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**FREEDOM**

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*booklet*



“If you grow a healthy tree, you’ll pick healthy fruit. If you grow a diseased tree, you’ll pick worm-eaten fruit. The fruit tells you about the tree... A good person produces good deeds and words season after season. An evil person is a blight on the orchard.”

— MATTHEW 12:33-35, THE MESSAGE

# **YOUR LIFE IS LIKE A TREE. YOU CAN PRODUCE HEALTHY FRUIT THAT BENEFITS PEOPLE OR UNHEALTHY FRUIT THAT HURTS PEOPLE.**

We are created in the image of God. This identity is intrinsic. Unfortunately, our perception of this identity has been distorted and devalued. Because of this false perception, our heart and mind have been poisoned with negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. This poison affects our view of God and others. As a result, we cope by fighting or guarding against being hurt. However, these behaviors become habits that poison others while perpetuating our own pain. Only Jesus can redeem our deep-rooted negative perception of our identity — empowering us to enjoy life and live connected with others.

Our lives are like a tree. The fruit of our lives — our behaviors and actions — are fed by the root system of our attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. These originate early in our developmental years through our experiences and relationships. If these experiences and relationships are healthy, we develop healthy attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that produce healthy coping behaviors and habits. However, if our experience or relationships do not foster healthy attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, or feelings, we develop destructive coping behaviors and habits. Unfortunately, we have all been involved in some form of unhealthy experience or relationship in our early growing up years.



*The Freedom Booklet* is a resource that can help you identify and uproot those unhealthy attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. It will encourage you to acknowledge the negative effects, repent of

your reactions, and release the offender to the Lord. At the end, you will have the opportunity to replace the negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings with God's truth about who you are and about your situation. This truth will empower you to live free in your future no matter what.

As you make your way through this process, I recommend you watch the tutorial videos for each section. These videos can be found at our website:

**[www.CultivateRelationships.com/Resources](http://www.CultivateRelationships.com/Resources)**

You will find the tutorial videos for this resource under *The Freedom Booklet* resource.

One final note, don't just simply answer the questions. God knows your heart and sees your life. He knows what is most important and He sees the deep areas of your mind and heart. Therefore, before writing anything down, I recommend praying through each question and listening for what the Holy Spirit may want to say or show you. Then, use a notebook or journal to write out what you see or hear God saying in response to the question.

Writing out these responses will help clarify your thoughts and bring finality to the process. Also, some of the questions may refer to a response you previously wrote down. Therefore, writing these answers out will help you reference these responses later in the booklet and bring a thoroughness to the process.

My desire for you as you work through this resource is that you would be honest with yourself and open for what God may have for you. While some sections in this resource may be easier than others, I ask that you push through to the end.

-Nathan Steel

# STEP 1: EXPERIENCES & RELATIONSHIPS

*Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.*

~ Psalm 26:2, NASB

*Then [Jesus] said to the disciples, “It is impossible that no offenses should come...”*

~ Luke 17:1

In your notebook or journal, write out areas of offense, hurt, or loss in your life. If this is your first time going through this resource, I recommend identifying experiences that happened early in your growing up years.<sup>1</sup> Try to be as specific as possible in the person(s) or situation involved.

The following are some examples of offenses or hurts that you may have experienced in your life:

- *A person’s words or actions that made you feel insulted, humiliated, devalued, or rejected.*
- *People or situations where you have been or felt violated or abused.*
- *A separation or divorce in either your own life or in the life of a couple close to you.*
- *Conflicts in your life involving parents, family, friends, coworker, church leaders, mentors, teachers, coaches, or others.*
- *Significant moments where you did not feel loved or safe.*

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<sup>1</sup> **Forgiving Yourself:** If you feel the need to forgive yourself, you can still benefit from this resource. Work through this resource paying special attention to *Step 6: Repenting & Confessing* (pg. 16). Trusting that Jesus has paid this price for your sin — acknowledging and receiving His forgiveness — will empower you to live free of guilt and shame.

**Forgiving God or Processing a Loss:** Processing a loss, unless resulting from one’s own choices, is an issue of trusting God and releasing the effects of that loss to Him. If you feel a perceived debt in which God owes you something, you can still benefit from this resource. Work through this resource but pay special attention to *Step 9: Receiving & Replacing* (pg. 22). Trusting the Heavenly Father’s perfect love, goodness, and character will help you embrace His plan and purpose for your life.

**(1.1) Take a few moments to write down as many offenses or hurts that you have experienced in your life.**

The following are some examples of significant losses that you may have experienced in your life:

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

**(1.2) Write down some significant losses that you experienced in your life.**

Choose ONE of the previous offenses, hurts, or losses that you've written down to work through at this time. Again, if this is your first time going through this resource, I recommend choosing one of the earliest experiences or relationships that you identified above — especially those relating to your early growing up years in general and your biological parents in particular. These early painful experiences are often where negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings began.

**(1.3) Write down the offense, hurt, or loss you are choosing to work through.**

**(1.4) Write down the offending person that is primarily responsible for this offense, hurt, or loss (if applicable).**

## **STEP 2: ATTITUDES, THOUGHTS, BELIEFS, & FEELINGS**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

~ Psalm 139:23-24, NLT

Early painful experiences and relationships build the foundation of our attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Your willingness to identify these negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings is an important step in becoming free from destructive coping behaviors and habits.

**(2.1) Take some time to write down what your thoughts have been regarding the situation.**

**(2.2) Write down what your thoughts have been toward the person (or people) involved.**



Use the following list of words to help clarify, guide, direct, and articulate your thoughts and feelings regarding the specific experience. Identify the top three or four feelings that most apply to you in this specific circumstance.

Unloved	Inadequate	Controlled	Anxious	Unwanted
Unworthy	Not Good Enough	Vulnerable	Resentful	Rejected
Worthless	Frustrated	Unaccepted	Betrayed	Helpless
Insignificant	Out of Control	Unheard	Used	Unsafe
Alone	Not Measuring Up	Invalidated	Victimized	Insecure
Devalued	Unknown	Abandoned	Condemned	Disconnected
Defective	Discouraged	Hopeless	Dirty	Distrust
Shameful	Trapped	Fearful	Powerless	Disrespected
Inferior	Unprotected	Judged	Failure	<b>Bitter/Anger</b> <sup>2</sup>

Answer the following questions using the three or four attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings you've identified above that best fit the way you have felt about the situation or person.

**(2.3) Write out how this specific experience has affected you.**

**Be sure to answer separately for each on you identified.**

(For example, you may write down: *"I feel \_\_\_ because..."*)

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<sup>2</sup> Bitterness and anger are internal and external behavioral reactions. While we may genuinely "feel" bitter or angry, these are reactions to something or someone triggering a negative emotion in us. If you identified bitterness or anger as your feeling, be sure to include details of these as specific responses in *Step 3: Coping Behaviors & Habits*, pg. 10.

**(2.4) Write out how this experience particularly affected your life in a negative way.**

**(2.5) Write out the emotional, physical, or mental consequences of this experience that you are living with.**

**(2.6) Write out how this experience has or might negatively affect your future.**

**(2.7) Write out how this experience has or might negatively affect those you love.**

## **STEP 3: COPING BEHAVIORS & HABITS**

*Good people bring good things out of the good they store in their hearts.  
But evil people bring evil things out of the evil they stored in their hearts. People  
speak the things that are in their hearts.*

~ Luke 6:45, NLT

We develop destructive coping behaviors and habits when we have believed a lie about ourselves, others, and God; we negatively react to the people that have caused us pain. This begins a lifestyle of fighting or guarding against being hurt again.

**(3.1) Write down the things you've said to or about the person or circumstance.**

**(3.2) Write down things you've done or failed to do to the person or because of them or the circumstance.**

**(3.3) Write down the thoughts you've had toward the person or about the circumstance.**

**(3.4) Write down the beliefs you started to have as a result of this offense, specifically toward:**

**a. The Offender**

**b. The Situation**

**(3.5) Write down the beliefs you started to have as a result of this offense, specifically toward:**

**a. Yourself**

**b. God**

**c. Similar Situations**

**d. Similar People (as the offender)**

## **STEP 4: NEEDS & DESIRES**

*People, trust God all the time.*

*Tell him all your problems, because God is our protection.*

~ Psalm 62:8, NCV

*I cry out to the LORD; I pray to the LORD for mercy.*

*I pour out my problems to him; I tell him my troubles.*

~ Psalm 142:1-2, NCV

We are born with needs and desires. These include being loved, cared for, and safe. In the following responses you will identify and express your unmet needs or desires along with your current ones.

**(4.1) Write down how you feel about this person and the situation.**

**(4.2) Write down what you are disappointed or upset about or what you wish would have happened (or not happened).**

**(4.3) As you begin to move forward, write down your current needs and desires (what you would like to happen).**

## STEP 5: GIVE THANKS

*I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart;*

*I will recount all your wonderful deeds.*

~ Psalm 9:1, ESV

*I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving,*

*and will call upon the name of the LORD.*

~ Psalm 116:17, NKJV

*Always give thanks to God the Father for everything,*

*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

~ Ephesians 5:20, NCV

Giving thanks to God aligns our perspective with His. It helps us begin to trust Him amidst painful experiences — releasing control of what we think should happen. However, this can be very difficult and often feels like a sacrifice. Ask God to help you find something to be thankful for regarding the experience and tell Him in writing. Finally, tell Him that you are willing to accept however He wants to use this circumstance in your life.

**(5.1) Write down your prayer of thanksgiving to God.**



## THE SERVANT WHO NEVER FORGAVE.

Then Peter came to [Jesus] and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”

“No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!

“Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

“But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ *Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.*

“But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. *He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.*

“His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! *I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?*’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

— MATTHEW 18:21-35 | NLT *Emphasis Added*

## STEP 6: REPENTING & CONFESSING

*Pain handled in God's way produces a turning from sin to God which leads to salvation, and there is nothing to regret in that! But pain handled in the world's way produces only death. For just look at what handling the pain God's way produced in you! What earnest diligence, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what readiness to put things right! In everything you have proved yourselves blameless in the matter.*

~ 2 Corinthians 7:10-11, CJB

*But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.*

~ 1 John 1:9, NCV

*Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.*

~ James 5:16, THE MESSAGE

Repentance is turning away from our own desires and lifestyles toward God, to live how He designed us to live. It is full acknowledgement, trust, and submission to the Heavenly Father and His design and plan for our life. Finish the following statements of confession and repentance in your journal or notebook.

**(6.1) Write down your confession and statement of repentance for your unwillingness to forgive the offending person.**

**(6.2) Write down your apology for what you've said and done toward the person that were wrong, hurtful, or negative. (Refer to 3.1-2, pg. 10)**

**(6.3) Write down your apology for the wrong, hurtful, or negative thoughts and attitudes you've believed or decisions you've made toward the offender or about the situation. (Refer to 3.3-4, pg. 11)**

**(6.4) Write down your apology for the wrong, hurtful, or negative thoughts and attitudes you've believed or decisions you made about yourself, God, or similar situations and people. (Refer to 3.5, pg. 11)**

**(6.5) Write down the summation of your apology. Confess and repent to the Holy Spirit for all the thoughts and behaviors from which you've been living. Finally, end your apology by thanking God for His goodness and faithfulness and express that you are choosing to receive His forgiveness.**

## STEP 7: FORGIVING OFFENSES

*Yes, if you forgive others their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you for your sins. But if you don't forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins.*

~ Matthew 6:14-15, NCV

*Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

~ Ephesians 4:31-32, NCV

Answer the following statements by writing out your decision to forgive the person who has sinned against you. Forgive the specific hurts or offenses, releasing your control to God. Choose to forgive the person who has hurt or offended you. Include the specific consequences of how they have negatively affected you in the past. Also, include how they are currently affecting you, and may affect you in the future. One last note, if you feel like you still need to forgive yourself, revisit *Step 6* (pg. 16), answering the questions (especially 2-5, pg. 17). Then skip to *Step 8* (pg. 20) and entrust your sin along with any negative consequences on others or yourself to God — trusting Jesus has paid the price for your sin and embrace His forgiveness.

If you are processing a loss, remember that God's perfect love and infinite goodness exclude Him from being forgiven. Processing a loss is often an issue of trusting God's love and goodness amidst disappointment or tragedy. If you feel as though God still "owes" you something, look back at *Step 6* (pg. 16) and answer questions 4 and 5 (pg. 17). Then, skip to *Step 8* (pg. 20) and entrust yourself and your circumstances to His love and goodness.

In your notebook or journal, write out and complete the following statements with your own words.

**(7.1) I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for the following offense...**

**(7.2) I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for the following ways this offense has affected me in the past. (Refer to 2.3, pg. 7)**

**(7.3) I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for the following ways this offense has affected me in my current circumstances and relationships. (Refer to 2.4-5, pg. 8)**

**(7.4) I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for the following foreseen and unforeseen ways this offense may affect me in my future. (Refer to 2.6, pg. 9)**

**(7.5) I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for the following foreseen and unforeseen ways this offense has affected those I love. (Refer to 2.7, pg. 9)**

## STEP 8: RELEASING & BLESSING

*“I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does.”*

~ Matthew 5:44-45, THE MESSAGE

*Don’t bit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you’ve got it in you, get along with everybody. Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. “I’ll do the judging,” says God. “I’ll take care of it.” Our scripture tells us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness.*

*Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.*

~ Romans 12:17-21, THE MESSAGE

This is one of the most powerful steps in forgiveness — letting go of your control and desired outcomes. God is faithful. He is bigger and better at dealing with our offenses and disappointments. Give control back to Him so that He can do something good with it — so that His grace can relieve your pain and anxiety.

If you’re going through this resource for a sin you’ve committed, then you can be confident that you are forgiven through Jesus’ death on the cross. You simply receive and live confidently knowing you are loved and the pain and disappointment you’ve caused others can be remedied. Entrust your thoughts, behaviors, and current circumstances to God’s grace and mercy — allow Him to free you of shame, guilt, and condemnation.

If you’re working through this resource grieving the loss of someone or something, know that God can work horribly traumatic circumstances out for your good. Because of our limited perspective, we do not get to define what that good may mean. He may not have caused the circumstance, but He will fix the circumstance to bring peace and hope back into your mind and life. We release control and what we think should have happened to God’s perfect love, grace, mercy, and goodness.

In your notebook or journal, write out and complete the following statements with your own words. If you're repenting, entrust yourself and the consequences to God. Ask Him to specifically bless the negative circumstances you've caused and/or the people you've hurt. If you're grieving, entrust the circumstance to God. Ask Him to redeem and remedy the pain, loss, and anxiety you're feeling.

**(8.1) I choose to release \_\_\_\_\_ to You good Father, in the following specific ways.**

**(8.2) I am choosing to pray over \_\_\_\_\_ the following specific blessings — asking that You would make the following good things happen in their life...**

## STEP 9: RECEIVING & REPLACING

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

~ John 8:31-32, NKJV

Despite what you have done or what has been done to you, God desires to redeem your true identity — removing your distorted and devalued perception of yourself. Prayerfully go through the next step, asking the Holy Spirit to speak truth to you about who you are and who He is. Pray through the following prayers. Then, in your journal or notebook write down what He speaks to you or shows you. While it may take a few moments to clearly hear His voice, it will often be the first thing that comes to your mind after you pray. Trust that this is His voice.

***“Heavenly Father, thank You for desiring good for me. I trust that You will speak to me and that Your voice will be clear.”***

**(9.1) *“Holy Spirit, because of this circumstance or relationship, what LIE have I believed about myself?”*** (Before continuing, write down what you heard or saw.)

**(9.2) *“Holy Spirit, because of this circumstance or relationship, what LIE have I believed about You?”*** (Before continuing, write down what you heard or saw.)



(9.3) *“Holy Spirit, what TRUTH do you want me to believe about myself?”* (Before continuing, write down what you heard or saw.)

(9.4) *“Holy Spirit, what TRUTH do you want me to believe about You?”* (Before continuing, write down what you heard or saw.)

(9.5) *“Jesus, I choose to give you the LIE that I am...”* (Picture yourself handing Jesus the lie from 9.1.)

(9.6) *“Jesus, I choose to replace the LIE with the TRUTH that I am...”* (Picture Jesus handing you the truth from 9.3.)

(9.7) *“Jesus, I choose to give you the LIE that the Heavenly Father is...”* (Picture yourself handing Jesus the lie from 9.2.)

(9.8) *“Jesus, I choose to replace the LIE with the TRUTH that the Heavenly Father is...”* (Picture Jesus handing you the truth from 9.4.)

## FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Share with a close friend or family member what you've worked through — talking through what you wrote down in your journal or notebook (e.g., your responses, thoughts, feelings, and prayers). Being vulnerable with this *Encouragement Partner*<sup>3</sup> will enhance the freedom and experience of this resource. This will encourage you to keep moving forward in forgiveness and pursuing wholeness.

Then, celebrate with that person. Celebrate the win this process has brought to your life. Get ice cream, go out for dinner, whatever it is. Celebrate!

When you've thoroughly celebrated, go through this process again, dealing with another person or offense. Continue revisiting this resource every time you feel anxious, frustrated, discouraged, or hurt by someone. Continue to write down your responses to these steps in a journal or notebook. Each journal or notebook will become a trophy of freedom — a symbol of what God is doing in your life and relationships.

Discuss each one with an *Encouragement Partner*.

Then, celebrate each one.

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of an *Encouragement Partner* is described in detail in Nathan Steel's book, UNLOVE: A Book about Unlearning and Reshaping What You Know About God, Love, People, and Relationships., copyright © 2020 by Cultivate Publishing (see pages 119-120).



