01

DIGGING DEEPER

If you're a visual learner, over the next seven days (or however long you take between meeting together) read these five sections and reflect on the questions at the end. If you're an auditory learner and would prefer to listen on your commute or while you work on a project, we've provided the audio for each day at ***trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.***

You can do them all at once, but we suggest breaking the five sections over multiple days to give yourself more processing time. This week's sections are from Chapter 4 of *The Cure.*

If you aren't able to go through the five sections before your next meeting, **that's okay.** Don't let it stop you from connecting with your community.

Passage for the week:

Romans 8:37–39 (NIV)

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Two Roads Metaphor

Here at Trueface we use a metaphor to explain what many of us have experienced as followers of Jesus. We talk about two roads—the road of Pleasing God and the road of Trusting God. These represent our *primary motivation* in our spiritual journey.

The road of Pleasing God leads to the Room of Good Intentions. In this room we assume we aren't pleasing to God as we are, so we work hard to try to make him happy. We put on masks to pretend we're doing better than we are with the people around us. We believe we are sinners, striving through diligent effort to become saints. Unfortunately, this room doesn't lead to authentic relationships. It leads to hiding, faking, and often to burning out.

The road of Trusting God leads to the Room of Grace. Here we trust that we are saints who still sin. We believe that what pleases God the most is us trusting him and trusting others. In this room we open ourselves up to authentic relationships where we are fully known and truly loved.

We might go back and forth between these rooms depending on the time in our lives, the season of our journey, or just how we're doing that day. But we want to help you live more and more in the freedom of the Room of Grace.

SECTION 1

You can find the audio file of this section at **trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.**

I went back to the Room of Good Intentions for a night last week—I still don't really understand why. When I came back to the Room of Grace, I told the hostess about my visit, and how I didn't understand why I went back to a place that almost destroyed me. She invited me to meet her and her husband today, and said she wanted to share her own story with me about why we return to the Room of Good Intentions even after we've experienced the Room of Grace.

I find them at a corner booth in the coffee lounge off the Room of Grace's main hall. It's inviting here: the rich scents of roasted beans, the steaming cups. It's a favorite place to gather, but it's not too busy today. The hostess introduces me to her husband, a quiet man with a broad smile and a contentedness about him. We spend some time getting to know each other. Then she moves to the reason we're here. "You were asking yesterday what could possibly make us consider going back to the Room of Good Intentions. It starts with the false stories we tell ourselves. We create lies about ourselves to make sense of the pain we suffered or the pain we caused."

"Everyone does this?"

"Everyone. Me, you, your grandma . . . everyone. These false stories become permission we grant ourselves to find meaning in something less than healthy relationships. Permission to fail. Permission to succeed at all costs. Either way, we're just waiting, helpless, for an opportunity to fail. Does that make sense?"

"Sorta."

"Let me ask you this: Do you ever picture God 'over there'? By that, I mean do you ever picture him on the other side of your sin, and the sin is like a chasm or mountain between you?"

I sit back, stunned for a moment. "Yeah! That started dawning on me just last week!"

"It's very common, seeing God that way. That's how it starts with me. I see a picture of God 'over there,' indignant and aloof to my heart and my needs, hurts, failures . . . the wrong that has happened to me. Then I start trying to solve the hurt by myself, but I don't even know the base issues, let alone how to fix them! But that's what I do. I stop believing God is able or good enough to solve my flaws.

"Then I feel sorry for myself, like I'm a victim of God's random acts and lack of protection. This is where the self-entitlement comes in: 'I deserve this. I owe this to myself. God doesn't understand me or my needs. I don't think he cares fully and he's been holding out on me.' And now my heart's inflamed, hooked, ready to plot a move."

I replay a dozen times I've experienced that very series in my head as she speaks. "I've known that sequence of events all my life. I've never been able to break it."

"Yes. The Room of Good Intentions ignores that entire rebellious system of permission. It only pays attention to the acting out. That's why most of the books on addiction and overcoming sin only address the techniques to fight the moment of temptation. By that point, though, the game is already over."



Reflection Questions

When you picture God, where do you see him?

In what area of your life do you give yourself permission to act out because you feel like you deserve it?

Consider a time that you've felt like God didn't come through for you. What were some of your thoughts during that moment?



SECTION 2

You can find the audio file of this section at **trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.**

"So, my story is about an absent dad," the hostess continues. "I guess I never felt like I was valuable enough for him to change his schedule.

"He's still alive and we've walked through a lot of what I'm telling you. But back then, he didn't know how to express love. He was trying so hard to become someone, to make his mark. He didn't have much meaningful time for an overweight, clumsy little girl with braces. A daughter is built to adore her dad, but not all dads realize this completely. He was successful in anything he tried. Competition was his lifeblood. His praise for me was always measured, and usually followed by correction or comparison. The only real affirmation I got was when I achieved something public, but that rarely happened. The message was clear: Who I was wasn't quite enough.

"So that story ran around my head all day, every day, as I grew up. Until I decided to make myself enough. I mean, who can live in a world where you aren't worth your father's affection? You start to find ways to prove you are enough, because maybe then someone will notice you and you will be loved."

Tears form in her eyes.

"So, an awkward little girl quietly and deliberately transforms herself into a presentable young woman. She learns to dress just right, learns to communicate cleverly and say important things at important parties. She grows out of her oafishness and becomes quite athletic. She feverishly works on her weight until she becomes attractive. She marries a very competent, emotionally guarded man, much like her dad. From her hairstyle to her clothes to how she dresses her kids, she has it together."

"'Competent' and 'emotionally guarded,'" her husband laughs. "That was my default, all right."

"Do you see the cycle forming? This God-loving young woman, carrying around suitcases of unresolved junk and a dishonest self-story, experiences a fresh series of thoughts. She's awakened, aware of her vulnerability. Soon, a familiar sin, a uniquely familiar offer of wrong pleasure, is presenting itself as an option."

"What does that look like?" I ask.

"Well, for me it became conquest. It wasn't sexual, necessarily. I wanted to prove I was worth something. I began using my competency, intelligence, and looks to draw competent, intelligent, attractive men. I wanted them to be willing to risk something on me. That's all. I just needed to know that if I wanted to proceed further, they would go along. That's my vulnerability. An opportunity to prove I'm enough by capturing the attention of another. It's a subtle game. I almost don't know I'm doing it at times. But it follows a predictable course, a predictable pattern.

"Without the self-story I created, I might leave it alone, trusting God's life for me. But the lie, the story of me not being enough, it's like rocket fuel. Now the story speeds up. Here's where it gets ugly. Somewhere in this whole blur, I give myself permission to act out. Maybe I send a vaguely flirtatious e-mail or invite someone to ask for my number. If questioned, I'd have to admit it is conscious on some level, but I hide it from myself. Yet, I do give myself permission. Thankfully, I never took it much further than that, but if I had continued to live in the lie of my self-story, it was just a matter of time and opportunity until I carried this out."



Reflection Questions

"Who I was wasn't quite enough." Where have you experienced this message? This may have been in your family, academics, sports, work, romantic relationships, friendships, or many other areas.

Usually, when we hear "Who I am is not enough," we follow it with a second sentence to "fix" this feeling—it's our human solution to the pain of feeling like we aren't enough. For example:

Who I am isn't enough . . .

. . . so I need to be competent.
. . . so I need to be funny.
. . . so I need to not even try.
. . . so I need to be in control.
. . . so I need to be invisible.
. . . so I need to be attractive.
. . . so I need to be successful.
. . . so I need to sabotage myself.
. . . and many more.

What are some of your second sentences?



SECTION 3

You can find the audio file of this section at **trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.**

Sitting there listening to this couple willing to tell me their story reminds me how beautiful and strong this room is. Who tells on themselves like this? Who is this honest? Her husband isn't smiling now, but he is fully supportive, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder. She gives him a thankful look.

"So, this awareness of vulnerability, allowed space, is now given an opportunity. It explodes into full-blown temptation. No longer just theoretical vulnerability, it now has a name, a time, a location, and a real possibility for something to happen."

She presses on even as it's clear this is painful for her. She's almost unwilling to come up for air until she gets this all out. "The Room of Good Intentions gives you only one tool to deal with this onslaught: resistance. It seems to make sense, after all. I know what I'm considering is wrong. I know I should fight it even if I don't want to abandon it. Even if it never goes any further than a veiled e-mail exchange, I still know this is not who I want to be. That's the vulnerability. For me, with my story, that's where I go. Everyone is different.

"So, I resist it for a while. 'I'll talk myself out of this; I'll resist enough; I'll stuff it away.' That's the problem with sin-management. It treats sin lightly, as if I could control it. Grace is not soft on sin. Attempting to manage my sin is."

She looks up, "Want to know the worst part about my attempted resistance?"

Only half joking, I respond, "I'm not sure."

"It's not the sin I'm obsessed with. It's the promised pleasure of the sin. That elation, that euphoria I'm hoping will come with the conquest. Remember? That's the part they don't tell you about resistance in the Room of Good Intentions. The extended resistance actually heightens the promised pleasure of my eventual acting out. The longer and more intense the battle, the bigger the payoff when I finally cave.

"So, I hide my temptation from others, knowing my resistance is not going to be enough to stop. Eventually, I become aware I'm going to act out. I no longer pretend I'm not fully bought in. To act out, though, I have to go into hiding, where I can start plotting the event. I don't go away literally, but I may as well. My kids, my husband, my friends, will now no longer receive my focus and devotion. I'm preoccupied in isolation, trying to figure out the next steps and planning how I'll manage the consequences afterward. And sitting alone, hidden, I find a strange comfort in the sin I'm intending."

I don't need clarification on any of this. The details are different, but she's describing the cycle of my sin as clear as glacier water.

"Eventually, I act out. Sometimes this cycle takes a month. Sometimes it happens in the course of a lunch with someone several tables away. It truly does deliver the pleasure it promised. It always does, or I wouldn't risk it. It could be one line in an e-mail hinting he'd be willing to take this further. Sometimes it's just grabbing an undeniable look from across a room. Whatever form it takes, it serves the purpose. I've compromised who I am; I've given in to what I know is wrong. I've betrayed my husband and created another life I can never expose to my family. Tragically, the more often I play this out, the greater loss of intimacy I create in my real world."



Reflection Questions

"Grace is not soft on sin. Attempting to manage my sin is." What comes up for you when you hear that?

Where in your life does resisting something you know is wrong actually lead to it feeling better when you give in (even if it feels worse later)?

As we engage in our crazy-making cycles, we lose intimacy in our real lives. Where do you see that happening in your life?



SECTION 4

You can find the audio file of this section at **trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.**

"In this trap I deceive myself into thinking I can manage the consequences of the choice. What delusion! I couldn't even manage the events leading up to the failure! How am I supposed to manage the consequences? I withdraw from my most important relationships—the ones who love and need me the most. I can't let anyone too close for fear I'll slip or my betrayal will show on my face. In my withdrawal I'm monitoring an ongoing ticker with periodic assessments of damage control. At this point, it's exhausting."

Her husband puts his hand on his wife's. He says, "I know her so well now, I can tell when she's in this place. For a long time, I just didn't want to admit it. We'd be watching a movie or listening to a friend tell an anecdote, and she'd miss the punch line. Everyone in the room is smiling and laughing, and my otherwise brilliant, clever wife is somewhere else entirely."

"It doesn't stop here," she steps in. "It is so hard to live in guilt, so hard to face the reality of what I know I'm capable of, that it's much easier to justify my actions. 'It didn't really hurt anyone. No one needs to know.'

"This inevitably leads to blame. Someone else must be held accountable for my choice. So I rehearse how my needs have not been taken care of, or how I have not been loved well. I become the judge and jury of others' behaviors."

He adds, "This stage is predictable, too. I just couldn't always tie it together. One day she's reasonable and thoughtful. The next she's a particularly aggressive traffic cop. Suddenly, I can't do enough. Or whatever I'm doing is wrong. I'm walking on eggshells, trying to not get on her bad side. Some of our worst fights were born in this part of the cycle. Blame is often a commentary on the unresolved, hidden sin in the blamer."

She nods. "Maybe the worst aspect of this whole cycle is that it reinforces the shame that got me into the mess in the first place. This failure adds another layer. 'Well, my dad was right. I'm not enough. Something's uniquely wrong with me. Who would keep doing such a thing?' So I spend a season in awareness of my shame, another chapter in the false self-story I tell myself. I don't realize that only grace through love can overcome my shame. And, I cannot experience this love unless I trust others with me.

"Inevitably, I begin to lose hope. I cannot be trusted. I cannot trust myself. I want to trust no one. I begin to doubt my life in Christ has even made a difference. My track record shows I've always been this way and always will be. I don't like being me; I don't like my own companionship. I find myself saying, 'I don't care anymore.' It's an ugly place to dwell.

"For a while the realization of my lost hope makes me so disgusted with my behavior, I don't struggle so much. Maybe this last episode got my attention. Maybe I'm growing up. Maybe this period of time with no temptation and no acting out is proof I'm gaining control of this sin after all!

But this, too, is self-delusion. Another opportunity, another awareness, another expression of my false story is right down the road. It is served best when I believe I'm getting better." She stops speaking. None of us is saying anything. It's like we've just watched a violent car wreck in slow motion.

Finally, she looks straight into my eyes.

"That is why we would go back to a room that almost destroyed us."

I realize I'm afraid. Afraid maybe I'll never get better. Afraid I'll always leave the Room of Grace because I'll always fail too much to feel right staying here. "So, where's the hope against this cycle we have no power to overcome? There's gotta be hope. Right?"

They both smile.

"Oh, there is great hope, my friend," she says softly. "This cycle will never go away. Not completely. Even after years in this room. But this room gives me, gives you, a chance to stop the cycle that the other room can never offer. Amidst our healing, our maturing, our learning to love, there is a great gift that can help us stop this cycle at any point."



Reflection Questions

Where do you connect with the feeling of isolation and withdrawal after sinning?

Where have you experienced trying the same solution again and again without a different result? What drives you to keep attempting this same solution?

Only grace through love can overcome our shame. How have you tried to overcome your shame on your own? What would it look like to let love overcome your shame?



SECTION 5

You can find the audio file of this section at **trueface.org/crazymakingstudy.**

It can be easy for us to think of the "obvious" sins when we hear about these crazy-making cycles. We imagine pornography, alcohol abuse, spending sprees, or stealing. We might even have read the last four sections and been thinking of a loved one that we wish would do this study.

We want to gently confront that way of thinking. Each of us has a crazy-making cycle—even you. And truth be told, sometimes the quiet cycles, the "acceptable" sins, are the most insidious. They leave us thinking that we can manage on our own or that our cycle isn't that bad, which blinds us to their true effects.

In the psychiatrist Gerald G. May's book *Addiction & Grace*, he shares about two types of addictions: attraction addictions and aversive addictions. Attraction addictions are things we crave, and aversive addictions are things we addictively avoid. Use the lists on the following page to try to identify areas you connect with. These lists are not exhaustive, so add anything else that you think of.

Circle all the words that you connect with and then put a check mark next to the ones you feel are strongest in your life.

Attraction: ***I crave . . .***

Anger
Approval
Attractiveness
Being good
Being helpful
Being loved
Being nice
Being right
Being taken care of
Calendars
Children
Cleanliness
Comparison
Competence
Competition
Contests
Depression
Dreams
Drinking
Drugs
Eating
Envy
Exercise
Fame
Family
Fantasies
Friends
Gambling
Gossiping
Groups
Guilt
Happiness
Hobbies
Humor
Images of God
Intimacy
Jealousy
Knowledge
Lying
Marriage
Meeting expectations
Memories
Messiness
Money
Movies
Music
Neatness
Performance
Pets
Politics
Popularity
Power
Psychotherapy
Responsibility
Revenge
Seductiveness
Self-image
Self-improvement
Self-contempt
Sex
Shoplifting
Sleeping
Soft drinks
Sports
Status
Stock market
Stress
Suspiciousness
Talking
Time
Weight
Winning
Work
Worthiness

Aversion: ***I compulsively avoid . . .***

Anger
Animals
Being abnormal
Being alone
Being discounted
Being overweight
Being judged
Being overwhelmed
Being thin
Being tricked
Blood
Boredom
Bridges
Closed-in spaces
Commitment
Conflict
Crowds
Darkness
Death
Dependence
Dirt
Disapproval
Doctors
Embarrassment
Evil spirits
Failure
Fire
Germs
Guilt
Illness
Independence
Intimacy
Needles
Open spaces
Pain
People of different beliefs
People of different class
People of different culture
People of different politics
People of different race
People of different religion
People of different sex
People who are addicted
People who are competent
People who are fat/thin
People who are ignorant
People who are neat/messy
People who are rich/poor
Public speaking
Rejection
Responsibility
Sex
Strangers
Success
Tests
Traffic
Tunnels
Vulnerability
Water
Writing





Reflection Questions

What surprised you about the ones you connected with?

For your top one or two, what are you trying to fix with this? Or put another way, "I crave/compulsively avoid _____ to prove that I am/am not _____."

Can you trace any of these backwards in your life? When did you first begin to experience this cycle?