02

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 or 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 we will be looking at the individual steps of our crazy-making cycles.

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:

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

SECTION 1

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

Now we will get into our personal crazy-making cycles. Look back at the lists on pages 34-35 to remember the areas you connect with the most. Choose your top one or two areas where you think you may have a crazy-making cycle, and work through each of the phases with your own story.

Building: This is the most nebulous part of the cycle. We have a vague inkling that our cycle is starting again—an unease we can't seem to pin down. We might feel distracted, vulnerable, or restless. We start drifting from the things that keep us grounded, even though we are rarely aware of our cycle at this point.

Can you think of a time where you've had this awareness that "not all is right"? What does that feel like for you?

What do you start to drift away from right before your cycle starts? These are usually protective aspects of our lives that we start to avoid or disregard.

Unhealthy Self-Thoughts: Something happens—maybe someone snubs us at work or our spouse forgets an important date or someone shines brighter than us at a party. Maybe we're just feeling a little unfulfilled. We each have incredibly unique, personal triggers. Whatever it is, it stirs up unhealthy self-thoughts. "They don't really care about me," "I deserve more than that person," "I always fail anyway," "I don't really belong," "I need to prove I'm worthwhile," "I won't be loved if I rock the boat," "I should have known better," and "I'm not enough" are a few examples of the thoughts that creep into our lives at the beginning of the cycle.

What are your most common unhealthy self-thoughts?

Can you identify any triggers (big or small) in your own life that bring up these unhealthy self-thoughts? Write them below. Don't be discouraged if you can't identify any yet—this can take a lot of time and self reflection.

Temptation: This stage is often when we first become actively aware of our cycle. We are tempted to act out and to do something we know is wrong. This is connected to our unhealthy self-thoughts—we are tempted to try to "fix" what we fear is true.

We can prove that we aren't incompetent by criticizing someone else. We can show that we're worthwhile by serving others to gain their love. We can stop feeling powerless by controlling someone else. Unfortunately, we have an active, agile, dedicated enemy that has become an expert in our personal temptations. We are guaranteed to find—or create—an opportunity to "fix" our unhealthy self-thoughts by being tempted to act out.

What does your most common temptation look like?

What would it look like to slow down and recognize your unique temptations to "fix" your false self-thoughts, rather than immediately acting out?

SECTION 2

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

Resistance: We know that we *shouldn't* act out. We should resist and do what we know is right. Initially, we may think that we genuinely will be able to resist—and it even works for a while. But eventually, if kept in the dark, a subtle shift happens during this phase. At some point, we know that our resistance isn't going to be enough. We acknowledge in a corner of our mind that it's only a matter of time. This is where people who look at their *behaviors* rather than the true root of sin—which is shame—think you win or lose. They think that the godlier you are then the better you are at resistance, but this shows that they don't realize that sin has deceptively mastered them. They don't realize sin's trick: the extended resistance only heightens the promised pleasure, which means it's only a matter of time before they spiral further down into their cycle.

How do you resist in your cycle?

At what point does this subtle shift happen, where you realize you're going to act out?

Hiddenness: Hiddenness is the natural outcome of that shift in our resistance. When we enter this part of the cycle, we no longer pretend our resistance is going to work—we're fully bought in. This is often subconscious. In order to act out we need to withdraw and hide from others in some way. This might be making sure no one who would confront us about our behavior is within earshot, avoiding a text message we know would draw us out of the cycle, not being present with loved ones in our lives, or even just shutting our physical door. We're plotting how we will carry out our addiction. Like any part of the cycle, this can range from a few seconds to weeks depending on our cycle.

How do you hide when you acknowledge you're going to act out?

Are there specific people you hide from? Why?

Acting Out: We now indulge our addiction. We placate someone instead of having a healthy confrontation, we purchase something we know we can't really afford, or we pour ourselves another drink when we know we should have stopped. We demean our children, send a passive aggressive email, or change our privacy settings to watch porn. There are as many ways to act out as there are humans on earth.

This can be hard to acknowledge, especially to ourselves. What does acting out look like for you?



SECTION 3

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

Withdrawing: Now we withdraw from our most important relationships, either physically or emotionally. We need to carefully monitor the situation and make sure to cover our tracks. We do not want to let anyone close enough to find out. We distance ourselves as we try to manage the consequences of acting out. We also may be feeling the first glimmers of guilt, and then shame—and feel like we need to keep others away from our uncleanness. We may also withdraw from ourselves by dissociating. This might look like binge-watching TV, scrolling social media, drinking to dull our awareness, filling up our calendar, or anything else that allows us to avoid confronting what just happened.

Which relationships do you notice yourself withdrawing from the most in this phase of your cycle? Friends, coworkers, spouse, family, a mentor, yourself, someone else?

What are you afraid they will say or see if you don't withdraw at this point?

Justifying behavior: We can't stay in withdrawal for long—we're not built for it. We also can't stand to feel guilty about our behavior for long. "It's not that bad," we tell ourselves, trying to downplay whatever we've done. We may argue with ourselves that we deserve it—or, depending on our cycle, that the other person deserved it. We justify, saying that because our needs haven't been met or because someone else didn't do what they should have or because we have not been loved in the way we prefer, we had every right to act out.

When you're justifying your behavior, what's your go-to argument? How do you try to stop feeling guilty?

Blaming: Our justifications eventually fall short, so we need to ramp up our defenses. It wasn't only *not our fault*—it's someone else's! It's our spouse's fault for not being attentive enough. It's our coworker's fault for not being efficient enough. It's our parents' fault for being too permissive. It's God's fault for not having life work out the way we imagined. We try to turn the poison we've been drinking outward, tossing the blame onto someone else so we don't have to bear it.

Who do you most often blame when you get to this part of your cycle?

How do you act out that blame? In other words, how does it manifest in your relationships?

SECTION 4

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

Shame: Eventually, our justification and blame run out, and we are left with what's been building behind the scenes: shame. It has been fueling this cycle all along. We may think, "How could I have done this again? Now I've hurt others, too, by what I did and how I've acted after. What's wrong with me?" We feel ashamed of ourselves, and then the old lies start to repeat, providing the unhealthy thoughts from the beginning of the cycle with a whole new set of ammunition. "No wonder I don't really belong anywhere—look what I've done." "See, I *am* a terrible person. Who else would do this again?" "I'm not worth loving—this just proves it." Once again, these lies are incredibly personal and specific to each of us.

What do your shame messages sound like?

When you feel ashamed, what is your urge? Do you want to run? Hide? Fight? Become invisible? Scream?

Loss of hope: Left untreated, this shame eventually overwhelms us and extinguishes our hope. We are afraid we will never get better and never be free of this sin. We believe that we have always been this way and always will be this way—doomed to repeat this cycle again and again.

When have you experienced this loss of hope around your sin cycles?

Sometimes, along with loss of hope, we feverishly work to be and do better, as though we can work off this last misstep. Which do you tend toward—loss of hope, striving to pay penance, or both?

Gap: Eventually, the shame abates, though it never fully disappears. We gradually reopen to the world and to others. We return to the place of thinking that maybe that last experience really got our attention—maybe that was the last time. We've made all the promises to ourselves and to God of, "No, this time I really mean it." But nothing's actually changed, we're just in the gap . . . waiting for the next trigger, unhealthy self-thoughts, and the cascade of steps.

Depending on your cycle, this gap may be a few hours or many weeks. What are some of your thoughts during this time?

During the gap do you feel like there is hope of overcoming the cycle?

SECTION 5

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

This is a dark cycle no matter what your particular sin is, and exploring it as we have over the last four sections takes both strength and courage. We can feel hopeless after doing the hard work of digging into our own cycles. But like the hostess said, there is also great hope. For those in the Room of Grace, there's a way to stop the cycle.

You can tell someone else.

You can tell another person what is going on inside before it happens. And the moment you tell with the motive of giving up control, the cycle can begin to stop. Light shines on the madness, the rationalization, the pain, and the damage—and it can stop.

Please read this again.

The control cycle can be broken when we choose to tell someone else.

You may need to break the cycle several times on a given day, but the power to break the cycle is no less. In fact, choosing to tell each time the cycle repeats can teach us to depend on and trust in God and others' love that much more.

In order to step out with this vulnerability, I need to understand who God is, and who that means I am. Through Jesus, I have been declared right with God—a holy, beloved saint with a brand new identity and heart. Shame makes quite a show out of pretending to be my master, but it's all smoke and mirrors. Jesus not only died for my sins, but for my shame as well. I am no longer a slave to the lies of shame, but a free child of God. Our study *Two Roads* focuses on this foundational piece of our faith.

Once I understand how God sees me and who I am in him, I can then:

- Learn to confess the sin I intend to commit rather than confessing the sin I've carried out. This is living in the light. My identity in Christ allows me to see the truth without having to hide in fear that failure will define me or confirm I'm not enough.
- Tell someone in the first moment I recognize my vulnerability. Now, here is incredible beauty. We can only be loved when another is allowed to meet our needs. God created us with limitations so that we can be loved by others. Instead of pretending we're "doing fine," we give others an opportunity to love us. We experience their love as we learn to tell each other we're vulnerable.

When we are in the Room of Good Intentions, we are forced to hide. The reality of the sin we're capable of tells us that we truly are who our shame has declared us to be—that our unhealthy

thoughts are true. In the Room of Grace, sin has no such power. I am "Christ in me" on my worst day, in my worst thought, during my worst temptation. So, I learn to tell on myself to God and to others. I experience the truth that living in holiness is living with nothing hidden. I am clean; I am free; I am healing. We are able to give our lives away when we are no longer preoccupied with failure. This is life indeed.



Reflections

"I am 'Christ in me' on my worst day, in my worst thought, during my worst temptation." To what degree do you feel like you believe that today?

Who could you share this cycle with? It could be a spouse, a close friend, family member, a mentor, your group, or someone else.

What comes up for you when you imagine telling that person about this control cycle or telling them when you're in the middle of a cycle?

Would you be comfortable sharing this cycle with your group? Why or why not?