Making Peace With Your Past
Unit 1 – Discovering Self-esteem

Memory verse: Romans 8:1 – “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”

Affirmation: “I accept God’s love for me”

Day 1 and 2: Understanding your family of origin

Lecture
A dysfunctional family focuses its attention on an emotionally needy family member. This person likely has an addictive/compulsive personality. The addiction/compulsion of this person may be known to the family or it may be a secret. When the behavior is secret, the children are generally aware that something is wrong. They may know it at a subconscious level but be unable to name exactly what is wrong. The compulsive personality has many expressions. Some examples are the alcoholic, drug addict, rageaholic, work addict, sex addict, persons with eating disorders, the spending or gambling addict, the religion addict. Other addictive/compulsive behaviors could be included. They have in common that their dysfunctional families focus on them. “Keep Dad happy, and maybe he won’t get drunk.”

A dysfunctional family places limits on the expression of feelings. The family that focuses heavily on the emotional instability of one member does not leave much room for other family members to express feelings. Things might be said like “Big boys don’t cry. You’re not sad, be happy.” You may feel reluctance to be critical of your family of origin. It may help to recognize that all families have strengths and weaknesses. But one trait of a dysfunctional family is the no-talk rule, because it wants to hide something. Thinking and talking about your past are not easy. Discussing emotional pain you may have experienced is not a betrayal of your family, but expresses a desire to become the whole person God desires you to be. You can confront your painful childhood and still honor your parents and relationships.

Questions
Q1. Did you come from a dysfunctional family? Why do you think the family was dysfunctional? – page 12

Q2. Was the family’s attention focused on emotionally needy family members? – page 12
Q3. Were limits placed on your expression of feelings? – page 13

Lecture
Other characteristics of dysfunctional families are that the family discourages talk about obvious problems. It permits destructive roles for the children in the family. It fails to provide appropriate nurture for developing children. Another characteristic is that the dysfunctional family is closed to the outside world.

Questions
Q4. What was your role in the family? – page 14

Q5. In what ways were you nurtured in your family? In what areas were you not nurtured? – page 14

Q6. Was your family open to the outside world? – page 15

Q7. Are any patterns being repeated in your present family? – page 15

Day 3: Losing self-esteem in a dysfunctional family

Lecture
Dysfunctional families tear down self-esteem by transferring shame. The Family Portrait in your book illustrates this transferring of shame, when mom says, “Look that’s your father, that’s your father”, when he was passed out, drunk. This kind of example may make you feel various feelings, because it reminds you of your own past. You may feel sad, angry, lonely, ashamed, guilty, confused or afraid. Or you may feel no feelings at all.

Dysfunctional families tear down self-esteem by teaching children that their feelings are not important. Family members lose perspective on what is normal. They fail to develop a strategy of problem solving for relational and emotional issues. They permit unhealthy
survival roles. Dysfunctional families tear down self-esteem by members failing to nurture one another.

Questions
Q8. Did you experience something in your family of origin that damaged your self-esteem? Please describe. – page 18

Q9. Do you have a good sense of what is normal?

Q10. Do you carry shame for someone? – page 18

Q11. What feelings were not allowed to be expressed? How do you deal with these feelings today? – page 18

Q12. Has your faith in Christ impacted your shame at the core of your being? Be honest. – page 18

Day 4: Finding self-esteem in Christ

Lecture
There is a Biblical formula for developing self-esteem. The first concept is that I first need to admit that I am too weak to keep all of God’s rules. Because of where I grew up my need to appear strong may be a big part of my personality. So it may be hard for me to express weakness. Yet the Bible tells me in Romans 3:23 that I am a sinner, that I have a nature that wants to do the wrong thing. I do not have the strength within myself to do what is right. (In a dysfunctional family I learned to hurt. I developed survival techniques. I experienced pain and defeat that were not my choices). This first concept can be summarized as “I cannot”.

A second concept is that as a follower of Jesus, I am free because Jesus died for me. Romans 8:1 says that “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.
This verse was written to people who had committed their lives to Christ. It is a promise of freedom and forgiveness. This concept may be summarized as “God can”.

A third concept is that I can experience this freedom as I follow the Spirit of God. This may be hard to comprehend at first. I may have learned to keep God at a distance. I may have seen God in terms of the way my parents related to me. But I need to let go, and see God as he really is. This concept can be summarized as “I am going to let Him”.

We encourage you to seriously consider the box on page 20 – How do you commit your life to Christ? This will be a decision that will change the rest of your life.

Questions
Q13. Do you recognize that you made choices which set you on the path to your addiction? – page 19

Q14. Have you shared your issues openly with God, or have you been hiding from him? – page 20

Q15. Where do you feel you are spiritually today? – page 21

Q16. What are you willing to allow God to do in your life? Are you willing to surrender to him on a daily basis? – page 23

Day 5: Getting in touch with your feelings

Lecture
Adult children of dysfunctional families may have trouble identifying feelings. You may have lived in reaction to other people’s feelings rather than having your own feelings validated. You may have been taught not to express feelings, or that certain feelings were unacceptable. Or you may be a victim of chronic-shock syndrome. This means that you experienced feelings so intense that your emotional system shut down while locked in the feelings of the moment. You may be carrying emotionally intense feelings that are buried beneath the surface of your conscious thinking, frozen as they were at the time of the traumatic event.
Feelings held inside will find a way out. They can express themselves in unplanned ways if we deny their existence. We may act out, which means behavior based on hidden feelings. Or they may find their way out in illness, which sometimes results from internalized feelings.

There are methods we use to stay out of touch with our feelings. These are: intellectualizing, minimizing, denial, isolating, swallowing a feeling, taking care of others.

**Questions**

Q17. What techniques do you use to avoid your feelings? – page 25

Q18. What issues brought you here? – page 28

Q19. Describe one incident to explain what it felt like to grow up in your family – page 28

Q20. What goals would you like to accomplish in this class? – page 28

**Summary**

Q21. What are the major lessons you have learned as you progressed through this unit? (half page)