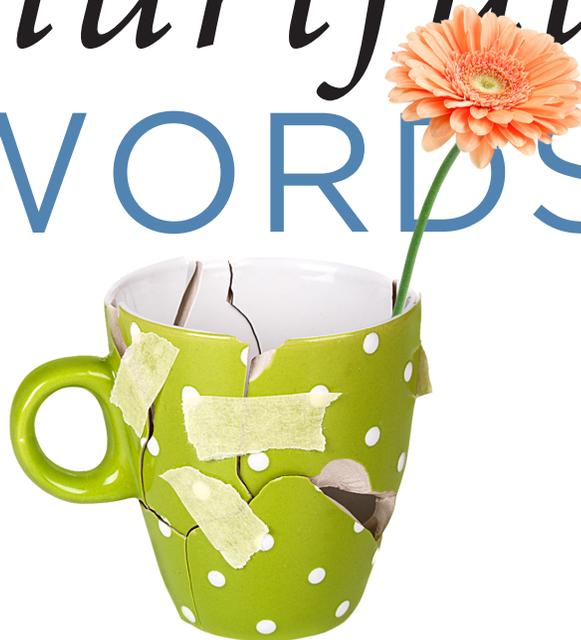


Small Group Study

OVERCOMING
hurtful
WORDS



Based on the book *Overcoming Hurtful Words* by Janell Rardon.

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An Invitation to Sobremesa

“Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee and just as hard to sleep after.”

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

A few years ago, my older daughter, Candace Rose, first introduced our family to a Spanish custom called *sobremesa*. On a little chalkboard pic in our dining room, she wrote this lovely Spanish word, as a reminder to all of us to “linger after the meal.” *Linger*. Just say the word. It drips off the tongue like honey from the honeycomb. Literally, *sobremesa* means “over the table.” “It has no precise English translation, perhaps because there is no cultural equivalent. It invites everyone to experience a time of leisure—spent in conversation, digestion, relaxation, and sheer enjoyment. Certainly no rushing is allowed. It isn’t reserved for weekends—though it can be longest on Sundays—and is even part of weekday and business meals.”

Today, I invite you and your small group to experience the power of *sobremesa*—all while reading, studying, praying, and engaging in the stimulating thoughts and challenging exercises in *Overcoming Hurtful Words: Rewrite Your Own Story*. Gather round the table, brew your favorite pot of hot tea or coffee, keep a pitcher of water at hand for hydration—and, most importantly, breathe in the power of God’s love for you.

The content of *this book* requires *this small group* to shape itself a little differently than other small groups. Hurtful words leave invisible bruises, tender places, and oftentimes carefully crafted, self-protecting walls around our hearts. So, opening our hearts, letting down our guard, and actually speaking the words out loud for everyone to hear can be daunting—at first. All I could do was cry when I started to share my story. It will take time, a whole lot of confidentiality and trust, and a firm commitment to one another. *What happens in small group stays in small group*. I’ve created an *Overcoming Hurtful Words Confidentiality Agreement* that I encourage each member to read and sign before getting started. On this healing journey, trust is everything.

The most important part of all? You are not alone. This small group is here for you. And, a whole online community is ready and willing to offer help: www.overcominghurtfulwords.com.

Always learning,



Overcoming Hurtful Words Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in our small group. As members, we commit to

- praying wholeheartedly for one another;
- practicing a “no-judgment zone”—offering the tenuous balance between the lavish grace of God and the helpful affirmation of the truth found in God’s Word;
- helping one another transform the narrative of unhealthy, heartripping behaviors into the narrative of healthy, heartlifting behaviors;
- listening between the lines of one another’s stories in an effort to help one another move through the three phases of a heartlift: reflect, reframe, and reauthor;
- reminding one another that God is a turn-it-around God: Genesis 50:20 NIV, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”;
- being transformed by the renewing of our minds: “To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:23–24 NIV).

Information shared will be kept confidential. It is the earnest desire of our small group to help one another through the *Overcoming Hurtful Words* healing journey. This healing journey requires complete authenticity, confidentiality, and trust.

Signed _____ Date _____

How to Best Use This Small Group Guide

“Your small group is destined to die a slow, complacent, even cordial death without direction. Good food and casual conversation might be staples of normal small group life, but they cannot be the substance. Too many groups meet week after week, month after month without any clear mandate, and therefore without any clarity regarding whether or not they’re fulfilling their purpose or really accomplishing anything. Small groups need a vision.”

—Marshall Segal, Managing Editor and Staff Writer, desiringGod.org

The Overcoming Hurtful Words Mandate: To strengthen the three-fold cord of emotional and spiritual health: a healthy sense of self, healthy behavior patterns, and healthy communication skills.

The Overcoming Hurtful Words Mission: To reflect, reframe, and reauthor negative words, labels, and narratives that have hindered emotional and spiritual health in order to achieve emotional healing and find true freedom in Christ.

Ideal Group Leadership, Size, and Setting:

- “Ideal” leadership would have empathic tendencies and strong listening skills, be nurturing yet also attentive to time management and group dynamics, and have a commitment to both praying through and preparing the material. Due to the emotional nature of this healing journey, understand it is a small group study, not a “therapy” or “psychological support” group. If members present with emotional or psychological needs (which might be “triggered”) that require this type of support, referrals need to be given.
- Due to the nature of the content of this small group study, “ideal” small group size is six to eight people and, if at all possible, in private homes or spaces where group members feel free and safe to engage in authentic, often very personal, conversations.

SUGGESTED FORMAT:

- **Class Length:** The process of overcoming hurtful words takes careful time and attention. I recommend that you spread this course over ten weeks, studying the introduction the first week and then focus on one of the nine practices for each week thereafter. The individual session lengths will vary depending on how much time your group needs to work through the reflect/reframe/reauthor process each week. Don't rush the process. Plan on spending at least 90 minutes together. Be flexible if you sense your group members need more time. Healing is hard! But it's not impossible. You can do it together!
- **Opening Prayer:** Take turns praying through the Heartlifter's Prayer (adapted for small group prayer):

Dear God,

No one knows pain like You. Please come alongside each one of us. Walk every single step of this hard-but-worth-it journey with us. Surround us with your healing wings (Psalm 91). As we reflect on the tender, broken places in our hearts, we pray You will visit us with the miraculous healing that comes only from You.

Where there is despair, bring the dawn of a brand-new beginning.

Where there are lies, bring the light of truth.

Where there is hate, bring a love that comes only from You.

Where there is unforgiveness, bring the supernatural capacity to let go.

Where there is anger, bring the peace that passes all understanding.

Where there is confusion, bring clarity and vision.

Where there is oppression, bring the freedom of the cross.

Where there is sadness, bring joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Help us rise above our crushing heartift and bring each of us to rejoicing in our powerful heartlifts.

Most of all, help us remember that we need to take really good care of our hearts. Teach us to guard our affections, for they influence everything in our lives.

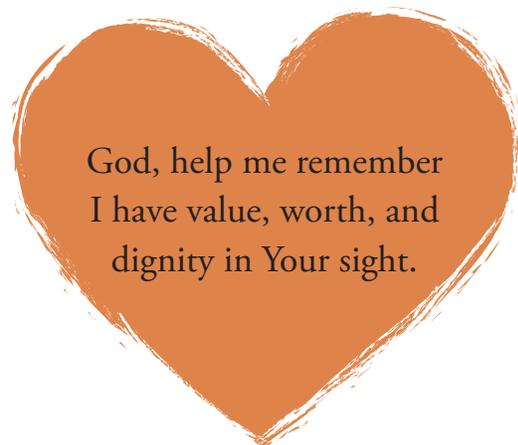
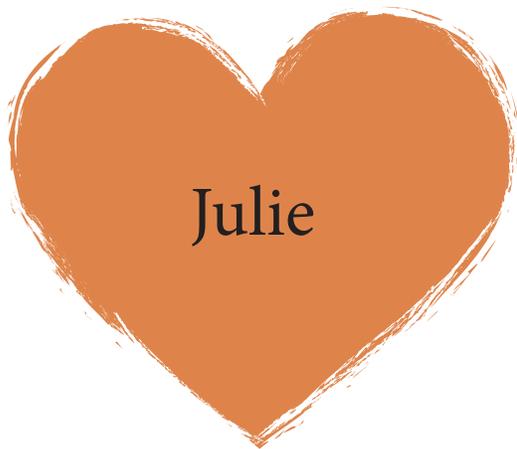
Amen.

- **Recite the Opening Pledge together:**

Today, we pledge that we are ready, willing, and able to commit to this heartlift journey. We know it will require honesty, hard work, and a big dose of humility. When the going gets tough, we will remember that You, God, are the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1–2). You are with us, even if, at times, it feels as if we are all alone (Isaiah 41:10). Your silence is not Your neglect; You know the perfect time, You have the perfect plan, and You are never late (Ecclesiastes 3:14). You will help us move

through this scary place of pain and into the beautiful, sacred space of peace, so that we can live, love, and laugh again. When we need help, we will ask for it. When we want to isolate and hide away, we will instead reach out and seek the company of wise men and women who will walk beside us. When we need courage, we will whisper our brave, three-word prayer—God help us. Amen.

- **Review the Assigned Reading and the week’s additional study guide insights.** Invite members to share what spoke to them. Was there one sentence, one thought, or one Scripture that stood out? How did they begin incorporating the “Practice” into their daily lives? Spend a few minutes here.
- **Visit *Heart Care* at the end of the practice.** Move through Reflect, Reframe, and Reauthor, highlighting and discussing it together.
- Using the prompt given in this guide, offer a few quiet moments of heart journaling, maybe five or ten minutes. Leaders, make available “heart-shaped memos” that members can use at the close of this quiet time. As quiet time comes to a close, each member writes one specific “heartlifting” intention on their heart. Name on one side, intention on the other. When returning to the group for the closing, place the heart in a bowl or basket (in the center of the meeting space), and wait quietly for the closing prayer.
- As small group study comes to a close, each member draws a heart from the bowl or basket and commits to praying for this person plus their “heartlifting” intention until the next meeting.



How Do I Overcome Hurtful Words?

Are you ready to rewrite your story? I can't wait for you to get started. Keep in mind that this healing journey is a process. It takes time. Be kind to yourself as you move forward. Mistakes will be made. Old patterns will kick and scream. Fatigue will set in and try to stop you. New patterns will be tested and tried. Voices may try to discourage your growth. Don't let them. Stick to the process, implement the nine practices, and stay the course. Okay, here we go. You've got this, and when you don't, God does.

1. Hurtful words have harmful consequences and leave our spirits crushed. Consider the psalmist's words in Psalm 34:18 NLT: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed."

Words within the Word: *crushed*

In the Hebrew, *dakka*, or crushed, means "broken very small—dust; cast down." The Oxford Dictionary defines crush (v), "deform, pulverize, or force inwards by compressing forcefully; bring about a feeling of overwhelming disappointment or embarrassment in (someone)." Synonyms: suppress, put down, quell, quash, stamp out, put an end to, overcome, overpower, defeat, repress, extinguish.

2. Here at the onset of our healing journey, take a few moments to read and reflect on the mandate and mission of this small group study:

The Overcoming Hurtful Words Mandate: To strengthen the three-fold cord of emotional and spiritual health: a healthy sense of self, healthy behavior patterns, and healthy communication skills.

The Overcoming Hurtful Words Mission: To reflect, reframe, and reauthor negative words, labels, and narratives that have hindered emotional and spiritual health in order to achieve emotional healing and find true freedom in Christ.

3. Look at the glossary and familiarize yourself with the words/concepts that will be a big part of this journey, especially WHOLE, the emotional power tool comprised of five steps.
4. Take time to read and process the lavish love of God—the Source of our healing: 1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:7–10; 1 John 4:19. We can't love others without first receiving and experiencing this lavish love. *He loved us first.*

PRACTICE 1

Guard Your Heart

*Intention of Practice 1: I will overcome hurtful words
by guarding my heart.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read Proverbs 4:23 TLB: “Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life.” In the King James Version, heart = affections, meaning “the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors.” Why are we instructed to guard our affections, i.e., our hearts, “above all else”?
3. Heart Share: Spend a few moments reviewing the content of *Practice 1: Guard Your Heart*. What thoughts/principles/ideas/stories spoke to your heart? What was your takeaway?
4. Review the “Three Phases of a Heartlift”:

Reflect: Heartrift	Reframe: Heartshift	Reauthor: Heartlift
What just happened?	Where did it come from?	Will I trust again?
Welcome God into the whys of present pain.	Face the fault lines of past hurts.	Live in newfound freedom in Christ.

5. Reflect: Here, at the beginning of our healing journey, it is important to read through Paul's words in Ephesians 4. If possible, take the time to read the entire chapter—aloud. If you have the Amplified Version, that is great. It offers additional “words within the word” that prove so helpful in understanding Paul's heart. Utilize www.biblegateway.com if an Amplified Bible isn't available.
 - a. What does Paul say is our life calling? (v. 1)
 - b. How does he define “the bond of peace”? (v.1)
 - c. Highlight what characteristics define “a mature person.”
 - d. Is this something “easy” to obtain or perhaps a process of day-to-day intentions and practice?
6. Reframe: Take the Heartlift Checkup on page 23. How is your heart doing today? In your journal or notebook, write a note to yourself or God and share your realistic expectations or desires for what you would like to see God do in your heart, in a specific relationship, or in all your relationships as a whole. Begin an honest, healing conversation with yourself about your History of Hurts. *We all have one.*
7. Reauthor: Examine your hearttriffts—deep wounds caused by heartbreaking words from close, trusted friends and family members. Review the questions on page 24 and discuss within the group.

PRACTICE 2

Welcome God into the Whys

*The Intention of Practice 2: I will overcome hurtful words
by welcoming God into my whys.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read John 10:10 AMP: “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].” So often we settle. Sometimes we get stuck. Our development stalls due to the negative, unhealthy words or actions of the significant people in our lives. John’s words make it very clear that God’s design for our lives is one of “overflow” and “abundance” and “fullness.” Yet God’s enemy and our enemy, Satan—the father of all lies—loves to keep us “underwhelmed” and “lacking” and “empty.” How has this unfolded in your life? Does a negative committee live inside your head?
3. Reflect: Never be afraid to ask why. This is a gateway question that invites us into the waiting room of deeper truths, a place where we get to know God better, to know ourselves better, and to be at ease with mystery—the great art of not knowing. Jesus knew the power of this great secret. He always invited His Father into the whys. Read Matthew 26:39 NIV: “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” What does “welcoming God into the whys” mean to you? How does this practice help you move through the initial heartrending shock?
4. Reframe: Footholds. What are they and how do we both recognize them and overcome them? With highlighter in hand, carefully read Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:25–27 AMP (p. 44). A foothold is an opportunity for the devil to lead us into sin—our unhealthy behavior patterns. After rereading “Why the White Line?” in Practice 2: Heart Care (p.42), consider where a foothold may have gotten a toe in the door of your life.
5. Reauthor: Time to pick up your pen and open your heart journal. Utilizing Practice 2 and this small group discussion, rewind and reset a heartrending experience in your life.

PRACTICE 3

Choose Healthy over Unhealthy

*The Intention of Practice 3: I will overcome hurtful words
by choosing healthy over unhealthy.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read Genesis 2:18 MSG: “GOD said, ‘It is not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.’” God values relationships far more than we can imagine. So much, in fact, that He enjoyed walking and talking with the man and woman every single day in the cool of the evening. *God models the beautiful, uplifting power of a healthy relationship built on love, trust, and unity.* Read further in Genesis 3 the account of the serpent and his deceptive ploy to get Adam and Eve to sin against God. *Satan models the subtle, destructive power of an unhealthy relationship built on lies, manipulation, and self-absorption.*
3. Take a moment to consider the genesis of unhealthy. From this point on in life, consider defining relationships and their behaviors from this standpoint: healthy vs. unhealthy. *Am I talking to my husband in a healthy or unhealthy manner? Am I treating my child in a healthy or unhealthy manner?* It might sound ridiculously simple, but it offers the necessary framework for developing an emotionally healthy life.
4. This Heart Care might take a little extra time. Due to time allotment, you may only have time to walk through Reframe: Creating Your Vision of Victory. That is perfectly fine, as this is most important. Break up into smaller two-on-two groups, if necessary, and give each person the opportunity to experience the meditative exercise *My Genesis 2 Beginning* (p. 53).

PRACTICE 4

Pray through and Stay with the Process

*The Intention of Practice 4: I will overcome hurtful words
when I pray through and stay with the process.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read 1 Samuel 1, the Tale of Two Hearts: Hannah and Peninnah, twenty-eight verses in which Hannah demonstrates key principles in overcoming hurtful words. After reading through Practice 4, 1 Samuel 1, and the chart “Mean or Well-Meaning” on page 75 in our book, how can we discern if someone is just mean or perhaps well-meaning? Does it make a difference to discern between these two behaviors?
3. Does the little conjunction *and* found in 1 Samuel 1:10 really make a difference in how Hannah overcame Penni’s harsh, crushing, and very unhealthy behaviors?
4. Do you agree that “fighting mean with mean creates an ugly scene”? Revisit our emergency response five-step plan, WHOLE (pp. 34–42), and share how implementing these five steps holds the potential to disarm potentially damaging hearttrifts. Would you agree that “having a heartlifter in the midst of a family makes home a healthy place to be”? Are heartlifting behaviors contagious? Flip side: are hearttrifting behaviors contagious?
5. Discuss additional action steps that might help you “do the one thing that changes everything”—e.g., choose love over hate—this week.
6. This week’s Heart Care is once again going to require additional time. If you can only do one exercise together, focus on the Reauthor section this week. Do it together and then pray through your individual findings. Can’t you feel the footholds and unhealthy behaviors relinquishing their power?

PRACTICE 5

Collecting Strength

The Intention of Practice 5: I will overcome hurtful words when I collect strength in the reservoir of my soul.

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Reflect: Here in Practice 5, we explore the sacred art of lectio divina: the practice of being present to each moment in a heart-centered way. When we read and pray lectio, we see sacred text as God’s living words being spoken to our hearts in the moment. The practice allows us to encounter God in an active and intimate way. As you read Psalm 23, place yourself in the pasture with the psalmist shepherd boy, David. Follow this process:
 - a. Read the passage aloud. Close your eyes. Listen between the lines.
 - b. Read the passage aloud a second time. Did you notice anything this time that you didn’t the first time?
 - c. Read the passage aloud a third and final time. What did you sense or experience this third time?
3. Reframe: A heart needs rest. Rest, as we’ve learned, allows us “to collect strength.” How does this new understanding reframe your thoughts about rest? Do you sense it giving you a little more permission to collect strength? Share simple ways that you can collect strength in your soul this week.
4. Reauthor: A new concept, restilience, was introduced in Practice 5. When the two principles, rest + spiritual resilience (p. 108), are joined, restilience is born. Restilience is a “God-given endowment and enlargement of physical, emotional, and spiritual capacity to face personal, family, church, and work struggles from a sacred place of collected strength.” Review the “three-fold cord of resilience training” on page 109.
5. Commit to “re-minding” each other to “collect strength” this week. Perhaps text one another “Psalm 23” throughout the week as a daily reminder to breathe, collect strength, and practice spiritual resilience.

Wait for the Peace that Passes All Understanding

*The Intention of Practice 6: I will overcome hurtful words
by waiting for the peace that passes all understanding.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Waiting rooms. There, in the midst of stale hospital coffee and torn-up magazines, something strange *can* happen. Life slows down. Previously important schedules are interrupted by the eternal. Personal agendas are exchanged for God's agenda. Anxiety lifts and gives way to acceptance—the gateway to God's peace. Read through John 15:9–10 MSG: “I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love.”
3. Healing happens in layers. The healing journey is different for everyone. For some, it might happen in six months. Others, years. Yet one very important aspect of the journey is the same: healing requires time in God's waiting room—time alone with self and God. It requires becoming very comfortable with “intimacy”—as defined “In-To-Me-See.” Reread Focus on the Family's insightful thoughts on intimacy (p. 115): “Real intimacy makes us feel alive like we've been found, as if someone finally took the time to peer into the depths of our soul and really see us there. Until then, until we experience true intimacy, we feel passed over and ignored, like someone is looking right through us. Real intimacy can only begin once you know yourself . . . true intimacy begins with being connected to your own heart. Because God made us, He intimately knows us better than anyone can. He can make us feel known in a way that no one on earth is able.” What do these words mean to you? Can we actually experience true intimacy without spending time alone with God? What do I do when I am “alone with God”? What does that look like?
4. Set time aside to visit the Reauthor section of Practice 6's Heart Care. Read aloud the meditative exercise “When Your Heart Sits in God's Waiting Room” (p. 117). Then, complete the exercise in Reauthor. Have fun and be sure to share your “Waiting Room” with the Heartlifting Community.

Embrace a Teachable Spirit

The Intention of Practice 7: I will overcome hurtful words by embracing a teachable spirit.

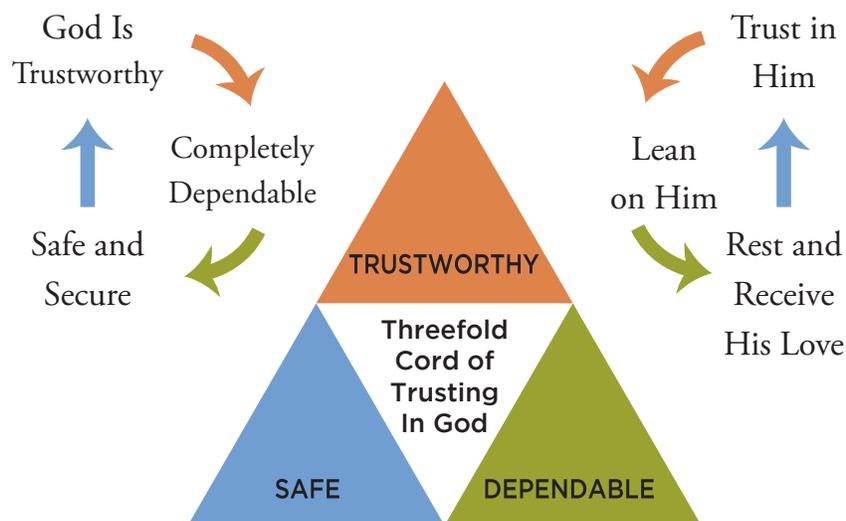
1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read through Matthew 11:29–30 MSG: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” Visit www.biblegateway.com and read it in several versions. Each version layers something beautiful on the next.
3. Now, read through Ephesians 4:17–32 AMP. Yes, this is a great deal of reading. (Leaders: maybe send a note to your small group and have them read prior to your scheduled meeting time). Think and discuss: If we lived life according to the principle of Matthew 11:29–30, would our lives look different? Do exhaustion and fatigue affect our ability to be teachable? Do they affect our capacity to respond from a healthy emotional place, not an unhealthy state of reaction? Compare and contrast these verses and how they affect our three-fold cord of emotional and spiritual health.
4. Visit Heart Care and spend time considering the tension between tough and tender love. Perhaps one of Hannah’s most beautiful lessons came when she understood this tension. She was physically and emotionally barren, but in the midst of all this barrenness, she thrived spiritually. Things looked bad on the outside, but inwardly, in that place that only God can see, Hannah was becoming a new woman: tough and tender all at the same time. What does this actually look like in our relationships?
 - a. Tough love looks like setting personal boundaries. *I’m sorry, you can’t speak to me in that tone of voice. When you calm down and gather yourself, we will have a conversation.*
 - b. Tender love looks like empathic responses. *I know you’ve had a very hard, very long day. I’m here to listen when you are ready to talk. I’ll give you the emotional space you need to decompress.*

PRACTICE 8

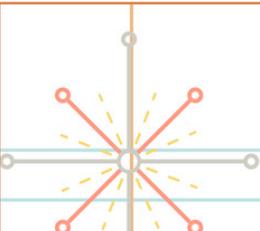
Take the Leap and Trust Again

*The Intention of Practice 8: I will overcome hurtful words
by taking the leap and trusting again.*

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Read the powerful truth of Psalm 9:9–10 NIV:
“The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.”
3. Take a few moments to visit the words within the word *trust*, found on pages 156–157, and the bulleted discussion points on pages 157–158. Would you agree with the statement “Trust is elusive”? Share times in your life when you experienced, firsthand, having to put your trust *in* God.



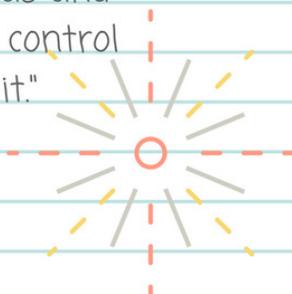
4. Reflect: In lectio divina fashion, read aloud (one to three times, depending on time frame) Deuteronomy 20:1–4 MSG and Ephesians 6:12 NIV, personalizing this spiritual directive. In order to trust again, it is critical to remember that people are not our enemies—the principalities and powers of darkness behind them are. Oh, this is not easy, but remember, you have the spiritual capacity and potential to live into this spiritual principle.
5. Reframe: Have some fun with this exercise. Either walk through this exercise together or in your very own quiet time. Yes, it is a serious exercise and one that I take to heart, but it also can be a great time of release.
6. Reauthor: What comes to mind when you think of God? A very important aspect of taking the leap and trusting in God correlates with our perception of who God is. On the note below, write your very first recollection of God. You could begin “I first remember thinking about God when...”. I’ve shared mine below.



"Be still and know that I am God."
-Psalm 46:10

One of my best childhood memories is nestling next to my Mom in church. Holding her hand in mine. The cadence of the liturgy offered my very young and perplexed soul a haven from chaos at home. There, in the midst of alleluias and amens, I knew there was a God in control of the entire universe. I just knew it."

Always learning,
Me



Smile at Your Future

The Intention of Practice 9: I will overcome hurtful words by smiling at the remarkable future in front of me.

1. Opening prayer and pledge.
2. Remember the father of lies? Read through John 8:44 NIV: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” One very big lie he loves to speak over and over again is, “This will never end. You will always live in your negative narrative.” As a group, take a moment to let the truth of these words rewrite that lie: “This will end. You will live into your beautiful new story. You will smile again, and again begins today!”
3. Take to heart the powerful truth of Proverbs 31:25 AMP: “Strength and dignity are her clothing *and* her position is strong and secure; and she smiles at the future [knowing that she and her family are prepared].” This healing journey has prepared you to move forward. You have visited your history of hurts, done the heart shifting/heart sifting work of letting go, and experienced the power of a heartlift. Whenever you doubt this work, meditate and speak aloud the truth of Proverbs 31:25.
4. Reflect: Once again, take the time to read, in lectio divina fashion, the words of Proverbs 31:10–31, preferably in the Amplified translation of the Bible. After doing so, complete the meditative exercise “Who are your healthy emotional bridges?”
5. Reframe: After reading the excerpt from *The Healing Power of Dialogue* (p. 195), brainstorm and consider how you can be a force for healthy conversation in your spheres of influence.
6. Reauthor: Celebrate! You have come so far. After completing the Reauthor exercise (in your quiet time), gather and share your “prophetic footing” discovery with the group. In closing, perhaps engage in the beautiful blessing ceremony described on pages 189–191. Please send pictures and share your stories with our Heartlifting Community.