

PRACTICING FAITH

PREPARING EMOTIONALLY FOR COMMUNITY

GATHERING

As we journey spiritually, it is important to remain attentive to our own hearts and the lies we often believe about ourselves and our communities. We as human beings can often become reactive to situations, individuals, and even ideas if they threaten the way that we perceive ourselves and our spiritual lives. Navigating these negative beliefs, feelings, and reactions is part of the journey for everyone.

The pain and peace cycle, developed by Sharon Hargrave, director of the Pepperdine University Boone Center for the Family, and her husband, Terry Hargrave. Their work helps us understand ourselves and transform the way we think and behave in reaction to adversity. They outline a holistic practice that equips us to walk through our pain and through emotional regulation to experience peace. The practice is grounded in the truth of identity in Christ.

The pain and peace cycle is helpful for both individual and communal peacemaking and is an essential tool for living healthy mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional lives. Essentially, if you desire to grow into spiritual maturity, you also need emotional maturity for your own sake and your neighbors' sake.

THE PAIN CYCLE*:

Practicing the peace cycle involves learning to recognize the lies we often believe which lead to a lack of peace and destructive coping behaviors which we refer to as the pain cycle. The starting point is to identify the underlying negative emotions we feel and how they lead us to react. For example, if you often feel inadequate and that makes you shame yourself, lash out at others, or withdraw, you need to name those emotions and observe how others respond to you when you are in pain. Then, you can begin to introduce the peace cycle into your emotional life, which counteracts the cycle of pain and lies.

Here are some questions to consider:

- 1.** When you encounter negative situations, individuals, or thoughts, what emotions bubble up for you typically? Here are some common emotions: Unsafe, unfair, used, guilty, fearful, powerless, out of control, vulnerable, betrayed, insecure, unsure, unloved, unworthy, alone, worthless, rejected, hopeless, inadequate, unwanted, insignificant.
- 2.** When those negative emotions bubble up, how do you typically react? Do you shame yourself? Withdraw from others? Blame and lash out at others? Try to control the situation?
- 3.** How do others respond to you when you react in those ways?

THE PEACE CYCLE*:

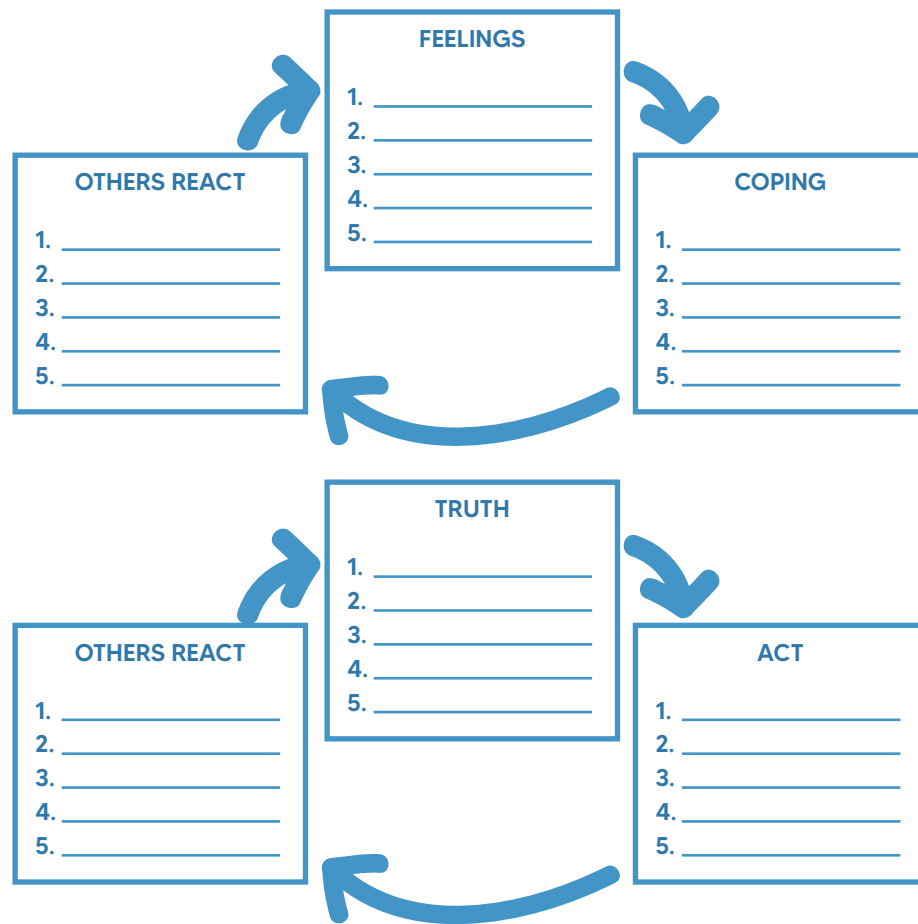
After we identify the ways we often react to the lies we believe, we can counteract those with truth.

Here are some questions to consider:

1. Instead of believing the lies and negative emotions listed above, what are some truths that you can tell yourself instead? Do you need to hear that you are: loved, worthy, significant, safe, enough, fulfilled, competent, capable, empowered, free, hopeful, valuable, precious? Which words are meaningful to you? (or come up with some of your own!)
2. Instead of blaming, shaming, controlling or withdrawing, what can you do instead? Can you be: relaxed, encouraging, inclusive, kind, compassionate, patient, connected, engaging, vulnerable? Which counter-action (or another you brainstorm) can you do instead?
3. How do you think others would respond?

THE FOUR STEPS:

- Step 1: Say what you feel
- Step 2: Say what you normally do
- Step 3: Say the truth
- Step 4: Say what you will do differently



*Excerpts and images are from 5 Days to a New Self by Sharon Hargrave and Terry Hargrave, PhD (professor of Marriage and Family Therapy at Fuller Theological Seminary). For more information about the pain and peace cycle, consider their training materials available here.