

HARD FEELINGS SMALL GROUPS



Suggested 50-Minute Small Group Format **(in-person groups can choose to go longer)**

10 minutes: Gathering question and opening prayer with breath

30 minutes: Discussion of Scriptures and emotions

10 minutes: Prayer requests and time of group prayer

Note:

There are several spiritual practices that can be used at the end of the weekly curriculum.

For small groups to be effective, they need to be safe. This means that participants can determine how much they wish to share. It also means that others accept and not critique or advise others after they share. It is important for all in a group to keep vulnerable information confidential. Make a commitment to not keep shared information within the group. Also, facilitators will acknowledge that some of these topics can be uncomfortable, even traumatic, and they will encourage participants to reach out for help if needed.

Group #1 | Week of September 28 | Created with Feelings

Gathering question

In your family growing up, share about one emotion that your family encouraged and one that your family discouraged.

Opening Prayer with Breath

Scripture

Gen 1:26-27

Exodus 34:6

Theme

Emotions are part of being made in God's image to promote relationship with God and with one another. God expresses emotion perfectly. Where have we gone wrong?

There has been a long debate about what it means for people to have been created in God's image, the *imago Dei* (in Latin). Some medieval Christian scholars argued that humans were created with the "superpower" of rationality in contrast to the animal world. Much of our theological traditions have emphasized how we "think" as more important than how we "feel." Fortunately, modern theological interpretations now emphasize the integrated nature of being human—including our emotions, behaviors, thoughts and relationships with others, including our Creator. Some theologians identify a key component of the *Imago Dei* as the relational nature of God seen in the Trinity's relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we attempt to understand our emotions, there may be clues that they offer us relational information about our God, others and ourselves.

Group Question

What is your understanding of what it means for humans to have been created in the image of God?

As Christians, we believe that Jesus' life models how God "shows up" as a person. He is born with a body (God incarnate) and our bodies are directly connected to and not separate from our faith (I. Corinthians 6:19-20 describes the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit). We know that our bodies share signals about many things (like pain when we burn our finger) or stomach pangs when we are hungry. However, sometimes we are challenged to interpret our emotional or physical signals, Feelings are intimately connected to our bodies and to our relationships, so it takes practice to understand what information our feelings offer us. Even Jesus needed to develop this understanding. In Luke 2:52 Scripture suggests that Jesus "**grew**" in wisdom, stature and in favor with God and others.

Scripture also points to our Creator as demonstrating a range of emotions within God's character.

Group Question

In Exodus 34:6, there are characteristics listed about God. Discuss which of these words are more "feelings," vs. "behaviors," vs. "thoughts."

Have you ever slowed down to reflect and pray about a significant reaction you have had in your life? Have you been able to separate out what in that reaction was "feeling," what was "thinking" and what was "behavior or what you did?" Take time in silence for a few moments to consider this opportunity.

We have added a Christian spiritual practice of "***The Welcoming Prayer***" to the end of this curriculum if you would like to find a way to slow down. ***A Daily Examen*** is also suggested to unpack your emotional and relational experiences. There are also some hints on what feeling information might be at the end of this curriculum.

Prayer requests and time of group prayer

Reflections:

Group #2 | Week of October 5 | Anger & Fear

Gathering Question

If you had to choose, do you personally struggle more to manage anger or fear? Explain.

Opening Prayer with Breath

Scripture

Anger: Eph 4:25-32; James 1:19-20

Fear: Matt 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6-7

Themes

Anger can either heal or harm. Humility is a pathway through our aggression.

Fear is real, but not final. Perfect love drives out fear and God offers in return His peace.

Pastor Karla speaks about God's anger as righteous anger. It was demonstrated to correct injustice or wrong. In ways God's anger was a protective energy to move God's people more toward what God wants and away from what God doesn't want for us.

Group Question

How might we discern if anger is righteous or not? What are some of the issues that God seems to get mad about? Do we get mad at these concerns too or do we get mad about other issues more?

Read James 1:19-20

What do you think it means to be "slow to anger?" Do we tend to "act" differently when we are slow to anger? Where does listening come in? Can you give an example in your own life about this process.

As humans, the emotions of anger and fear can be combined sometimes. Particularly in our American culture, boys are often taught not to show fear and to be tough. Sometimes the feeling energy of fear can get channeled into anger. It is more difficult to manage our reactions when feelings are "loaded." Therapists see this often when working with perpetrators of domestic violence. When all emotions are not available to a person, certain ones will become "loaded" and be shown in more extreme ways. It becomes an emotional skill to learn how to identify fear or anxiety in ourselves and often our "body" signals are the first to know. Think about heart racing or breathing changes. Fear is a signal of not feeling safe. Slowing down helps us to understand our needs more clearly.

Read **Philippians 4:6-7**

According to this passage, fear is present in people; it is common. For certain kinds of fear to be “driven out,” something relational needs to occur. Fear is rarely dealt with well when we isolate and try to fix it on our own. What do you think this passage “perfect love drives out fear” means? Have you ever had this experience? Besides God, do you have people in your life that you feel safer with that demonstrate a kind of “perfect love.” Explain.

In the passage above, fear is about anxiety or being troubled. However, there are other Biblical words for fear. For example, in **Proverbs 9:10** it says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This word for fear is about a deep reverence, respect and awe of the God who is in control of us and our world. This type of fear helps us to understand how we are not ultimately in control of our lives, but a God who created and loves us is in control

Prayer Requests and Time of Group Prayer

Reflections:

Group #3 | Week of October 12 | Sadness, Shame & Guilt

Gathering Question

Offer one example of loss in your life. Did the loss connect more to sadness, shame, guilt or some other emotion?

Opening Prayer with Breath

Scripture

Sadness: Ps 34:18; Lamentations 3

Shame & Guilt: Self-conscious emotions Gen 3:7-10; Rom 8:1

Themes

God meets us in our sorrow. Grief is not the enemy—lament is a path to healing.

Shame distorts identity, but grace restores it.

Loss of something or someone often impacts us significantly. Grief, the response to loss, sometimes takes an extraordinary amount of energy to sort through. We can figure out what we need sometimes when the “what” or “who” is absent. We can also practice gratitude for having been blessed at a particular juncture of our lives. Sadness can direct us to define what is missing to live life more fully.

Read Psalm 34:18 and Group Question

Have you had a time in your life when you experienced God’s closeness? Was the time related to your being brokenhearted or not? Explain.

Although some development researchers would differ a bit, most would agree that very small babies show the emotions of MAD, SAD, GLAD AND SCARED right out of the womb. Guilt and shame are usually understood as different feelings since there are often “thoughts” attached to the feelings... “I have done something wrong” or “I AM something wrong.”

Read Genesis 3:7-10

Group Question

What do you think it means when Adam and Eve “hid?” What were the feelings that are connected to this behavior? What are some of the feelings we have when we feel disconnected from God? From others? What are common ways people hide in the 21st century?

Even in Genesis 3, God calls out for us. In **Romans 8:1** Paul reassures us that in Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation. We are connected to God even in moments when we try to hide.

Group Question

Has anyone ever done the *Daily Examen* spiritual practice? An adapted example is at the end of this curriculum. Review this exercise and respond to the following if you wish:
"When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the Universe?"

Prayer Requests and Time of Group Prayer

Reflections:

Group #4 | Week of October 19 | Confusion of Competing Emotions

Gathering Question

If you can remember one, recall a time where you felt both happy to do something but also felt another emotion as well, such as fear or anger or envy.

Opening Prayer with Breath

Scripture

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 37:23-24

Genesis 37; Romans 12:15

Themes

Confusion can send us seeking sources with unhelpful answers. In Christ, clarity is given through wisdom.

Envy destroys relationships. If we can learn to celebrate with others, God restores us with joy.

Group Question

Have you ever gotten bad or good advice or input from someone about something significant you were struggling with? How did you know?

Read Acts 8:26-40

The Ethiopian treasurer for the Queen traveled from his home to Jerusalem (about 1200 miles and taking 12 days by chariot) so he could worship. On his way home, he was reading in the book of Isaiah when Jesus's disciple Philip encountered him. It looks like this man was a spiritual seeker and dedicated time and effort on this faith journey.

Group Question

Has there been a time in your own life where you have felt confused about your faith? What feelings were associated with this time? Did God bring someone to you to help you with your confusion? Explain.

Wisdom is an integration of information including our thoughts, feelings, actions and values in relationship to ourselves and to others. Wisdom requires us to go through times when we don't know, a humility. In our fast-paced world, taking time to discern and reflect is difficult and "counter-cultural." Contemplation and prayer help us to slow down and listen to God, others and to ourselves more deeply.

Group Question

How tough is it for you to slow down and reflect? What helps you to do this?

As a group, review or read the story of Genesis 37 about Joseph's brothers being jealous.

Group Question

How often do we see examples of jealousy in our world? Offer some examples that are personal and global. Spend a few moments unpacking the feelings, thoughts and actions associated with jealousy. Are there any competing emotions when jealousy shows up?

Romans 12:15 suggests that a Christian person shows love to others when they come alongside them (clinicians refer to this as “mirroring” and it is a part of empathy) when others rejoice and when they are in sorrow. On a scale from 1-10 with 1 being very hard and 10 being very easy, how would you rate your own ability to do this? How would someone who knows you well rate your ability to do this?

Prayer Requests and Time of Group Prayer

Reflections:

Group #5 | Week of October 26 | Emotional Maturity

Gathering Question

Share a brief story about a place in your life where you have matured by understanding and expressing your emotions better.

Opening Prayer with Breath

Scripture

Gal 5:22-25

Rom 12:1-2

Theme

Emotional maturity reflects spiritual growth. Following Jesus transforms how we feel, respond, and relate to ourselves and others.

As noted in Group #1, even Jesus needed to “grow” in his life (review Luke 2:52). The Greek word in this verse is **προέκοπτεν (proékopten)**. This is the verb describing Jesus “increasing” or “advancing” in wisdom and stature. It implies a process of progression or moving forward into an improved state. Wisdom indicates an integrated ability to manage feelings, behaviors and thoughts both within and with others. Growth can happen with or without “sin,” which might be a new idea for some.

Read Galatians 5:22-25

In reading the fruit of the Spirit, which of these words are more feelings, behaviors or ways of thinking? Are they internal or more relational or both? Discuss.

To grow, a life needs to be nurtured both individually (example: we need water, food and shelter to live) and relationally (example: we need others to love and care for us). If a life has been neglected, where might we start to begin the process of growth?

Read Romans 12:1-2

Why do you think Paul suggests we need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice? What does the body aspect mean? In these verses, are we charged to take responsibility for another’s growth or is it mostly meant for the individual believer? How do we “test and approve” God’s good, pleasing and perfect” will? Maybe you can share a time when you came to understand that God was leading your life in a particular way.

As the group ends, reflect on some things that you have learned from each other.

What is one bit of wisdom that you hope to take away from your time. Take time

in group prayer to express your gratitude for your group and the time spent together.

Reflections:

Reference Materials

Key Information You Get from Basic Feelings

Basic Feeling	Key Information
"I'm MAD"	"I don't like this"
"I'm GLAD"	"I like this"
"I'm SAD"	"Something/someone is missing"
"I'm SCARED"	I don't feel safe"

Note: in each basic feeling there is a range from a little to a lot of that feeling. For example, the range of MAD can go from slightly irritated to rage.

Begin to separate out feeling information (affect), from thinking information (cognition) from what you do with this information (behavior.)

Christian Spiritual Practices

Opening Prayer with breath (adapted from Centering Prayer Tradition)

The facilitator will ask the group to gather and then direct everyone to take about 30 seconds of silence to breath together without words. In this way we will acknowledge that we are embodied souls and not just floating minds.

After this, the group or facilitator will open the time by saying something like: **We bring all of ourselves to you, our Lord. During this time together, help us to be authentic and open to what you would have us learn so we can follow you more deeply. AMEN**

The Welcoming Prayer

This prayer helps to dismantle acquired emotional programs and to heal emotional wounds by addressing them where they are stored – in the body. It contributes to the process of transformation in Christ and can be used in association with Centering Prayer.

- Feel and sink into what you are experiencing this moment in your body.
- “Welcome” what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.
- Let go by saying “I let go of my desire for security, affection, control and embrace this moment as it is.”

Dailey Examen

We encourage you to use this Examen (or some questions in it) each day as an internal, prayerful, self-reflection and/or as a conversation with others (including children)

- When did I feel most alive today?
- When did I most feel life draining out of me?
- When was I happiest today? What was today's high point?
- When was I saddest? What was today's low point?
- When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God, and the Universe?
- When did I have the least sense of belonging to myself, others, God, and the Universe?
- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?
- When did I give and receive the most love today?
- When did I give and receive the least love today?



Check out the Hard Feelings Podcast!

Clinicians and Spiritual Directors from our community joined host Evan Gratz on the Point Loma Church Podcast to discuss the topics covered in these small groups. Episodes include:

- **Created with Feelings Featuring Claudia Grauf-Grounds**
- **Anger & Fear with Deanna Lazaro**
- **Sadness, Shame & Guilt with Jim Grisolia**
- **Confusion or Competing Emotions Featuring Kayla Karesh**
- **Emotional Maturity Featuring Em Cummins**
- **Spiritual Practices Related to Feelings with Lynn Ziegenfuss**

You can access the podcast in audio form by searching "Point Loma Church" on the apps Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or iHeartRadio. The podcast is also available in video form at youtube.com/@PointLomaChurchOnline

*Claudia Grauf-Grounds developed this curriculum to support of Pastor Karla Shaw's Fall 2025 sermon series on Hard Feelings: A Sermon Series About Our Emotions.
Please direct any concerns to her: drclaudiagg@gmail.com*