

RADICAL  
RECONCILIATION  
*The Journey of*  
FORGIVENESS



PICKING UP  
THE PIECES



by Ramon Presson with Ben Colter

*Radical Reconciliation: The Journey of Forgiveness*

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# GROUP MEETING STRUCTURE

Each of your group meetings will include a four-part agenda.



## 1. BREAKING THE ICE:

This section includes fun, uplifting questions to warm up the group and help group members get to know one another better, as they begin the journey of becoming a connected community. These questions prepare the group for meaningful discussion throughout the session.



## 2. DISCOVERING THE TRUTH:

The heart of each session is the interactive Bible study time. The goal is for the group to discover biblical truths through open, discovery questions that lead to further investigation. The emphasis in this section is two-fold:

- (1) to provide instruction about the process of recovery and freedom; and
- (2) understand what the Bible says through interaction within your group.

NOTE: To help the group experience a greater sense of community, it is important for everybody to participate in the “Discovering the Truth” and “Embracing the Truth” discussions. Even though people in a group have differing levels of biblical knowledge, it is vital that group members encourage one another share what they are observing, thinking, and feeling about the Bible passages.



## 3. EMBRACING THE TRUTH:

All study should direct group members to action and life change. This section continues the Bible study time, but with an emphasis on leading group members toward integrating the truths they have discovered into their lives. The questions are very practical and application-focused.



## 4. CONNECTING:

One of the key goals of this study is to lead group members to grow closer to one another as the group develops a sense of community. This section focuses on further application, as well as opportunities for encouraging, supporting, and praying for one another.



## TAKING IT HOME:

Between each session, there is some homework for group members. This includes a question to take to God or a question to take to the heart, and typically a few questions to help prepare for the next session. **These experiences are a critical part of your journey of forgiveness.**

# RADICAL RECONCILIATION: THE JOURNEY OF FORGIVENESS

Relationships are complex, and there are many forces at work to sabotage them. We all have busted relationships! Some are new; some are old. Some are fully inflamed; others are just simmering. Sometimes we're the offender; sometimes we're the person offended; and sometimes ... we have no clue what the problem is.

In *Radical Reconciliation*, we'll go beyond improving or managing our difficult and strained relationships. We'll pursue their healing. Our goal will be to progressively move toward forgiveness and, in most cases, healthy reconciliation. Although we're entering uncomfortable territory, bear in mind that we are on healing ground. We'll encounter some radical ideas that oppose our natural human responses. It will be important for us to remember as we continue on this journey that the work of forgiveness is a supernatural task for which supernatural power is available.

Lewis Smedes, author and noted authority on forgiveness, points out that forgiveness, which is so beyond our natural ability and instincts, is as much of a miracle as walking on the water. Forgiveness definitely sounds like a superhuman quality! For true reconciliation to occur, we need to take the path to true forgiveness, rather than settling for a cheap imitation.

## OUR ROUTE TO RECONCILIATION

- A**WAKEN: Grapple with the complexities of relationships, and the set of forces at work to disrupt and sabotage them.
- A**CT: Understand the benefits of forgiveness and my resistance; then make a decision to take the path of forgiveness, even if it's difficult.
- A**NALYZE: Begin to push the flywheel and inch forward by analyzing relationships and naming offenses.
- R**ELEASE: Release is the critical juncture at which you extend compassion and gift the offender.
- R**ECONCILE: Recognize the difference between reconciliation and restoration, readjust your heart, and then take steps to build bridges.
- R**EBUILD: The journey to personal healing and relational reconciliation is ongoing. Continue to incorporate what you've learned through this study, what God has revealed through other channels, and the discernment that you've developed as you press on in life.

# SABOTAGED RELATIONSHIPS



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## BREAKING THE ICE – 15 MINUTES

*LEADER: Be sure to read the introductory material in the front of this book and the leader's material at the end of the book. For the first icebreaker, help your group members get to know one another by initiating introductions. You should introduce yourself first. Encourage everyone to answer the "Breaking the Ice" questions, so they get used to hearing their own voices.*

1. Take turns introducing yourselves to the group. Share your name, one thing about yourself that your friends would say is unusual or unique, and finally one reason you joined the group.
  
2. From the list below, which is your favorite to build, create, re-model, or redecorate?
  - Model airplane, ship, or car – I love to imagine what it would be like to be in one.
  - Kitchen – It's my favorite room!
  - Bathroom – It's nice to put my own "stamp" on this room.
  - The whole house – It's my prize possession.
  - Old cars – I love it when a plan comes together.
  - Art – I enjoy expressing myself through my creativity.
  - Garden – I love the beauty of God's creation.
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_.
  
3. When something is broken, my first thought is usually ...
  - Run and hide!
  - It can wait. I'll get around to it later.
  - Somebody help me PLEASE!
  - Not a problem. I can fix it.
  - The world has just stopped and this is all I can think about right now.
  - It wasn't me!

4. Briefly describe the last time you had to deal with a major repair.

## OPENING PRAYER

*God, we're not exactly sure how it happened, but somehow the gift of relationship gets busted. We don't know how to put it back together. In some cases, we're not even sure we want to or that it's even possible. Please walk with us in our journey toward healing as You begin to mend the broken pieces of our relationships and our hearts.*

## THE ANATOMY OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Before a surgeon begins surgery, he or she must first understand how the patient is wounded or impaired. A heart surgeon, for example, studies how a healthy heart functions before he or she can restore one to its original, healthy design. We must approach healing of broken relationships in the same way a surgeon studies to heal the body. In order to move toward forgiveness, healing, and possible reconciliation, we must understand the original, healthy design of the relationship and what has been broken.

In this session we will identify God's original design for human relationships and our Adversary's attempts to destroy them.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

- Discover God's original design and purpose for human relationships
- Recognize the complexities of relationships and the complications of communication
- Acknowledge the intent of the Adversary to sabotage our relationships, destroy community, and isolate us from one another
- Prepare to begin the healing journey toward forgiveness and possible reconciliation



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## DISCOVERING THE TRUTH – 35 MINUTES

*LEADER: Explain that the “Discovering the Truth” section that provides understanding of the journey of forgiveness, and opportunities to discover what the Bible says about it. Watch your time so you can leave ample time for the “Embracing the Truth” and “Connecting” segments later in this session at the end of your group session. Read any explanations and questions to the group.*

The self-help section of any bookstore is full of books that address relationship issues with bosses, co-workers, parents, children, in-laws, spouses, and ex-spouses, just to name a few. There's no shortage of experts in these areas. This is indicative of the extent of broken, or strained, relationships in our culture. They're everywhere and generally unavoidable.

In this study, we'll go beyond improving or managing our difficult and strained relationships. We'll pursue their healing. Our goal will be to progressively move toward forgiveness and, in most cases, healthy reconciliation. Although we're entering uncomfortable territory, bear in mind that we are on healing ground. We'll encounter some radical ideas that oppose our natural human responses. It will be important for us to remember as we continue on this journey that the work of forgiveness is a supernatural task for which supernatural power is available.

## CREATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

The Trinity existed before the foundation of the world. Within the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have always been in relationship with one another.

*LEADER: Ask various members to read Bible passages when they appear during the session. Encourage individuals to respond to the questions as they feel comfortable. Some members may want to speak up while others may wish to remain quiet on certain questions. Strive for participation across the group rather than allowing one or two to carry the discussion.*

*<sup>1:26</sup> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> God made man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ...*

*<sup>2:18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him helper suitable.*

GENESIS 1:26-27; 2:18 NASB

1. To whom does it appear "Us" and "Our" refer in verse 26? What are some implications you can imagine of being created in the image of God, of being God's image-bearer?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think "suitable" means? What do you think Genesis 1:27 and 2:18 reveal about God's perspective on human relationships?

In addition to man's capacity for emotion, creativity, intelligence, and moral awareness, man possesses the capacity for relationship. Part of what it means to be created in the image of God is to have this capacity for relationship. We crave relationships just as we crave intimacy. In fact, relationships are vital to spiritual health. Our relational God designed us with a longing to know and to be known. It is part of our original, healthy design—our inherent DNA.

3. If God created us for relationship, what do you think He intended our relationships to be like? Ideally, what relationship qualities would be evident?

*“Now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed.”*

JOHN 17:5 HCSB

*“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”*

ROMANS 8:19,22 NIV

*<sup>1</sup> How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

1 JOHN 3:1-3 NIV

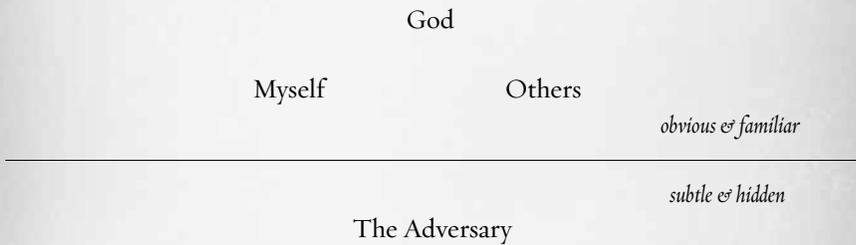
4. In John 17:5, Jesus recalls the transition in His relationship with the Father. How does He seem to feel about this change? What is Jesus' desire?

5. We were originally created for deep, intimate relationship we God. Although we've fallen from this depth of relationship, what awaits us according to I John 3:1-3 and Romans 8:19?

The Trinity longs to return to that state of original relationship, and to draw us into this relationship. All of creation longs for this same return to oneness with our Creator. Because we're created in God's image, when relationships are less than what they should be, we experience a longing that requires healing and reconnection.

## SUBTLE SABOTAGE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Social scientists accurately view our relationships as part of a vast and very dynamic network of contributors and influencers. They typically identify three major players in the in the network, but unfortunately they miss the fourth. This often forgotten character is our adversary, who would choose to remain anonymous and faceless because his potential damage is greatest when he's allowed to work behind the scenes.



<sup>10</sup> *Be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil.* <sup>12</sup> *For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.*

EPHESIANS 6:10-12 HCSB

*Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary, the Devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.*

1 PETER 5:8 HCSB

6. Who is our unseen adversary and what does he intend for our lives and relationships according to Ephesians 6:10-12 and 1 Peter 5:8?

The Bible makes it clear that the Devil and his demons are ruthless and purposeful. They desire to thwart and undermine everything godly. The enemy strategically schemes to sabotage lives and ruin relationships. In so doing, he seeks to diminish our capacity to bring glory to God and live in the joy God has planned for us. Although there are many factors that influence our relationships, our adversary has used four primary tactics from the beginning.

## TACTIC I: DECEPTION

*LEADER: Invite 3 people to read the parts of the narrator, the serpent/adversary, and Eve.*

*NARRATOR:*<sup>1</sup> *Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman,*

*ADVERSARY: “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’”*

*EVE:*<sup>2</sup> *“We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden.”*<sup>3</sup> *But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’”*

*ADVERSARY:*<sup>4</sup> *“No! You will not die.”*<sup>5</sup> *In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

GENESIS 3: 1-5 HCSB

7. What is the progression of the adversary’s deception with Eve? What is he trying to get her to doubt?

*LEADER: If possible, use a Swiss Army Knife or something similar as a visual aid while you’re discussing this section.*

Think of deception as a Swiss Army Knife that has several options hidden in the handle. These are some of the specific tools at his disposal within the main “handle” of deception:

- **Temptation** • **Division** • **Destruction** • **Distrust** • **Doubt**
- **Betrayal** • **Dishonesty** • **Neglect**

8. Look again at the dialog. How are the various tools of deception employed in Genesis 3?

Clearly, the serpent twisted the truths that God had revealed to both Adam and Eve. The adversary came in disguise. He strategically worked to get the couple to doubt the heart of God toward them. In the deception, he took advantage of questions that were already there, and manipulated the truths to an extent that led to catastrophe.

## TACTIC 2: RESIGNATION

*<sup>6</sup> Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

GENESIS 3:6 HCSB

9. Resignation can be understood as being passive in the path of relational destruction. In what ways to you see resignation as a force with Adam and Eve? What are your clues?

It was easy for Adam and Eve to take those first steps toward disobedience once they engaged the serpent's conversation. They allowed the serpent to dictate the terms and direction of the conversation. Once Adam and Eve resigned control, stepped aside, and listened in earnest, the story took a sudden and dramatic turn.

## TACTIC 3: HIDING AND SECRECY

*<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. <sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."*

GENESIS 3:7-10 HCSB

10. What are some reasons you see that might have caused Adam and Eve to hide? Why would the enemy want to encourage our tendency toward hiding and secrets? Why is this so detrimental?

When we allow relationships to fall apart and accept this as a new reality, we validate one of the primary works of the enemy—resignation. This path of resignation culminates in a passiveness and shame that leaves people isolated, lonely, bitter, and vulnerable.

## TACTIC 4: BLAME

<sup>11</sup> Then He [God] asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I had commanded you not to eat from?” <sup>12</sup> Then the man replied, “The woman You gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup> So the LORD God asked the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “It was the serpent. He deceived me, and I ate.”

GENESIS 3:11-13 HCSB

II. What dynamic is occurring in Genesis 3:11-13? Who is each person holding responsible? Who is really to blame? How do you suppose the conversation went between Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden of Eden?

Part of being human is wanting to assign blame when something goes wrong. When a relationship is injured, we want to find blame—even if it’s on ourselves. When we feel deeply wounded by another, we might wonder why God didn’t shield us. We tend to place the responsibility for damaged relationships with others, God, or ourselves. All three of these options are obvious and familiar and therefore the most likely targets when we look to assign blame. The enemy likes to work in the shadows. His preferred activity remains subtle and hidden.



## EMBRACING THE TRUTH – 20 MINUTES

*LEADER: “Embracing the Truth” is the section in which the group members will begin to integrate the truth they are discovering during the session into their personal lives. Be aware that the level of hurt and response to this hurt will be different for different people, so the rate of life application will vary accordingly.*

### UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

One of the factors that make relationships so challenging are the differences that we each bring to the table. Differences in the following categories have the potential to complicate relationships ...

Personalities	Experiences	Expectations
Educational backgrounds	Backgrounds	Ethnic Cultures
Genders	Ages	Generations
Geographic Cultures	Ambitions	Beliefs
Opinions	Convictions	Values
Priorities	Family Systems	

1. Recall a recent relationship challenge. Choose one or two of the differences noted above that complicated the relationship. What was the complication?
  
2. Which relationship sabotage tactic (deception, resignation/passivity, hiding/secretcy, or blame) is most prominent in this relationship? In what ways have you allowed the enemy to infiltrate?
  
3. Which tools from the enemy's deception toolbox (refer to page 11) are at work in this relationship?

## RELATIONAL SHIELDS: RECOGNITION AND RENUNCIATION

One of the results of Garden of Eden episode is that the adversary successfully placed a wedge between Adam and Eve and God. Their relationships were never the same.

The good news is that God is not only a Creator, He is also a Healer and Redeemer. There is power in recognizing this truth. Recognition of the enemies schemes, and of the truth, act as a shield to deflect the enemy's arrows of deception and fiery arrows of shame.

4. What lies have you heard playing over and over in your mind about yourself, God, or the other person as a result of the adversary's deception? Are there any beliefs you've been carrying that just might be lies?

Territory in our personal lives and in our relationships where the enemy seems to have won can be recaptured by God. In C.S. Lewis' novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan overturns the White Witch's reign and rule over Narnia. Aslan's restored rule includes the active participation of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. Likewise, God seeks to enlist our active participation in the restoration of our broken relationships, and the renunciation of the enemy. When it's His flag that is raised in victory on the hill of our hearts, we will join Him in the celebration. This triumphant march begins when we recognize the spiritual battle taking place against the principalities of darkness. It progresses when we renounce the Adversary's subtle influence over our hearts.

5. Rate your current level of recognition of the enemy's influence and your willingness to renounce his lies and work to reconciling relationships.

1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5.....	6.....	7.....	8.....	9.....	10
Don't see it and I'm not ready yet				Strong recognition, but I'm not really ready to renounce			Strong recognition and I'm ready to fight		

## OUR ROUTE TO RECONCILIATION

On the journey to reconciliation our Route to Reconciliation will help us understand where we are in the process while keeping the destination clearly in our path.

-  **A**WAKEN: Grapple with the complexities of relationships, and the set of forces at work to disrupt and sabotage them.
- A**CT: Understand the benefits of forgiveness and my resistance; then make a decision to take the path of forgiveness, even if it's difficult.
- A**NALYZE: Begin to push the flywheel and inch forward by analyzing relationships and naming offenses.
- R**ELEASE: Release is the critical juncture at which we extend compassion and gift the offender.
- R**ECONCILE: Recognize the difference between reconciliation and restoration, readjust your heart, and then take steps to build bridges.
- R**EBUILD: The journey to personal healing and relational reconciliation is ongoing. Continue to incorporate what you've learned through this study, what God has revealed through other channels, and the discernment that you've developed as you press on in life.

During the second session we will continue the process of awakening to the realities of broken relationships and healing.



## CONNECTING – 20 MINUTES

*LEADER: Use the “Connecting” time to help group members connect with each other, with God, and with their own hearts. The invitation is for people to become comfortable opening up within the group. Encourage people to begin leaning on and supporting one another in prayer and in other, more tangible ways.*

*LEADER INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE GROUP EXPERIENCE: Give each participant a 4 x 6” index card or blank sheet of paper. Explain to group members that they are going to participate in a writing exercise, and will be invited to share their response with the group.*

Imagine that you are placing a “lost” ad in the Lost & Found section of your community newspaper. Describe your losses in a written ad, and then share your ad with the group. Here’s an example of how one could read:

Husband lost to divorce on March 4th along with capacity to trust. Also missing is peace, joy, and self-esteem. Dreams of our 20th wedding anniversary were stolen at the same time. Dreams have been replaced by nightmares and insomnia. If grip on sanity and the ability to hope again are found please return to Angela Smith, 117 10th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234. A reward is offered.

Discuss the following questions with your group:

1. In writing from this objective perspective, did you understand any of your story in a different light? Discuss.
2. What has been “stolen” from you?

3. The writer of the example ad hopes to recover joy, peace, and self-esteem. What do you hope to recover? What are some of the deepest longings you feel?

Let's pray for God to fill these longings in our hearts. How can we pray for you today?

MY PRAYER REQUESTS:

MY GROUP'S PRAYER REQUESTS:

*LEADER: Say something like, "In today's session, we established that there is another character in the story. This character prefers to remain hidden and work in subtle ways. He wants more than anything to disrupt the harmony that God intended for us. In order to recover what we've lost, we must recognize the work of the enemy and the provisions of the Redeemer." NOTE: Be sure to give an overview of the "Taking It Home" assignment.*



## TAKING IT HOME

*LEADER: Explain that the “Taking it Home” section will contain either an introspective question to ask of your heart or a question to take to God. In addition, there are two questions to help prepare for the next session. Strongly encourage everyone to complete the questions before the next session. Be sure to highlight the importance of journaling feelings or key insights that God reveals.*

### QUESTIONS TO TAKE TO MY HEART

Look into your heart for the answer to these questions. This is introspection time—time to grapple with what drives your thinking and behavior. **Every action has a corresponding belief that drives it.** Dig for what you believe in the deep recesses of your heart about God, yourself, and the world in which you live. Be sure to capture your thoughts.

- \* How have I been processing my busted relationship?
  
- \* To what have I attributed the cause of most of my relationship problems?
  
- \* To what degree have I understood the spiritual battle for the health of my relationships?

### LOOKING FORWARD ... PREPARE FOR SESSION 2

**NOTE: Be sure to review the Group Covenant on the next page so you're prepared for a brief group discussion at the next meeting.**

Consider two questions to be discussed in Session 2. Capture your thoughts and feelings in the “Relationships Journal” on page 20, as you continue on your journey.

1. Who in my life requires the most of my patience? What is it about this person, me, and the chemistry between us that makes the relationship a struggle?
2. Which of my characteristics might require others to be patient with me? Is there something I need to address here?

# GROUP COVENANT

As you begin this study, it is important that your group covenant together, agreeing to live out important group values. Once these values are agreed upon, your group will be on its way to experiencing true redemptive community. It's very important that your group discuss these values—preferably as you begin this study.

- \* **PRIORITY:** While we are in this group, we will give the group meetings priority. All the sessions are integrated, with each session building on the sessions that precede them. Committed attendance is vital to our healing journey together.  
NOTE: Due to the focus of this group on taking the journey through the emotions and losses of divorce, group sessions will require a full 90 minutes to complete, so plan accordingly.
- \* **PARTICIPATION AND FAIRNESS:** Because we are here to receive help, we commit to participation and interaction in the group. No one dominates. We will be fair to others and concentrate on telling our own stories briefly.
- \* **HOMEWORK:** Homework experiences are an integral and vital part of the recovery process. Assignments between each session include: (1) A Question to Take to My Heart or (2) A Question to Take to God; plus (3) Thoughts to journal to prepare for the next session.
- \* **RESPECT AND OWNERSHIP:** Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions, and all questions are encouraged and respected. We will not judge or condemn as others share their stories. We are each responsible for our own recovery and will not “own” someone else’s. Offensive language is not permitted.
- \* **CONFIDENTIALITY:** Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the meeting without permission from the group member. This is vital in creating the environment of trust and openness required to facilitate the healing and freedom. Names of attendees will not be shared with others.
- \* **LIFE CHANGE:** We will regularly assess our progress and will complete the “Taking it Home” activities to reinforce what we are learning, and to better integrate those lessons into our personal journeys.
- \* **CARE AND SUPPORT:** Permission is given to call upon each other at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group will provide care for every member.
- \* **ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRITY:** We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in whatever loving ways we decide upon. Unsolicited advice-giving is not permitted. We will build a close relationship with an accountability partner for mutual growth and responsibility. Men will help men and women will help to women in order to uphold the spirit of integrity. No dating within the group!
- \* **EXPECTATIONS OF FACILITATORS:** This meeting is not professional therapy. We are not licensed therapists. Group facilitators are volunteers whose only desire is to encourage people in finding freedom and hope.

I agree to all of the above \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_