

Ongoing Health

How do I keep myself healthy? That is a question we all contemplate on some level, if we desire to stay healthy. Some of us may focus on physical health, being careful to avoid germs during flu season or working out regularly. Some of us may focus on spiritual health by engaging in spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible, prayer, and worship.

Ultimately, though, we are complex beings, so a balanced perspective about health is necessary, encompassing physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational. This is never truer than with sexual brokenness. Throughout our lives, we have learned and developed many unhealthy patterns in life. Our Support Programs are designed to identify those patterns, teach new ones, and support you as you walk them out.

In his book, *Desires in Conflict*, Joe Dallas describes the need for ongoing maintenance in our lives:

Here's an unflattering thought to consider: Everything is in a constant state of decay. Without maintenance, things deteriorate. So do people. So will you. If you can accept that fact, you will avoid the apathy that can keep a person from maintaining their sexual integrity. Not convinced? Look at your yard. It isn't naturally inclined toward beauty. It has beauty's



potential, but to bring that potential out you have to keep it from doing what it's naturally inclined to do: grow weeds, dry out, die. How about your body? It's a great machine, but it's not naturally inclined to stay in shape. If you want to avoid obesity, scruffiness, or body odor, you have to work on it, exercising and grooming your body daily. The same can be said of almost anything: pets, finances, houses. Without constant attention and maintenance, things naturally decay.

The Bible also speaks of this state of decay – that all creation is under the curse of sin and desiring future restoration.

For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Romans 8:19-22 (NLT)

So, there is a need for ongoing maintenance in our lives. We must continually walk out new patterns of relating with God and others that are consistent with God's original design for our lives. In this lesson, we will explore the areas of physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational health. In each of those areas, there will be prompters to look honestly at how you are doing in that area. You may be doing very well in some areas and struggling in others. The goal of this lesson is to help you examine both – to affirm areas of strength and develop awareness of areas that need work. Throughout the second year of the program, we will come back and revisit this topic as a reminder and challenge to be moving forward in your pursuit of health. **All of this is critical preparation for developing a rhythm of ongoing healthy living, even after you complete the program.**



One key element that will affect your healthy living plan is vision. Do you have an idea of where you want to go in life? What do you want your life to look like?

In Proverbs 29:18 (NIV), a very wise man (Solomon) writes:

Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.

Solomon makes a distinct link between vision and self-control. If we don't have a vision for how we want our lives to look, we will lack motivation to do the sometimes difficult work of sexual and relational wholeness.

When God is going to build a great person, time and again He starts with the person's vision. How powerful is the issue of vision in a person's life? In a fallen world, we can't possibly have godly character without it. But with it, courage takes root so deeply that a person is able to live with real spiritual understanding.

Ted Roberts, *Pure Desire*

Anytime you concentrate on the difficulty of the work instead of its results or rewards, you're likely to become discouraged. Dwell on it too long, and you'll develop self-pity instead of self-discipline.

John Maxwell

Perhaps your vision has been overcoming an addiction to pornography or a struggle with homosexuality or resolving the issues surrounding your spouse's struggle with sexual brokenness. Is there more than that? What do you want your life to look like in the future?

If my focus is just to stop some destructive behavior, sexual or otherwise, that's a good beginning, but it's like settling for flying a Cessna [small low-flying airplane] when God designed me to operate at high speed and high altitude through the vision He put deep into my heart. Without a God-given vision, we live a low-level life; in that mode, the addictive mindset can never be broken.

Ted Roberts, *Pure Desire*

The Apostle Paul understood the necessity of vision. Note what he identifies as important in his life:

*I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, **everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. **I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!***

Philippians 3:7-11 (NLT)

Paul even welcomed the suffering he knew he would experience in following Christ! Your journey of healing has probably included some suffering, whether looking back at difficult memories and experiences or trying out new ways of relating with God and others. But we, like the Apostle Paul, must keep a larger God-given vision in focus as we continue in the difficult journey of healing.

Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.
II Timothy 2:4 (NLT)

What is your life's God-given vision? If you have not contemplated this before, spend some time praying and asking God to give you a vision for your life and relationships that follows his desires for you. Draw your God-given vision below. You do not have to have amazing art skills. Just draw as best you can, using stick figures if you wish.



What follows is an exploration of the four areas of health described earlier (physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational). Focus your interaction with each section on how it will help you fulfill God’s vision for your life and relationships. After each section, there are a series of questions surrounding the area explored.

Day 1 - Physical Health

Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

I Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)

Even though physical health is generally beyond the scope of our support programs, we all live and function in the physical world, and our physical health can affect our perspective – spiritually and emotionally. So, even though other types of health may be of greater value, lack of physical health can get in the way of health in other areas.

People are often at vastly different places when it comes to physical health. Rather than focusing on a standard of where you “should” be, some questions to ask yourself are: Do I have physical health issues in my life that are proving to be barriers? Do I expend energy being frustrated about my physical health? What might be one reasonable and attainable step I can take forward?

There are a number of resources available about physical health that can give you an in-depth exploration of the topic. As you examine a step forward for yourself, you might consider seeking out one of these resources.



What needs to be part of your long term healthy living plan?

What needs to change, and how will you maintain that change?



What are healthy physical activities you can engage in to address your body’s responses to stress?

Day 2 - Spiritual Life

God deeply desires relationship with us. If we ever question that, we need only to look at the message of the Gospel. God sends Christ (His only son) on a mission to reconcile us to God. He experiences great pain and trial (ultimately death) to accomplish this mission. God desires relationship with us, and we are designed for relationship with our Creator.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Psalms 139:13-16 (NIV)

God also designed us all uniquely. Even though we all desire relationship with God, different ways of connecting with God may resonate more or less with each of us. Gary Thomas explores this concept in his book *Sacred Pathways*. He describes various different pathways – or ways to connect with God. Understanding how you best connect with God can bring amazing life to your relationship with God.

Take a look on the next couple pages at the nine different pathways Thomas identifies, and see if you relate with one or a couple of them. **Underline phrases with which you relate.**

Naturalists: Loving God Out of Doors

Naturalists would prefer to leave any building, however beautiful or austere, to pray to God beside a river. Leave the books behind, forget the demonstrations – just let them take a walk through the woods, mountains, or open meadows. These Christians believe that nature clearly proclaims “God is!” They may learn more from watching an ant colony or looking at a peaceful lake than from reading a book or listening to a sermon, though they may find fulfilling thoughts from the parables of Christ, which are based on nature, or the Psalms.

Sensates: Loving God with the Senses

Sensate Christians want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of God. They are drawn particularly to the liturgical, the majestic, the grand. When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring. Whereas some Christians might find such a sensuous onslaught distracting, these Christians delight in it. The five senses are God’s most effective inroad to their hearts.

Traditionalists: Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol

Traditionalists are fed by what are often termed the historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifice. These Christians tend to have a disciplined life of faith. Some may be seen by others as legalists, defining their faith largely by matters of conduct. Frequently they enjoy regular attendance at church services, tithing, keeping the Sabbath, and so on. Traditionalists have a need for ritual and structure. The contemplatives’ unstructured “prayer of the quiet” would be confusing and fairly unfulfilling to them.

Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

Ascetics want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Take away the liturgy, the trappings of religion, the noise of the outside world. Let there be nothing to distract them – no pictures, no loud music – and leave them alone to pray in silence and simplicity. Ascetics live a fundamentally internal existence. Even when they are part of a group of people, they

might seem to be isolated from the others. Frequently introspective, sometimes to a fault, they are uncomfortable in any environment that keeps them from “listening to the quiet.”

Activists: Loving God Through Confrontation

Activists serve a God of justice. Their favorite Scripture is often the account of Jesus cleansing the temple. They define worship as standing against evil and calling sinners to repentance. These Christians often view the church as a place to recharge their batteries so they can go back into the world to wage war against injustice. Activists may adopt either social or evangelistic causes, but they find their home in the rough-and-tumble world of confrontation. They are energized more by interaction with others, even in conflict, than by being alone or in small groups.

Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others

Caregivers serve God by serving others. They often claim to see Christ in the poor and needy, and their faith is built up by interacting with other people. Such Christians may find the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts as selfish. Whereas caring for others might wear many of us down, this recharges a caregiver’s batteries.



Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts. As sensates want to be surrounded by beauty and intellectuals want to be grappling with concepts, enthusiasts are inspired by joyful celebration. These Christians are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout “Amen!” and dance in their excitement. That’s all they ask. If their hearts aren’t moved, if they don’t experience God’s power, something is missing. They don’t want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them.

Contemplatives: Loving God Through Adoration

Contemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God. Their favorite Bible passages might be taken from the Song of Songs as they enter the “divine romance.” The focus is not necessarily on serving God, doing his will, accomplishing great things in his name, or even obeying God. Rather, these Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable.

Intellectuals: Loving God with the Mind

Intellectuals might be skeptics or committed believers, but in either case they are likely to be studying (and, in some instances, arguing either for or against) doctrines like Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in the world of concepts. Some intellectuals, influenced by a personality type that may be shy or withdrawn, might avoid intellectual activity. “Faith” is something to be understood as much as experienced. They may feel closest to God when they first understand something new about him.

**We were made by God, for God.
Our lives have meaning and value
because of His love of us.
He desires an intimate, passionate
relationship with us.**



Which spiritual pathway(s) resonated with you?

What brings life to your relationship with God (church type/style, small group involvement, serving opportunities, personal devotional life, use of the spiritual disciplines)?

What has encouraged spiritual growth in the past? How will you continue that in the future?

A key scripture for you?

Day 3 - People/Relationships

Over the last year, you have been learning more about the struggle with sexual brokenness. Part of that process has been grappling with the idea that at its core, sexual brokenness is about a breakdown in relationships. Brokenness probably occurred in significant relationships in your life. Just as brokenness has occurred in relationship, healing also comes in the context of relationship. As you have walked through our support programs, this concept has been illustrated through your

leaders and fellow participants in the program and your small group. Because of the need for healthy relationships to foster the healing process, the second year of the program has more emphasis on developing healthy relationships.

When contemplating ongoing health and further healing in your life, healthy relationships will be a critical component. Just as we are designed for relationship with God, we are also designed for relationship with each other.

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air ... but for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:18-22 (NIV)

Man's greatest need is God. Yet most human beings sense the desire for human love before they appreciate their need for relationship with God. While God is capable of meeting our basic needs directly, He created us with a desire for the companionship of other humans. This is clearly evidenced in Adam's sense of loneliness. God's answer for Adam was the creation of Eve, a suitable companion. Eve was suitable for (or corresponding to) Adam, because where Adam had a need to relate to another of his own kind, Eve was able to fulfill it. The mental, emotional, physical, and relational needs Adam felt could be met in his relationship with his companion. These needs are a part of every human being's makeup, so the desire for human companionship persists, even when the basic need for God is satisfied.

Counseling the Homosexual by Michael Saia

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Ephesians 4:25 (NIV)

Although each person becomes a Christian through his own personal choice to follow Christ, God does not reconcile us to himself as individuals. Rather, God brings us to himself as a body (Ephesians 2:14-18). Consequently, there is no place for the "lone ranger" in the body of Christ. We are all "members of one another" so independence from other Christians is both disobedient and dangerous. Refusal to join a local fellowship of Christians usually indicates some form of pride, rebellion, or fear on the part of the hesitant person. Due to his disobedience to God's Word, this believer puts himself in a spiritually vulnerable position. "Lone ranger" Christians always get "picked off" first.

Counseling the Homosexual by Michael Saia



Because of the brokenness we have experienced relationally, our perspective about healthy relationships can be skewed. As Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel describe it, there may be a tendency to keep everyone at a distance, avoid intimacy, always be "in control" – in order to keep from getting hurt. Or we may crave an exclusive intimate relationship, and

**We were made for relationship.
God intends that we
learn and grow in the context of
relationships with one another.**

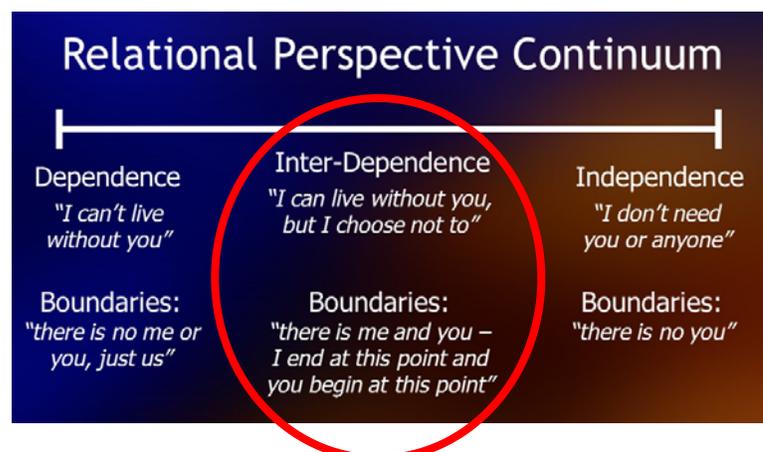
when we find one, take desperate measures to keep it. We may also combine both approaches: the more we want a close relationship, the harder it is to find one. Then when we meet someone who really does seem to care, we wonder. Why is this special closeness so hard to maintain? What starts out as a fulfilling friendship, turns overnight into a bitter web of jealous, tearful accusations and ever-increasing demands. The “special friendship” blows up in our face, causing us to pull away, aching and devastated. “I will never let anyone get that close to me again,” we resolve, burying ourselves in work, activity and time alone. We pull into solitary independence, perhaps seeking comfort in masturbation, fantasy, or anonymous sex but basically avoiding any real closeness. This lonely isolation continues until once again, another “special person” appears on the scene who reaches out in kindness and interest. Like the dieter who has been starving for weeks, we fling aside all caution and plunge into yet another enmeshing dependency. And the cycle begins again. (*Coming Out of Homosexuality*)



There are many aspects to the development of healthy relationships. Davies and Rentzel summarize healthy friendship as being:

- free and generous – we appreciate our friends and enjoy their company without the urge to possess or control
- built over time – a solid friendship is based on shared experiences and growing trust, and there is no safe way to rush this process
- not self-serving – in healthy relationships, we desire to promote our friends’ growth, encouraging them to realize their dreams, even if this means they are unable to spend as much time with us
- directed outward, not inward – more time is spent focusing together on mutual interests or topics outside the friendship rather than discussing or examining “the relationship”
- not mentally or emotionally preoccupying – it’s not that we don’t think about our friends or care deeply for them – they just don’t hold any magnetic power over our thought life or emotions
- build on strength rather than weakness – though we have times with our friends where we can let down and be vulnerable, we don’t try to keep each other in a weak, vulnerable place

(*Coming Out of Homosexuality*)



Who are key people in your life who offer support? Describe your relationship and how you support each other.

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

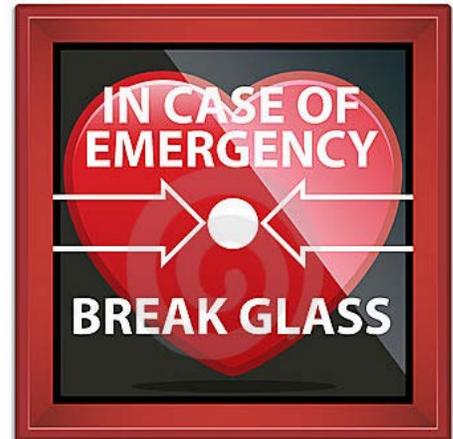
How do you intend to nurture these relationships in the future?

What characteristics will you look for in future relationships?

What are healthy relational outlets you can pursue to foster new relationships and develop existing relationships?

**God calls us to walk in honesty and integrity.
Confession is key to living a victorious life.
At the cross of Christ we find
liberation from our sinful past.
Through relationships, we receive
the encouragement to maintain a pure life.**

When other support systems fail, what is your emergency plan? What institutions/organizations that share your values will you seek out?



Day 4 - Warning Signs

Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

First Things First by Stephen Covey

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
I Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)



Often the key to overcoming temptation or pursuing healthy patterns is realizing our areas of vulnerability. All of us are in process, so it is helpful to be aware of areas in which we need continued growth. This awareness can help us see the warning signs that temptation or failure is around the corner.

Warning signs are not sin. Instead, they are indicators that something is out of balance. They can vary from person to person. What may be a warning sign for one person may not be an issue at all for another. If we have a clear understanding of the warning signs in our lives, we can often avoid the pitfalls that follow those warning signs.

In *Desires in Conflict*, Joe Dallas gives some additional encouragement about combating brokenness in our lives:

The best offense is a good defense. So battling inward pollution is best done by keeping the inner man clean or spiritually minded. Paul illustrated the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 5:17 by calling it a war between the two. They do battle with each other incessantly, so that you never seem to keep your thoughts as clean as you would like to. The trick is not to concentrate only on the negative (lustful thoughts) but to emphasize the positive. Paul's solution? "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Practically speaking, that means a life of consistent inward prayer ... a consistent awareness of God's presence, plus nonstop acknowledgment of His nearness to you and residence within you. It means instant confession of sin when it occurs and a commitment to keep your thoughts centered on Him. Keeping the mind centered on God –

His nearness, His goodness, and His unfailing love for you – is the best defense against mental impurity.

What are the attitudes, actions, and/or patterns that you have noticed precede or are happening simultaneously with you struggling with sinfulness and rebellion (of any kind)?

What are areas in which you need continued work (relational deficits, addictive patterns, etc.)?

We are called to die to our old nature. In order to know newness of life, we must intentionally put to death our sinful behaviors. God calls us to not just manage our problems, but to surrender them to Him.

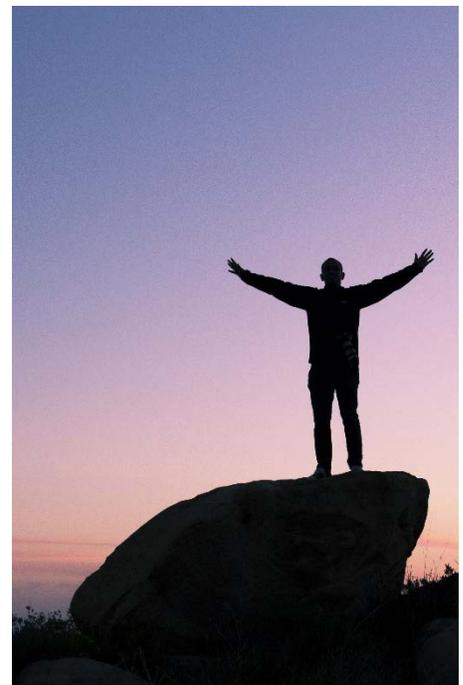
Day 5 - Successes

... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV)

Just as Joe Dallas challenged us with focusing our thoughts on positive things, it is also important to acknowledge and celebrate success in the journey. Maybe you made a good choice even though it was difficult. Perhaps you took a step of obedience God placed in front of you. Maybe you took a step of faith and pressed deeper into a healthy relationship with someone. All these successes (and many more) can be sources of celebration. We can become discouraged if our only focus is on what we have not done or should not do. Part of living in the reality of our lives is also celebrating those things that are going well.

Describe a recent success or victory in your life.



How do you create sign-posts or milestones of your growth and God's healing work in your life? Describe a recent example.



How are you celebrating the victories in your life?

Now What?

Hopefully you took some time to intentionally engage with each of the questions in this lesson. When we come together next week, we will discuss your answers, as well as areas that were a challenge for you. As mentioned earlier, you may have difficulty with some of the questions. That's okay. You are still in process. Next week, you will also be provided with a tool that will help you to continue engaging with the question: **How do I keep myself healthy?**

What is one practical step you can take to invest in your health?

