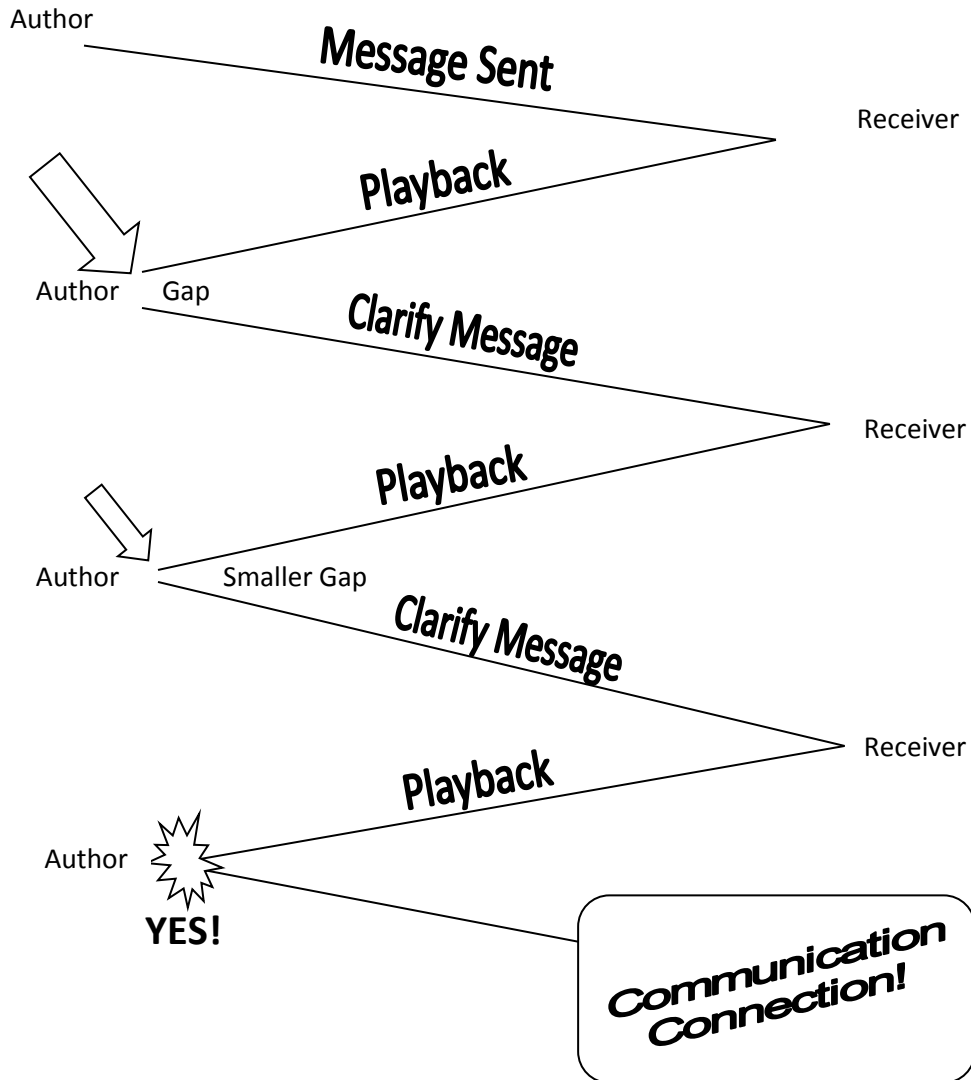
Here are a few quick differences between the goal of Understanding and the goal of Agreement:

“Goal of Understanding”	“Goal of Agreement”
Listening to their opinions	Waiting for chances to say your opinions
Asks many questions	Gives many reasons and rebuttals
Values the other person’s beliefs	Values personal beliefs and tries to conform the other person to your belief
Seeks to have a conversation	Seeks to have a debate
Chooses relationship over being “right”	Chooses being “right” over relationship
Invites the opinions of others	Fights the opinion of others
Others Centered	Self Centered

Achieving Mutual Understanding

- ✓ IMPORTANT: reaching mutual understanding with someone doesn’t always mean you will come to agreement with one another or that your opinions will align. However, it does mean that you will understand each other’s position and that you value the author of it whether you agree with their position or not.

Let's take a look at a model of Mutual Understanding...



Application:

Find a partner and practice “Achieving Mutual Understanding” as it relates to the question “What is Fresh Start?”

Imagine you are meeting someone in a public place, at your job, a family function or in a restaurant. They notice that you are wearing a Fresh Start shirt, wristband, reading a “Processing The Issues Of Your Heart” booklet, or overhear a conversation that you are having with a friend related to your own Fresh Start Story.

As a result, they ask you, “What is Fresh Start?”

Take turns role playing your responses to this question as you practice “Building a bridge” and “Achieving Mutual Understanding”. Include asking questions on the part of the “Receiver” to seek understanding.

If time permits, also practice your responses in 3 different versions: 30 seconds, 90 seconds and 3 minutes long – as you will have different opportunities with different people and in various situations and settings.

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YOUR Fresh Start Story!

It is now time to combine all that you have learned and practiced in the previous 4 session – as you again share YOUR Fresh Start story with the group. Before we tell our stories, let’s review what we have covered:

a. Session 1: The 3 Primary Objectives for NEXT:

- i. The Biblical Basis of each part of “Processing The Issues Of Your Heart”
- ii. The Big Ideas
- iii. Communication Skills

b. Session 2: The Biblical Basic and Big Ideas for Parts 1-3

- i. Part 1: **OFFENSE/HURT/LOSS** - Big Idea: **Who or What is in your gap?**
- ii. Part 2: **AFFECT** - Big Idea: **What is in your heart?**
- iii. Part 3: **RESPONSE** - Big Idea: **What have you decided?**

c. Session 3: The Biblical Basic and Big Ideas for Parts 4-6

- i. Part 4: **POUR OUT YOUR HEART** - Big Idea: **Go vertical!**
- ii. Part 5: **FORGIVE** - Big Idea: **Cancel the debt!**
- iii. Part 6: **RELEASE** - Big Idea: **Let God handle it!**

d. Session 4: Communication Skills

- i. “Building a bridge”
- ii. Understanding VS Agreement
- iii. Achieving Mutual Understanding

Application:

Referring back to the 8 questions that were introduced in Session #1, take turns having each participant share their story with the rest of the group:

1. Before you entered this process, what ONE WORD would you have used to describe the condition of your heart regarding your offense, hurt or loss?
2. After completing your process, what ONE WORD would you now use to describe the condition of your heart?
3. Was your situation an offense, hurt or loss?
4. Which part of the process was the most impacting for you? Why?
5. How would you describe the impact this process has had on your heart and life?
6. How have you changed as a result of your process?
7. Based on your experience, what were the benefits of processing an offense, hurt or loss?
8. What is next for you? (Desires, dreams, other)

Conclusion

We pray that as a result of these sessions you have become better equipped in sharing **YOUR** unique Fresh Start Story!
May you increasingly experience and apply a FORGIVEN, FORGIVING and FREE lifestyle
as you give away what you have received!

And remember, "With the Lord, there is always MORE!"