Registration Packet

UNTYING THE KNOTS OF THE HEART

1. **Lesson 1**—*Untying the Knots of the Heart* **Introduction**
   Please read, complete the Reflection Questions, and bring with you to the first group meeting.

2. *Untying the Knots of the Heart* **Underlying Beliefs**
   Please read prior to first group meeting.

3. *Untying the Knots of the Heart* **Registration Form**
   Please complete and sign the form, and bring it with your payment to your group facilitator.

APHESIS GROUP

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Untying the Knots of the Heart

Lesson 1 Introduction

Focus

Welcome to *Untying the Knots of the Heart*! This first lesson introduces you to who we are, what we believe, what we hope for you, and helpful information about our unique discipleship process. During our first group time together, we'll look at a broad overview of *Untying the Knots* and review our important group norms and values. We'll also start the process of getting to know one another.

Encouragement

As you read, we invite you to capture any questions you may have about the group process. We also invite your honesty and willingness to practice trust. Particularly, think about what creates a safe environment for you to share your thoughts and struggles. Please be ready to share this with your *Untying the Knots* group.

Assignment Summary

- Read the lesson.
- Complete the Reflection Questions.
- Fill out and sign the *Untying the Knots of the Heart* Registration Form, indicating agreement with the Norms and Values and Use of Process and Materials.
- Be prepared to discuss and reflect on the lesson material during your group meeting.

Prayer

Lord, I want to experience peace. I want to live fully. I want to feel your presence and love in the way you intended. Help me in this journey of discovery, seeing more of who I am and who you are. Help me truly process what is going on in the depths of my heart.

Untying the Knots of the Heart

Introduction — Lesson 1

We are in great need of discovering who we really are, who others around us really are, who God really is.



Why Do We Need to Untie the Knots?

When life is kind and we are experiencing little stress or pain, most of us are the "good Christians" we long to be. When life is good and the road is smooth, our ability to love others and God comes easily. Our inner life feels peaceful and we have time to reflect and intentionally choose our thoughts, words, and actions. We tend to be better communicators, with patience and energy to invest in people we love and all that matters most to us.

However, when life is unkind and we experience times of long-term stress and pain, a new set of inner-life and relational dynamics emerges. For most of us, when we experience relational, physical, emotional, and/or spiritual pain, our ability to love and be others-focused is greatly diminished.[1] Our inner life feels like it is in turmoil, or even complete chaos. People and circumstances seem to continually bruise the very places in our souls that already hurt most. Our hearts feel knotted and tattered. The depth of our Christianity and our true character begin revealing themselves during life's trials; however, for the Christ-follower, something abundantly refreshing and life-giving should be stirring deep within the heart, even in the midst of life's daily challenges.[2]

> *Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*
> John 7:37–38

Obviously, there is something rich and wonderful that followers of Jesus Christ are meant to experience. But what does this thirst-quenching river of living water look like on a daily basis?

A life alive with such a wellspring would likely include rich, vibrant emotions and inner-life traits central to Christianity—love, joy, peace, and hope. After walking with Christ for many years, we might expect to have a great sense of being filled, our

"The required cheerfulness that characterizes many of our churches produces a suffocating environment of pat, religious answers to the painful, complex questions that riddle the lives of hurting people. We will look at how this culture of mandatory happiness actually promotes dishonesty and more suffering."[5]

life-thirst deeply satisfied from within. Our cup would be overflowing, resulting in a great ability to focus on others with acts of compassion, love, and kindness. An abundance of rich, vibrant, deep relationships with God and others in the church community would be a logical outcome of "living water" flowing from within believers. We would expect struggles from time to time, but what Jesus expresses in John 7:37–38 would be the typical Christian experience.

Biblical Christianity should be a powerful, paradigm-shifting, mind-blowing, life-transforming experience!

Unfortunately, many of us experience a different dynamic. Statistically, Christians appear no different than non-Christians: we suffer equally from stress, depression, anxiety, addiction, hopelessness, overwhelming discouragement, and broken relationships. Countless numbers of authentic, Bible-believing Christians sit in church pews, smiling, saying everything is fine.[3] In reality—at home, work, school, and play—they and others around them are experiencing significant life issues on a regular basis.[4]

This begs the question:

What Is Going On Here?

Truthfully, life has a lot of stress and pain. Relational, physical, emotional, and spiritual pain comes in both small waves and crushing tsunamis. Our family environments and the collective culture in which we operate every day can generate tremendous amounts of pain and stress that can devastate our inner lives.

Our Families are Falling Apart

We are undoubtedly shaped by our childhood experiences and the influences of family and home. We all long for stable, safe, committed, joyful home environments, but they are hard to come by. Currently, over half of today's marriages will end in divorce. Over half of children born in the U.S. are born to unwed mothers. Family dissolution is now a fact of life. These facts are true of individuals both inside and outside the church.[6]

An alarming number of people are growing up in abusive families or situations where physical and/or sexual abuse occurs. Emotional abuse and neglect are equally damaging and equally rampant, though not always as easy to observe and address.

The outcomes and consequences of these family environments leave their impression and influence. Issues of codependence, chemical dependence, addictions, depression, anxiety disorders, and inappropriate boundaries are just a handful of the conditions that can stem from this type of stress and pain-filled home environment.

Our Culture is Falling Apart

We are not just affected by what happens in our homes, we are shaped by influences outside the family—**mankind's collective culture**.[7] While there are influences for both good and ill, our culture has tendencies that are destructive to our spiritual and emotional well-being. Our current culture can shape us into people struggling to manage our inner lives. It can impart perspectives and beliefs that obstruct an accurate view of ourselves and others, hindering us from relating in healthy ways.

With even a brief glance around us, it doesn't take long to see that as a culture we are in deep trouble. Watching the evening news or reading the morning paper is often a stressful, painful experience. Addictions are at an all-time high. Government and business corruption and scandals seem never-ending. The very core of what it means to be a man or a woman is challenged and obscured by western culture. We are given impossible physical standards to attain by a highly image-oriented and sexually-charged media. Amid a struggling economy, materialism continues to grow even as the number of homeless in our streets rises. Murder and suicide rates remain high. Many of us are surrounded by thousands of people, yet we feel isolated and alone.

The flurry of life has a way of tying our insides into knots.

Living amidst all this influence and shaping, we come into a relationship with God and others with a range of personal baggage.[8]

Most Christians awaken on a typical day with tremendous stress, pain, and inner-life turmoil. Even those from fairly healthy families and who have avoided many of our cultural pitfalls are not immune to the effects of mankind's fall and the sin pervading each human soul. Often, the stress and pain of daily life trump the peace of our inner lives, diminishing, or even eliminating, the healthy soul outcomes the Bible claims will be produced in us (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control, etc.).

When we slow down and honestly reflect on our lives, we often discover that our personal baggage—collected through years of swimming in a fallen world—is affecting our instinctual responses to life's stress and pain far more than God's words through the Bible are affecting us.

Our Expectations Versus Reality

If we are honest, many of us have drawn some conclusions about **the differences between our expectations of Christianity and our actual experience**. We might not even know we have begun living in a way that reflects instincts and beliefs we would never say out loud. But, in reality, these thoughts may cross our minds:

- I trust God to save me and get me to heaven . . . but . . .
- I haven't seen God work the way I expected in my daily life; my failures, pain, and disappointments are deep.
- Most Christians I know seem to handle life better than I do. What's wrong with me?
- I have to find a way to survive this life and make it look good until I get to heaven.
- It doesn't feel like I can trust God to handle my pain and stress in everyday life; it's up to me to find other ways to reduce my pain and stress, protecting myself and those I love.
- I know we are saved by grace, but life's relentless pain makes me feel like I'm not under grace at all.

Over time, we become skilled at keeping up the right appearances, giving the right responses, and trying not to feel the wrong things.[9]

Is this simply the Christian life? **Is this what God intended?**

Thoughts, Feelings, Intentions, & Desires

We can manage to be "good Christians" when life is calm and safe. But, when:

- trust is broken
- loss overwhelms
- I feel worthless
- I fail to love myself, God, and others
- I feel empty
- relationships break
- pain dominates my life
- I doubt God cares
- I feel unloved and unaccepted for who I am

we can be stunned by what happens within us and what pours from us . . . perhaps reflecting little, if any, of the gospel.

Our default, unspoken fears and beliefs often lead us into behaviors we know are wrong and sinful, but we feel compelled to do them; we feel like we can't stop. The rivers flowing from our inner life are not "rivers of living water," but something often looking more like sewage. We feel brokenhearted and desperate.

A different set of instincts and default beliefs about God, ourselves, and life seemingly trump the life-changing power of the gospel.

Untying the Knots of the Heart proposes that God intends and provides trustworthy **care, love, and rescue not just for heaven, but for *life now***. Who we believe he is, what we believe about him, and how we believe he sees us affect every key inner-life perspective and skill we need to thrive:

- my ability to trust (without trust, we are alone)
- my ability to resolve emotional and relational pain (to forgive)
- my ability to be comforted
- my ability to grieve and resolve loss
- my determination of what gives me life and where life is found
- my determination of who I am and what I'm worth
- my concept and understanding of who God is and his role in my life
- my ability to love and be loved

Untying the Knots of the Heart Can Make A Difference

We are in great need of sorting out our inner life, and discovering who we really are, who others around us really are, and, more importantly, who God really is.

Life is lived from the heart.

The content and small group process of *Untying the Knots of the Heart* help people unearth and identify the default beliefs leading them into pain and hurtful behaviors. It is our prayer and hope that this experience reveals biblical dynamics leading to an inner life characterized by what Jesus promised us throughout the New Testament:

unwavering love • real joy • authentic peace • lasting hope

What is the *Untying* Process?

Untying the Knots of the Heart **is a biblically-based, small group discipleship process**, developed using time-tested, effective biblical concepts. This is not a casual Bible study group where biblical information is shared and the focus is on gathering facts and collecting information. This small group process lets us examine and integrate our emotions, beliefs, and experiences with biblical truth. It's a place where we each begin to explore, understand, and share our own unique life stories. *Untying the Knots of the Heart* is about self-discovery. But it's not a process you do by yourself. It's one in which you will walk alongside others on the same journey. This small group process uniquely walks each of us through our spiritual, cultural, and family backgrounds, helping us identify the lies, false perceptions, and life perspectives that are influencing us at a deep level. It helps us see ourselves and others through the eyes of a compassionate, loving, grace-filled Heavenly Father. Each of us are given the time, a safe place, and an intentional process to sort through our inner lives in light of God's truth.

Untying the Knots helps take the gospel to the remotest parts of the heart.

Untying the Knots of the Heart is designed to help take the gospel of Christ where it was intended to go—the innermost parts of the human heart.[10] It is designed to help group participants take the great truths of the Bible deeper into their hearts and souls. By helping participants identify their fallen default beliefs, instincts, and behaviors, they can better address them, or as the apostle Paul described, take them off, casting them away like an old, soiled garment (Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10). Thus our ministry name:

> **Aphesis** [af-uh-sis]: the New Testament Greek word meaning *release from bondage or imprisonment, forgiveness or pardon of sins (letting them go as if they had never been committed), remission of the penalty, deliverance, forgiveness, freedom, and liberty*.[11]

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

In this transformational group process, people commit as a group to immerse themselves in the life-transforming truths of the gospel on a regular basis with the great hope of not being conformed, but transformed.

This group experience focuses on the **heart** and how God's truth as expressed in the Bible has been integrated into the believer's psyche. We desire to take people through a **process of discovery** about themselves, looking through biblical lenses. There are far too many believers who have not allowed the gospel and great truths of God to truly penetrate their soul to the depths of their deepest disappointments, pain, and need. Through this process, we are trusting God to do just that. **It is crucial that together we create a small group environment that gives participants the opportunity to process deeply about themselves, others, and God** in a way that is designed to help people get in touch with their heart.

It's important to understand the four key principles upon which *Untying the Knots of the Heart* is founded.



Made for Connection

1. **We were designed for connection.**

   God created us for relationship with him and with one another. We are healthy and thriving physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually only when we are in rich relationship with God and others.



Everything Flows from the Heart

2. **Jesus said that when we know him, we will have wells of living water flowing out of us from within.**

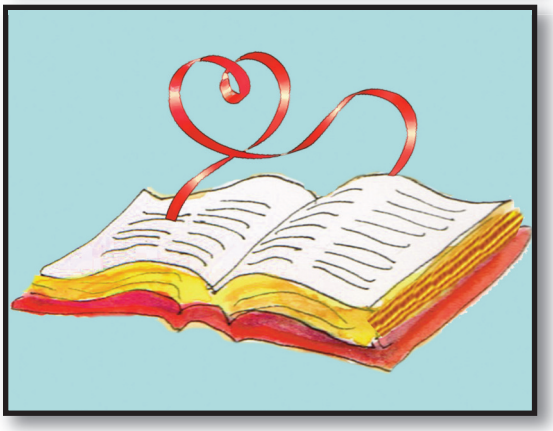
   The Bible tells us everything (our behaviors, how we relate to others around us, etc.) flows from the heart, our inner life. God has always been more concerned with the condition of our heart than our behavior.



We Are Profoundly Broken

3. **Because of the fall, our connections with one another and our own hearts are deeply broken.**

   There is not a day that passes that we do not feel the effect of the fall.



The Word is the Answer

4. **God has given us the answers we most need to navigate life.**

   His Word contains insights into God and into ourselves. The gospel and the story of our redemption is far more than good news or helpful advice; it is his rescue of us in the deepest sense.

Overview of Content

Untying the Knots is divided into eight modules:

1. The Impact of Spiritual and Cultural Origins
2. The Impact of Family Background
3. Your New Family
4. Your Identity
5. Addressing Your Emotions
6. Addressing Your Pain
7. Communication
8. Re-entering a Hurting World

Recommendations for optional, supplemental reading material are provided to help participants go deeper in their understanding of particular issues or concepts.[12] The *Untying the Knots* discipleship process is a cumulative experience, with the concepts building upon one another.

Overview of the *Untying* Process

- **Lesson 1/Pre-registration Meeting** We begin establishing a safe group environment where God can do his work, encouraging people to be real and deeply process God's truth in light of what is going on in their lives. We ask group members to understand and commit to a common set of group norms and values, providing a framework and group environment for this to happen.

- **Lessons 2–6** We visit and reflect on our own backgrounds and personal life experiences that have impacted and shaped our default beliefs, instincts, and behaviors. The Bible constantly tells us to take off our "old self." To do this, it is critically important for each of us to gain a firm understanding of the powerful forces that have helped shape our instincts and default beliefs, both positively and negatively.

- **Lessons 7–10** We begin the process of introducing ourselves to the family environment of the Trinity. We explore the environment God intends us to personally experience with Him. God's true family environment should impact and shape our default beliefs and instincts about ourselves, others, and himself far more deeply than our fallen world.

- **Lessons 11–16** We seek to better understand our inner life in light of what we learned about our life stories and our new Heavenly Family environment. We explore our personal identity, emotions, and approach to life's daily pain. We learn perspectives and practical skills that help align our inner life, instincts, and default beliefs more closely to what God intended, increasing our awareness of our inner life and better addressing our emotions and pain.

- **Lessons 17–18** We explore how identity, emotions, and pain affect our communication and relationships with others. We look at new relational skills that help us relate better with God and others.

- **Lessons 19–22** We learn invaluable perspectives and life skills God has given us, helping us enter back into a chaotic, stressful, pain-filled world of relationships and challenging circumstances, yet still filled with authentic love, joy, peace, and hope God intends to keep us fully alive and thriving.

The gospel is not just good information or good advice.

It's a transformational, perspective-shifting way of seeing:

- Ourselves
- Life
- Others
- God

What happens in an *Untying the Knots* group?

Untying the Knots of the Heart involves a small group of both genders (usually 8–16 people) who meet together weekly. Each group time of 2½–3 hours is led by trained facilitators. The group begins each session with review and discussion of the lesson, using additional questions and exercises to better understand key, biblically-based concepts. During the last half of the group meeting, participants typically break into gender-specific groups to apply and process the material personally in an open, safe group environment. Participants begin to see they are not alone or isolated in their struggles and problems. It is encouraging to hear other people share similar feelings and difficulties. Through the process, participants develop **new ways of understanding themselves and God**. The key effective element of *Untying the Knots of the Heart* is its **PROCESS-ORIENTED** approach. It is not just a Bible study! Group participants are involved in **an intentional process designed to help them sort through their inner life and relationships** in light of God's truth and perspectives.

We frequently talk about the value of community, but few of us have actually experienced it in a healthy way.

During this group process you will:

- learn solid biblical concepts about inner-life issues and relationships, past and present
- learn more about how you are perceived by others and by God
- begin to understand and value your own story
- learn specific reasons why you may be hurting and/or struggling
- experience a sense of acceptance and belonging as part of a supportive group
- discover you are not alone in the difficulties you are experiencing
- learn life-changing concepts and skills which enhance your ability to make decisions, solve problems, and see yourself correctly in light of biblical truths
- learn to communicate more comfortably and effectively
- receive honest, safe feedback from others without feeling judged
- learn more about what it means to be close and intimate with God and others

The Importance of A Small Group Format

Western culture is increasingly fragmented and we are becoming more isolated from each other in many ways.[13] American society is the most individualistic culture in the world,[14] so we often don't recognize that this isolation is not healthy. In the midst of our social disconnection, we also suffer disconnection from ourselves.[15] All of these dynamics contribute to a situation in which our personal blind spots persist and we remain stuck.

We don't often recognize isolation; most of us have learned from our culture and experiences to cover and hide it.

We believe God designed us to live in relationship with others; we were wired for connection by our Creator. We need healthy connection to grow spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. However, most of us have seldom (if ever) experienced authentic, healthy connections with others. Most of our relationships have been superficial; when we have opened ourselves to others, we've often been hurt.

This is why the *Untying the Knots of the Heart* discipleship process is designed to be carried out in a **safe**, small group context.[16] We want group participants to taste the joys of healthy community, where they find it safe to be open and honest with themselves and others. Most group members—often after a lifetime of painful relationships—report thoroughly enjoying and thriving in the depth of relationships cultivated in *Untying the Knots* groups. Within these safe small groups, we learn to

become trusted "clear-eyed" friends who help each other grow by providing empathy and support. We also learn how to give helpful perspectives to reveal one another's blind spots. Some of our strongest realizations come when we say something out loud in a safe space, hearing ourselves speak what we truly believe and feel.

God tenderly reveals his care and truth in highly effective ways through group interactions as participants study the lessons together. In very practical ways, group members learn how to have deeper, more helpful relationships.

Addressing Common Questions and Concerns

How can I make the most of my group experience?

Group participants are encouraged to learn about their own interpersonal style of relating to God and others. They are given opportunities to try new ways of relating to themselves and others. Participants must work to establish a **level of trust** that allows them to talk personally and honestly. **Group trust** is enhanced when all participants make a commitment to the group. One of the unique elements of this process is that it is a closed and safe system. After the group begins, no other participants are added, helping ensure a safe, consistent, predictable environment.

To receive the greatest benefit from *Untying the Knots*, we invite you to:

- actively participate in group discussions
- be honest and genuine
- let the group know if you need to process or talk about something
- ask for help, encouragement, and prayer when you need it
- express your honest thoughts, feelings, and reactions with the group
- experiment with new perspectives and behaviors in this safe place
- explore new ways of thinking, feeling, or relating to yourself, others, and God
- be patient with the group, express frustrations, and stick with the process
- be open to processing your inner life and relational issues
- commit to exploring what you are experiencing in your emotional life

You will maximize your experience if you talk about your thoughts **AND** your feelings. Unwillingness to address both **thoughts and emotions** are a major reason people struggle with inner-life turmoil and may feel "stuck" emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Group facilitators and group participants can help you be more honest with yourself and others as you explore your thoughts and emotions. How much you choose to talk about what you are personally experiencing is up to you; however, we have found that people who benefit most are those who take responsibility to share their thoughts and concerns, speaking up when they have reactions to issues being discussed.

Will I have enough time to talk through what I personally need to process during each group time?

Each group usually finds its own way to divide time. Group participants who are able to request time as needed are most likely to benefit from the group. Group participants also benefit from hearing other people discuss what they are personally experiencing; **we encourage participants to gain from both attentive listening and honest sharing**.

It's our prayer that through your journey in God's Word you will discover:

- You are more marvelous than you ever imagined.
- You are more broken and compromised than you ever realized.
- You are more
- rescued than you have ever dreamed.

What if people feel too afraid to be open and honest in the group?

When you meet people for the first time, it can be hard to know what to say and how much to trust them. Trust is a confidence and strength that develops over time in the group as people take risks and share about themselves. It helps to remember groups are small (typically 4–8 people in gender-specific groups for sharing) and other group participants may be struggling with some of the same things you are. Letting the group know you are uncomfortable can be a first step.

Setting Our Group Up for Success

It is very important to understand what makes this discipleship group different from other Bible studies or small groups:

> We are asking people who participate in *Untying the Knots* to **trust God together to help create an environment and group culture that is unique and not often experienced—a group culture where we are honest and open about what we really think, feel, and experience in our lives.**[17]

It's in community that we most experience God's love, care, compassion, and support.

We each need the gospel of Christ to go to the deepest parts of our heart—aspects of our lives we typically don't discuss in casual Bible study. To do this, the group environment must feel safe; in essence, **it is our desire to teach group participants how to be safe people**. As each one of us becomes a safe person, we will likely create a safe group environment. Our Group Norms and Values help us do just that.

Untying the Knots Group Norms and Values

Because of the great importance of providing a safe group environment, we maintain Group Norms and Values that each group member agrees and commits to in order to participate in *Untying the Knots of the Heart*.

GROUP NORMS

Group **norms** are behaviors and practices (ground rules) a group agrees to in order to help establish a safe, predictable environment. A **norm** is something we can easily observe in each other. It's easy to see if it is being followed or broken.

These are the *Untying the Knots* Norms, to which we ask all group participants to agree, commit, and hold one another accountable:

By committing to the Group Norms and Values, you are helping set up your *Untying the Knots* group for success.

COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

The group sessions are CONFIDENTIAL. Group participants and facilitators commit to maintaining confidentiality of anything shared in the group sessions. Nothing is to be shared outside the group, including sharing others' comments or personal information with spouses.*

*__Important Exception Concerning Group Confidentiality:__ An exception to the group confidentiality agreement exists with regard to mandatory reporting requirements: facilitators and the local church or Christian organization they are serving must comply with federal and state law.

COMMITMENT TO ATTENDANCE

To create a stable, predictable group environment that fosters trust, it is of utmost importance that group participants can count on one another attending each week. To create the best opportunity for an effective and safe group environment, **we ask you to agree and commit to missing no more than four sessions** during the 22-week group experience, or **missing no more than two sessions** during the 14- or 16-week experience.

COMMITMENT TO CONSIDERATE ABSENCES

If you need to miss a session, please let your group facilitator know so they can plan accordingly and inform the group of your absence. You also may want to set up a time with your facilitator to catch up on material and receive the next lesson.

COMMITMENT TO NOT INTERRUPT

When someone is talking during a group discussion, we ask that you do not interrupt them.

COMMITMENT TO TRY NOT TO FIX OTHERS

An important element of the *Untying the Knots* environment is freedom to safely share and process, creating space and welcome for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. **We are not here to fix each other.** We ask participants to agree and commit to gentle and kind interaction with one another, refraining from judging, shaming, or excessively advising others.

COMMITMENT TO COMPLETE HOMEWORK

The *Untying* process is very dependent on group participants understanding the concepts and principles presented. We also desire to begin group discussions at a deeper level than is typical in small group studies. To help accomplish this, we ask participants to agree and commit to completing one to three hours of homework each week. This is an important norm to uphold for everyone to gain the most from the content and discussions.

COMMITMENT TO SAFE, CONSIDERATE CLOSURE

If you can no longer participate or decide *Untying the Knots* is not for you, we ask that you come one last time to say goodbye, to share with the group why you are leaving, and give closure to the other participants. Because of the importance of confidentiality, **this norm helps assure the group of your commitment to them**, even if you do not continue with the group. If you choose to no longer participate, you will not receive the rest of the notebook material, since *Untying the Knots of the Heart* is an intentional, sequential, guided process, not stand-alone study materials.

GROUP VALUES

Values are different than norms. Unlike norms, **values** are not as easily observed or measured. Consequently, they can be more difficult to hold one another accountable to than the Group Norms. They are still vitally important and we desire that these Values become a normal part of our group culture. We ask each participant to embrace, commit to, and make every effort to keep these Group Values:

DESIRE TO MATURE

We value the willingness and openness of participants to change their attitudes and beliefs about themselves, others, and God. This comes with the realization that we are all still in a process of maturing and learning what God may have for us. If an individual does not have a desire and need for change, very little can be done to help them mature and grow.

DESIRE TO LOOK INSIDE

We value the willingness of participants to focus on their own process and relationship with God, not on the relationships and choices of spouses, children, parents, or others. It can be tempting to believe that if we just help or fix others, or get them to change, our pain and problems will disappear; we invite participants to look seriously and bravely at their own life and how God desires to relate personally to their heart and experiences. Our own relationship with God is the only one we truly have in our ability to let him transform.

HONESTY

We value honesty as a way of life and as a fundamental biblical principle in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with God, others, and ourselves. We are referring not only to being honest with others about what is going on in our lives, but more importantly being honest with ourselves.

Openness and honesty are two different things!

OPENNESS

We value the willingness of each participant to gain new awareness and insight from being open about what is **really** going on in their life. It is critical to let God, and others who are safe, know what is going on with us. Others cannot enter in, understand, help, or support us in an area of difficulty if they do not know how or with what we are struggling.

TRUE ENCOURAGEMENT

True encouragement is one of the most difficult things to learn to do.

We value building up, affirming, and motivating one another to believe what is true. Recognizing our achievements as we overcome and become new creations in Christ is extremely valuable. However, we do not value giving false praise or patronizing others with shallow Christian platitudes. Often, the most encouraging thing to do is listen and attempt to understand. We value thoughtful, timely encouragement, **allowing the other person who is hurting to feel heard**, and not simply doing or saying what may make us feel more comfortable (giving advice, giving a solution to their problem, etc.).

WRESTLING

We value wrestling through ideas, thoughts, feelings, and the truth of Scripture with God. God's wrestling with Jacob (Genesis 32:22–32) was a deep expression of respect and a loving growth opportunity for Jacob. God could have simply crushed Jacob or forced his will, but God valued the process for Jacob's sake. We value the same kind of process and learning.

RESPECT

We value showing one another respect as individuals who are uniquely created by God, deserving of being heard and understood just as we are. Please show respect to others by listening to what they are thinking and feeling. We want to practice **active listening**, using our ears, face, body, and posture to indicate our respect and attentiveness. We also value respecting each other's time. Please show respect by being on time for group sessions.

It's a powerful thing to have others move toward us in the midst of our deepest shame.

ACCEPTANCE

We value offering to one another the same unconditional love, acceptance, and grace God has shown to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. We make this most evident when someone chooses to share something tremendously shameful to them, and as we listen, we do not turn away; instead, we draw near to them with God's compassion and acceptance.

PRAYER

We value taking all our desires, feelings, thoughts, struggles, and joys to God. Though we may not stop our discussions and pray each time a person in the group expresses struggle or pain, we highly value wrestling things over with God in prayer.

YOUR FEELINGS AND DESIRES

We value not just what you think about, but also what you feel and desire. Your honest affect, the appearance on your face of your joy and sadness and other emotions, is important to your humanity, to God, and to this process.

Our first group time will be a mixed-gender discussion. You'll be asked to introduce yourself and give some basic information: name, where you currently live, how many are currently in your family, and your favorite drink & snack while talking with friends.

How do the *Untying the Knots* Norms and Values influence your feelings about being part of this group?

Lesson Readings and Interactions

Lesson Reading

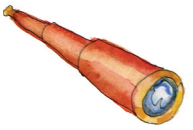
Reading assignments and exercises for upcoming lessons will be given at the close of group discussions. It is of utmost importance to complete lesson assignments to receive the full benefit of *Untying the Knots* and to fully understand and discuss the concepts during the following group session. Even if you cannot complete the reading or assignments during a given week, though, please **do** attend the group session and participate.

Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions in each lesson help you process your thoughts, emotions, and information; you'll find them in boxes like this. Occasionally, these questions will be discussed in the mixed-gender group, though more often discussed during the gender-specific groups. It is important to complete these questions each week to gain the most from the group discussions. **It's one of the crucial ways we begin the process of untying our knots.**

Reflection Exercises and Questionnaires

Some lessons include more than just Reflection Questions. Occasional Reflection Exercises and Questionnaires help you look at your current instincts and heart desires. They also help you see patterns of thinking and history that introduce you to yourself a little more.



Group Process Time

Boxes marked with a spyglass telescope indicate topics or questions that will be unique to the group time following the lesson reading; we have created a place for you to capture notes and thoughts during the actual group discussion. **When you see the spyglass telescope, you can relax; it's just letting you know that anything included in the corresponding box is something coming up on the horizon that will be part of a great discussion!**

Wide Margins for Notes

We specifically designed the reading material with wide margins; it's a great place for you to jot notes or questions as you read the lesson or during group discussions. Your own questions, reflections, and ideas are valuable for both your own processing and for group discussions when you feel led to share. The more you interact with the material, the more valuable your experience will be.

Life Map

Lessons 2–8 contain questions and prompts to help you create your Life Map. It will be valuable for you to honestly capture your answers and create your Life Map a little at a time based on the topics and questions for each of these lessons.

What makes you feel safe to actively participate in a group like this? How can we help create a group culture where we can each be open and honest about our thoughts, feelings, and struggles?

What are your fears about participating in a group like this?

In what ways do you hope to change or grow while you are *Untying the Knots*? What do you hope to gain?

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Untying the Knots of the Heart Underlying Beliefs

The foundation of *Untying the Knots of the Heart* is the Bible, God's infallible written Word, the sixty-six books contained in the Old and New Testaments. We believe that it was uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that it was written without error (inerrant) in the original manuscripts. The Bible is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks. We accept those areas of doctrinal teaching on which, historically, there has been general agreement among all true Christians.

We believe the Bible is the ultimate authority in faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). The Bible communicates the greatest story ever told about God's amazing and loyal love (*kesed*) for us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). We believe the Bible to be God's gift to humanity so we can know God intimately and live in his presence (John 17:17). It also instructs us on godly living and how to be right with God and with our fellow human beings (Philippians 2:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:12).

We believe human beings, both male and female, were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We believe that through the sin of Adam and Eve all of humanity experiences physical, spiritual, and relational death, and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature (Genesis 3:1–7; Romans 5:12).

We believe Jesus Christ became a human being by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary, and is both true God and true man (Luke 1:35; 2:7, 11, 52). As a perfect, sinless man and God in the flesh, Jesus Christ was crucified and died in our place so that we can become children of God by faith in him (Romans 8:3–4, 15–16). It is only by faith in Christ that a person is saved (John 3:5–7; Romans 10:9–10).

We believe those who have become children of God through regenerative faith in Jesus Christ are united in one spiritual body, the body of Christ, the Church (Matthew 16:18; Romans 12:4–8; Colossians 1:18). The Church meets in local assemblies (the local church) for the purpose of glorifying God through worship, study of the Bible, fellowship, sharing the gospel with others, and making disciples. As such, we believe the Church to be a key instrument God uses to change people within our culture.

We believe the regeneration of the believer extends to our new identity in Christ. As we relate to God as our caring Father, and as we yield our inner life under the influence of the Holy Spirit, this process, along with the Holy Spirit, brings forth the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, his ascension into Heaven, his current life with God our Father as our Advocate and High Priest, and his future physical return in power and glory (Matthew 28:6–7; John 14:1–4; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25–26; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 2:1–2; Revelation 19:11–16).

We believe in the resurrection of the saved to live in the blessed presence of the Triune God forever and in the resurrection of the lost to live in eternal torment separated from God forever (Luke 13:28; 16:19–31; 23:43; John 3:18; Philippians 3:20–21; Revelation 20:11–15).

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Lesson 1 Endnotes

1. When we are convinced that our way of understanding the world is accurate, our mind fails to pay attention to evidence that we may not be seeing as clearly as we thought. This acts against our ability to correct our understanding in the same way that our immune system works to fight off diseases and viruses in our physical bodies. That immunity to change can impede our ability to detect errors in our belief systems. We're mentioning this at the beginning of *Untying the Knots of the Heart* to invite you to allow God to show you a clearer picture of himself over these next weeks. In the process, you may come to see many other things in a different light as well.
2. You may be inclined to reject the idea that what comes out when you are under stress is your true character. If so, that is okay. We simply ask that you will be open to begin thinking about what happens in your heart in the various experiences in your daily life. Ask God to help you notice what is going on in your inner life.
3. For more on our inclination to put on masks, see John Lynch, Bruce McNicol, & Bill Thrall. *The Cure: What if God Isn't Who You Think He Is and Neither Are You?* (CrossSection, 2011), chapters 1 & 2.
4. "The end result of an inability to walk out our beliefs is that our churches and relationships within the church are not qualitatively any different from the world around us." Peter Scazzero. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 177.
5. Tullian Tchividjian. *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free* (David C. Cook, 2012), p. 2.
6. For more statistical data on social patterns related to the U.S. national average and people from various religious traditions, see the 2008 Pew Research study on Religion and Public Life: Religious Landscape Survey http://religions.pewforum.org. See also the LifeWay Research web site www.lifewayresearch.com.
7. We will focus on the impact of our fallen culture in Lesson 3 and then revisit the topic of culture at the end of *Untying the Knots* in Lesson 22 when we discuss engaging in our broken world as God's messengers and ambassadors. See also Andy Crouch. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (InterVarsity, 2008).
8. We use the terms "personal baggage" and "emotional baggage" to describe the unresolved issues, relational hurt, disappointments, abuse, and other trauma in our lives that impact our present relationships (with God, others, and self). We use baggage as a metaphor pointing to the weight or burden that we carry into every life experience. Often we fail to realize the impact our personal baggage has on our perceptions and reactions.
9. See John Lynch, Bruce McNicol, & Bill Thrall. *The Cure: What if God Isn't Who You Think He Is and Neither Are You?* (CrossSection, 2011). See also Peter Scazzero. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), chapter 2.
10. The *Untying the Knots of the Heart* discipleship process is designed to bring spiritual, emotional, and relational health. Those three are interrelated. We cannot have health in our relationships without becoming emotionally healthy. We cannot become emotionally healthy without becoming spiritually healthy. Becoming spiritually healthy will involve becoming emotionally and relationally healthy.

11. Strong's number 859. Definition taken from *The New Testament Greek Lexicon, Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary*.
12. See www.untyingtheknotsoftheheart.org.
13. See Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000). Peter Block. *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008). Fred Kofman and Peter Senge. *Communities of Commitment: The Heart of Learning Organizations* (Organizational Dynamics, v22i2, pp. 5–19, Autumn 1993).
14. See David Livermore. *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Baker Academic, 2009), chapter 4. See also Geert Hofstede. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (Sage, 2001).
15. Brené Brown. *I Thought It Was Just Me: Telling the Truth About Perfectionism, Inadequacy and Power* (Gotham/Penguin, 2007). p. 241
16. "Only with the support, insight, and fellowship of a community can we face the dangers of learning meaningful things." Fred Kofman and Peter Senge. *Communities of Commitment: The Heart of Learning Organizations* (Organizational Dynamics, v22i2, pp. 5–19, Autumn 1993), p. 20.
17. See Larry Crabb. *Becoming a True Spiritual Community* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), pp. 145–146. See also Larry Crabb. *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships* (Thomas Nelson, 1997).