

LESSON 5

ANCHOR 5

Get honest about my past so I can discover God's best version of me.

Psalm 32:2 Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

PRAY

Ask God to speak to you as you read His Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a revelation of God's truth and love and give you understanding of what you are about to read. Pray that you will have an Encounter with God as you earnestly seek Him. Don't rush through reading everything and don't rush through praying. Take some time to stop and listen so you may hear anything God wants to say to you.

After you read the scriptures, ask:

- "God, what are You saying in these scriptures?"
- "God, what are You saying to me in these scriptures?"
- "God, how do You want me to apply this to my life?"

Write in your journal as you spend this time with God.

Encounter's first 4 Anchors of Hope will put you in a great position to heal and grow when you apply them to your life. By making the decision to get well and realizing that you do a terrible job at trying to do God's job, you allow His love and power to restore hope and healing in your life. By making the decision to respond to the love of God and surrendering your life and will to Jesus Christ, a real transaction occurred and you are no longer the same person you used to be. You trusted in the finished work of Christ on the cross and were made new and given a new identity in Christ. In return, God declared you 'not guilty'. He declared, once and for all, that you are forgiven and that you now have an eternal home in heaven.

You have to get honest with God before you can get well. Getting honest with yourself and others is part of the healing process. God wiped your slate clean when He saved you. If you allow Him to do so, He can take out all the junk that keeps you from discovering all He has called you to be. When you evaluate your past and look at the events and the people that may have impacted how your character defects were developed, how your coping mechanisms were developed, how your fears were developed, how your insecurities were developed, how your doubts were developed, how your pain was developed, how your habits were developed – you can finally allow God to heal you of the root issues that cause you to behave the way you behave and to do the things you do.

The 5th Anchor of Hope is all about getting gut-level honest with both yourself and God. To help you recognize how you became the person you are today and discover God's best version of you moving forward, Anchor 5 requires that you:

1. Have the right mindset – recognize and agree with God on the thoughts He wants me to dwell on from His Word and the truths He wants me to live out in my own life.

2. Have the right attitude – humbly allow God to evaluate my thoughts and guide my actions by completely surrendering to Him and His Word.
3. Have the right motive - desire to love God back, from a place of gratitude, in response to His great love for me. Consider this:
 - a. Maybe in the past I asked God to bail me out of certain situations, or I only incorporated Him into my life wherever or whenever it was convenient.
 - b. Maybe in the past I never knew what it meant to appropriately respond to God or to really love Him back – to have an authentic and real relationship with Him out of gratitude and love.
 - c. Now that I have responded to God’s love, I honestly desire to love Him back! (When that becomes your motive, you look for ways to honor Him and please Him by allowing His Word and His ways to become the authority over your life. We will talk more about that in Anchor #8)
4. Have the right spirit of complete honesty – allow the Holy Spirit to search me as I get gut-level honest and real with myself and with God. God already knows everything about me. He knows about my past and He wants to put it where it belongs - in the past tense - so it does not keep me stuck and I don’t have to live there any longer.

Now that you are aware that you need to have the right mindset, the right attitude, the right motive and the right spirit of complete honesty to discover God’s best version of you, read the following scriptures and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal things to you:

Psalms 119:9-18, 67-68, 73-74, 105-106 – Ask God to give you that same heart and passion for His truth.

Psalms 51:1-12 – Ask God for that same type of Godly sorrow and repentance.

Proverbs 5:21 – Realize that God already knows everything about you.

Psalms 130:3-4 – Ask God to remind you of just how much you have been forgiven by Him.

Colossians 3:1-17 – Ask God to help you have that same mindset.

Isaiah 43:25-26 – Ask God to help you get honest about your past.

1 John 1:5-10 – Ask God to give you the desire to have that same kind of honesty with yourself, with others and with Him.

Hebrews 12:1-2 – Ask God to help you be honest about any sin in your life that slows you down and trips you up, so you may be able to run the race well and keep your eyes on Jesus.

Hebrews 4:12-13 – Ask God to search every part of you through His Word and Holy Spirit.

Anchor 5 can be scary for some people; it may be scary for you. It is the anchor that separates those that only talk about getting well from those who really do want to get well. Applying Anchor 5 to your life allows God to get to the root issues of anything that keeps you stuck. It brings out the real causes of why you do what you do, so you can begin to allow God to heal those areas in your life. In the process, God shows you a better way to respond to what people have done to you in the past or how events have hurt you in the past, so those people and events cannot continue to hurt you in the present and in the future.

Read **Psalm 32**. Meditate on it and ask God for that same brokenness. David called upon God for deliverance. David recognized that God could do what he could not do by his own will and in his own strength. When David confessed his sins to the Lord and repented of them, he encountered the joy of forgiveness. His guilt was taken away. God will do that for anyone who calls upon Him – that includes you!

Toward the end of **Psalm 32**, it goes on to say that God will teach you and instruct you in the way that you should go. It says He will counsel you and watch over you. To paraphrase, it implies that you can do things God's way, or you can do things your own way. But your way will only cause you pain and God's ways will surround you with His unfailing love. God gently instructs you to have a clean and pure heart and to rejoice in the Lord and the joy of His forgiveness.

In the historical Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858, Abraham Lincoln said this, "You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." How true that statement is. You may have some people fooled into believing that all is well with you, but others can see glimpses of issues or dysfunction in your life. You may have fooled yourself into believing that things or relationships in your life are all okay, but you lie to yourself repeatedly by pretending that you are fine, when you really are not fine at all. More importantly, God is never fooled by you or by anyone. He already knows every detail of your life. And He isn't shocked when you come to Him and get honest with Him about your 'stuff'. He is loving and forgiving and offers to put the righteousness of His Son, Jesus, onto you. The 'right' of all that Jesus is and has done replaces all the 'wrong' of anything ever done to you or all the 'wrong' that you have ever done or can ever do. That hardly seems fair, but it is the way of our loving and forgiving God.

Read **Psalm 139:1-18** and **Psalm 139:23-24** as a prayer of complete humility and honesty to God.

Psalm 139:23-24 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Ask God to remind you of His great love for you. Ask God to help you sincerely mean it as you pray this prayer of self examination. Please don't miss the 4 things you are asking God to do:

1. Search me and know my heart
2. Test me and know my anxious thoughts
3. Point out anything in me that offends You
4. Lead me along Your path

If you allow God to search, test, point and lead you, *then* Anchor 5 can bring you to a place where you begin to allow God to heal you. God can take every ounce of pain, shame, guilt and fear that you have experienced up to this point in your life and finally help you discover His best version of you - His redeemed masterpiece and a trophy of His grace.

While it is true that you cannot change or fix your past, you can be free from your past! It doesn't have to hold you hostage. You can give God those keys to your past so He can set you free. You have no control over the things that have already happened to you, but you do have control over how you respond to those things now and in the future. With God's help, you can choose healthier responses.

The Holy Spirit has a divine way of bringing light into every crevice of your life, of exposing that which has lurked in the darkness and held you captive in your thoughts and behaviors for so long. The Holy Spirit can reveal that which was hidden away and illuminate things that need to be brought out into the light. God can help you to see things for what they really are and reveal to you the havoc they may have caused in your life and in your relationship with God and in your relationships with others. When these things are revealed and brought to light, God can begin to heal the pain they have caused in your life, as you give that pain to Him and seek His freedom and deliverance from your past.

We are all unique, and we have varied pasts. Some people seem to have more painful lives than others for reasons that can't always be explained or understood. Yet, allowing God to search your heart and your life to reveal the good, the bad and the ugly, can be greatly beneficial for your spiritual and relational growth. Looking back and taking an honest assessment of your life doesn't mean you are looking at just the bad stuff in your life. If you focus only on the negatives, you will become discouraged and may want to skip over the areas of your life that you have never dealt with, because of how painful it is. When this starts to happen, take a time out and try to focus on something good from your past. Maybe your past was 99% bad, but try to remember that 1% that was good. Looking at the good and exercising the principle of gratitude can encourage you in this anchor. Allow God to give you a balanced view of both the good and the bad, and seek His comfort and truth as He leads you to freedom.

We can complicate the evaluation of our lives and make it more difficult and burdensome than it has to be. God doesn't keep a record of your forgiven sins, nor does He want you walking around with guilt and shame over something for which He has already forgiven you. You only need to ask His forgiveness for un-confessed, continued or present sin.

Once you have allowed God to do a thorough examination and you have confessed and turned away from your past and present sins, God forgives you of them. There is no need to revisit old sins that have already been confessed and forgiven. It is a trick of the enemy to guilt you into confessing sins for which you have already been forgiven. Guilt and shame from the enemy is used to lead you away from the cross and away from God's grace. Satan loves to condemn you. Guilt, or conviction, from God is just the opposite – it is meant for your good to bring you to repentance, so you can turn from your sins and turn toward God. God leads you to the cross and to His forgiveness, grace and joy!

God wants you to have healthy relationships, not dysfunctional relationships. If you are still allowing your past or present dysfunctional relationships with people to have an effect on you, it can impact your relationship with God. For example, if you are allowing a past or present hurt to dictate how you behave relationally with others, that hurt can give you a skewed view of God and your relationship with Him.

God does not want you living with unresolved hurts from your past. God wants to break all your chains so you can live free from the pain of your past and allow nothing to get in the way of a loving relationship between you and Him and healthy relationships with others.

God wants to heal you of all the damage that has been done to you whether it was someone else's fault or your own fault. God wants to restore what the enemy has stolen. God wants to replace your regrets with a hope for the future. God wants you to discover His best version of you as you experience His great exchange program:

- He exchanges your life with His!
- He exchanges your shame with His Son!
- He exchanges your guilt with His grace!
- He exchanges your sin with His forgiveness!
- He exchanges your hate with His love!
- He exchanges your pain with His power!
- He exchanges your hurts with His healing!
- He exchanges your bad habits and character defects with His Holy Spirit!
- He exchanges your identity with His Identity!
- He exchanges your old nature with His new nature!
- He exchanges your hopelessness with His eternal hope!

Bill's Personal Story:

I gave my life to Christ when I was 37 years old, but I had the social skills of a young immature teenager. I never grew emotionally or socially beyond the hurt of the sexual assault that was done to me when I was 12 years old. My confusion and hurt grew into shame and that shame grew into anger. To cope with that anger, I began drinking excessively and using drugs. I started having inappropriate sexual relationships with women when I was a very young teenager, as a way to numb my pain.

I had never had a father, but when I became old enough to see that other people had fathers, I wondered why my own hadn't loved me enough to stick around and be my dad. The sexual assault I experienced as a 12 year old only added to my hurt and confusion. I was angry. I acted out in ways that were hurtful to me and to others. I didn't realize I had deep abandonment issues until later in life. I became a train wreck and my life was a real mess!

When I eventually received Jesus into my heart and life and became a follower, I knew I had to go all in to allow God to change me and transform my way of thinking and acting. By applying the principles of Anchor 5 to my life, I was able to connect the dots and see where people and events in my life had contributed to the person I had become. As I prayed and allowed the Holy Spirit to search my heart and reveal things to me, I started writing:

1. *WHO had done things to me*
2. *WHAT they had done to me*
3. *HOW those people or those events made me feel*
4. *HOW I responded to the feelings those people or events created in me*
5. *HOW I coped with my feelings and pain towards those people or events*
6. *WHAT character defects and/or bad habits were developed in my life and what behaviors I exhibited as a result of what people did to me or how an event in my life impacted me*

THEN, I could clearly see how I had become the person I was and had done the things I had done for so many years.

Doing this spiritual exercise helped me understand the root issues in my life that had impacted me the most and shaped the person I had become, the root issues that dictated what I believed and how I responded to those issues. I started discovering and understanding God's will for me and I realized that He had a better way of thinking and acting. God wanted to give me a hope and a future so I could discover His best version of me – my true and right identity.

Did I want to look back at my past and think about or re-live those painful memories again? Of course not! But I knew that God was with me and would not allow me to go through it alone. I knew that, in order for me to get past my stuff and gain God's wisdom, truth and healing, I had to allow Him to help me re-visit that stuff one more time so He could reveal those root issues and the hold they had over me. I had to allow God to heal me at the root issues of my life and accept His grace, His truth and His love.

I discovered that the things that happened to me in my past, and the people that had done those things to me in my past, had been allowed to create a path of destruction, pain and guilt in my life. Before I believed in Jesus and decided to follow Him, I gave those hurts unhealthy power in my life and I lived as if those hurts belonged there. I developed habits that continually allowed those hurts to influence my bad behaviors. When I decided to follow Jesus, I didn't want to live in those hurts any more. I was ready for God's healing and deliverance.

My unresolved hurts had grown inside of me for so long, like a cancer. I had believed the lie that my pain would go away over time and that it would all get better. I had denied that the people and the events in my life had any effect on me. I had tried to play God by moving forward in my own way. My efforts to deal with guilt and shame had been woefully unsuccessful. Unfortunately, I learned the hard way that no one is qualified to deal with guilt except Jesus Christ and that I was not qualified to be God or do God's job. I had lived like this for 36 years. I finally decided that I wanted to get well.

Something God revealed to me, as I sought Him and His truth, was that I had majored in the minors most of my life. The symptoms of my pain were my minors – excessive use of drugs, alcohol and sex. I had allowed those symptoms to dominate my life. But they were not the root issues of my pain. The abandonment of a father, the trauma of sexual assault and the disappointment of losing my dreams had caused me to use those things to cope with my pain, to numb myself in unhealthy and dysfunctional ways.

When I finally got serious about my relationship with Jesus Christ and became honest with myself and with Him, I allowed the Holy Spirit to show me the root issues in my life. When God brought those root issues to the surface, He illuminated what was once darkness and brought it into His marvelous light. He began to heal me and deliver me from the pain of my past and it no longer had power over me. The enemy's lies held me hostage for most of my life. The devil had convinced me that I was not worthy of God's love and that I should live in guilt and shame and regret. My own dad had not even loved me and had left me. The devil taunted me that I was unlovable. There must be something wrong with me. But God exposed those lies and declared me "not guilty". God convinced me that His plan for me included a better version of me than the one the devil had led me to believe.

John 10:10 NIV says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." God opened my eyes to see and gave me wisdom to understand how the enemy had tried to derail my life and how I had ridden on that train of lies as a hostage to my pain for far too long.

This personal story began with a fact that my earthly father abandoned me. It ends with a truth that my heavenly Father never left me. The finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross declares me a son of the one true King. His arms were open wide to forgive me and to receive me when I turned from my sins and turned to Him. His grace surrounds me. His love overwhelms me. My story has become HIS story. My past is my past. My future is in Christ. I will forever live my life in gratitude and praise to the God who saved me from myself.

Take some time to be alone with God. Pray for His guidance as you seek Him. It is wise to schedule this time with God so you won't be rushed and God is given all the time He needs to do whatever He needs to do in you. Examining and evaluating your life is not a short endeavor. You didn't get where you are overnight. However, with the counsel and comfort of the Holy Spirit, you can have revelation and healing. God can do a work in you to the degree that you are willing to be open, honest and surrendered to Him. If you are up for the healing, He is the ultimate Healer. Take that step toward Him. He will meet you where you are and do the work required to heal you and set you free.

Answering the questions below will help you in your evaluation of your life. You will share your answers in your Encounter Study group. Feel free to schedule some time this week with an accountability partner within your group or a trusted friend, if you want to share your answers in more depth or need more time to share your questions completely. This is not required, but it can be helpful in your process of sharing and healing.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

1. What people and events from my past have hurt me? How did those hurts make me feel? How did I respond and cope?
2. Have I hurt others in my life and how did I hurt them?
3. How has shame and guilt continued to hold me hostage to my past?
4. What regrets do I still carry?
5. What character defects, insecurities, fears, identity issues or bad habits were developed in my life as a result of things that happened in my past? What character defects do I still struggle with?
6. What are the root issues of my life that God has revealed to me?

Please don't miss the purpose of answering these questions and doing this exercise honestly and completely. It is for your ultimate benefit and your spiritual and relational growth. There is healing in revealing what has been kept in secret. The bible says to confess your sins to one another **so that** you may be healed - **James 5:16**. Healing can also occur as you talk openly about what has caused pain in your life - that pain may or may not have been through any fault of your own. Exposing that hurt or that pain diminishes the power it has to hold you hostage to your past. As you surrender it to God, He can start to heal you and set you free from your past. That healing will further develop your character and help you discover God's best version of you.