Care and Discipleship Mentor Training

Welcome to Care and Discipleship Mentor Training for men and women!

*Become equipped to serve as a "**Care and Discipleship Mentor**" in your sphere of influence.*

This training will focus on one-another care utilizing biblical counseling concepts and methods.

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Authored by Ellen Castillo. Ellen has experience in counseling, training, and mentoring in and for the local church.

Please contact Ellen through her website if she can serve you in any way. It would be her privilege and joy!

www.ellencastillo.com

*All Scripture is from the CSB unless otherwise noted

"My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14)

This workbook belongs to: _____

<u>Instructions for Ellen's Local Training Group</u>:

All lessons are available as PDF downloads on the ellencastillo.com website at the "Care and Discipleship Mentor Training" tab. You are encouraged to print the lessons out as you progress through them and place them in a binder as an ongoing resource.

Monthly meetings will be informal gatherings where we discuss the lesson you read the month before that meeting. At our first meeting, we will read through Lesson One (Introduction to One-Another Care and Discipleship). The upcoming month's lessons will be posted for you to print and put in your binder to read and prepare for the next meeting.

If you miss the first meeting or join the meetings sometime after that first meeting, you are welcome and encouraged to join us for the lesson we are currently reading! **However, you must read the Lesson One introduction lesson on your own before jumping in.** All lessons stand alone except for the introduction, which sets the stage for all the other lessons.

Not every portion of the lessons will have blanks to fill in or ask you to answer questions. You are encouraged to be a self-learner as a mentor! Look things up, jot down responses or your own questions, and interact with the points made as you wish. In our meetings, you will have the opportunity to share your thoughts and ask questions as we go over the lesson.

Each lesson will have a list of suggested resources. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a good start for you to build your library of tools to use as a mentor. The resources will be listed (new items will be added ongoing) at ellencastillo.com at the "resources" tab. This will be a place for you to go for links to helpful books, articles, podcasts, websites, and organizations that will be helpful to your one-another care ministry.

Note: our Care and Discipleship Mentor team meetings should be a safe place for personal sharing. All should agree to maintain the confidence of their fellow participants. We can discuss particular mentees you are working with in general terms, but we must always maintain their privacy. So, we will refrain from naming names or giving away too much about the person's identity or situation. Let's keep things in general terms. If you need help more specifically than that, please arrange to discuss this with Ellen 1:1 instead of in a meeting.

<u>Instructions for group leaders, group participants, and individuals taking the course independently in other locations</u>:

All lessons are available as PDF downloads on the ellencastillo.com website at the "Care and Discipleship Mentor Training" tab. You are encouraged to print the lessons out as you progress through them and place them in a binder as an ongoing resource.

If you take this course individually instead of with a group, you can complete the reading and questions for the lessons at any pace you desire. You can also dig deeper into the suggested resources. If you have questions, speak with a church leader or a trusted biblical counselor. You are also welcome to message Ellen through the website; she will respond as time allows.

To take the course with a group, complete Lesson One (Introduction to One-Another Care and Discipleship) together in your first meeting. Then, for the rest of the meetings, as homework, print and complete the lesson for the upcoming group meeting (preferably monthly.) When you come together as a group, discuss the lesson together.

Not every portion of the lessons will have blanks to fill in or ask you to answer questions. You are encouraged to be a self-learner as a mentor! Look things up, jot down responses or your own questions, and interact with the points made as you wish. You can share your thoughts in your group as the leader guides you through some open-ended discussion questions.

Each lesson will have a list of suggested resources. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a good start for you to build your library of tools to use as a mentor. The resources will be listed (new items will be added ongoing) at ellencastillo.com at the "resources" tab. This will be a place for you to go for links to helpful books, articles, podcasts, websites, and organizations that will be helpful to your one-another care ministry.

Group leader: Besides the above, consider yourself a facilitator, not a teacher, and your group will be able to stay on topic more naturally. Your role is to gather the group, provide structure, and keep discussions on topic. A leader should have a reputation of maturity and wisdom as a believer in Christ. You do not need special training, background, or expertise in mentoring or counseling. You only need a good working knowledge of the Bible and a willingness to facilitate a group of adult believers through the course, where all the teachings and resources are contained. NOTE: if your group is larger than 12 or so, you may have a better discussion experience if you split up into two or more groups. Be sure to designate capable leaders for those groups.

Be prepared to ask your group some open-ended questions for each portion of the lesson rather than just asking for responses to the questions or blanks throughout a

lesson (pick the ones you want to emphasize.) For example, ask, “What new thing did you learn from this lesson?” or “What challenged you?”. Also, “What questions do you still wonder about this topic?” and “How might you apply this to your own life and One-Another ministry?”. The open-ended discussion is usually the most fruitful part of the group gathering!

If you encounter disagreements, questions you cannot answer confidently, or difficulties with your group’s dynamics, please seek help from church leadership. This study does not dispute any doctrinal differences our churches may have. However, we will sometimes disagree on some areas that are not salvation issues. Your church is your best guidance in these matters.

TIP: If you have time left at the end of your discussion, feel free to run through some of the chapter questions in the book “Consider Your Counsel” by Bob Kellemen (linked on the website resources list.) These are excellent topics to help your mentors consider specific ways to address some mentoring challenges. Keep this book on hand!

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your training group should be a safe place for personal sharing. All should agree to maintain their fellow participants' and mentees' confidence and privacy. Please refrain from naming names or giving any identifying information about those you are mentoring.

Course Content:

There are many common struggles that believers deal with. In a twelve-lesson training we can only cover a small fraction of the topics we could cover! These lessons will give you a foundation in some basics of one-another care, but it is not exhaustive or complete. If you finish these twelve lessons and want further training, several options are available. Reach out to Ellen for guidance if you wish to discuss this.

And stay tuned for the potential for more training for Care and Discipleship with the addition of more topics and lessons!

IMPORTANT: Please notice that there are no lessons specific to trauma, abortion care, or any addiction. Trauma requires a skilled and trained counselor, so please refer your mentee to one if unhealed trauma is part of their story. There are some helpful addiction recovery programs; please ask a counselor or church leader for a referral. Healing from the effects of abortion often requires specific counseling. Ask a counselor or church leader for a referral. You can, of course, still come alongside a mentee as an encourager if they are also getting some other help! Healing happens well in a community, and there is always a part that you can potentially play in the process.

Without guidance, a people will fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance. (Proverbs 11:14)

If at any time while you are mentoring, you feel that you are not equipped for a situation, it is your role to help them find someone who is.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lesson Three:
One-Another Care, Rooted in God's Word; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Anger and Forgiveness; Case Study and Resources
Applying Ephesians 4:32: Forgiveness
Biblical Mentors: Paul and Barnabas

Lesson Four:
One-Another Care in the Family (Marriage/Parenting/Sexuality); Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Worry, Fear, Anxiety, and Stress; Case Study and Resources
Applying Ephesians 1 Thessalonians 4:18: Comfort
Biblical Mentors: Paul and Timothy

Lesson Five:
One-Another Care in a Culture of Soulcare in the Local Church; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Depression; Case Study and Resources
Applying Galatians 5:13: Servanthood
Biblical Mentors: Naomi and Ruth

Lesson Six:
One-Another Care: Prayer; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Grief and Loss; Case Study and Resources
Applying James 5:16: Prayer
Biblical Mentors: Elija and Elisha

Lesson Seven:
One-Another Care in Friendship and Relationships; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Peacemaking; Case Study and Resources
Applying Hebrews 10:25: Fellowship
Biblical Mentors: Moses and Joshua

Lesson Eight:
One-Another Care in the Context of Adult Ministries; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for the Fear of Man and Insecurity; Case Study and Resources
Applying Romans 15:7: Acceptance
Biblical Mentors: Esther and Mordecai

Lesson Nine:
One-Another Care in the Context of Kids and Student Ministry; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Decision Making and God's Will; Case Study and Resources
Applying 1 Peter 4:9: Hospitality
Biblical Mentors: Elizabeth and Mary

Lesson Ten:
One-Another Care: Ministry with Difficult People; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for the Thought Life; Case Study and Resources
Applying Ephesians 4:2: Patience and Forbearance
Biblical Mentors: Paul and Titus.

Lesson Eleven:
One-Another Care: Serving From a Place of Weakness; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for How People Change; Case Study and Resources
Applying Galatians 6:2: Bearing Burdens
Biblical Mentors: Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar

Lesson Twelve:
One-Another Care: Boundaries; Suggested Resources
Hope and Help for Guilt and Regret; Case Study and Resources
Applying 1 Thessalonians 5:11: Encouragement
Biblical Mentors: Samuel and Saul

NOTE from Ellen:

This is a self-published, self-edited project. I continue to edit it as new information comes to my attention. I am sure my software did not catch all the errors—it happens! It's difficult to see your own mistakes sometimes. If you spot any errors, let me know. Thanks!

Ellen

Lesson One

Introduction

Care and Discipleship Mentor Training

INTRODUCTION

"For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures."
(Romans 15:4)

From Ellen:

I am so excited that you have decided to take this training course! It results from many years of offering biblical counseling within different contexts – as a ministry of my local church, through my own small counseling business, and as the director of a nonprofit parachurch ministry. The Lord has led me to spend much of my ministry equipping others to minister to those in their spheres of influence. In this course, I give you a sort of 'mini-course' in biblical counseling that can also be called mentoring or One-Another care.

For our ministry purposes, we will use the terms:
"Care and Discipleship Mentoring"
This training will equip you to be a:
"Care and Discipleship Mentor"

As I have spent many hours counseling adults and teens, the majority of them Christians, I have observed that many would benefit from having someone to walk alongside them, support them, and help them grow spiritually while dealing biblically with life's circumstances. There is an appropriate time for some to engage in a formal counseling relationship with a trained and experienced counselor. However, there is also a great need for Christians to have more natural, less formal relationships with others who can apply the One-Anothers of Scripture to their lives. I am aware that the one thing that seems to hinder this kind of informal One-Another ministry is that people feel ill-equipped to be helpers, mentors, disciplers, etc. It is my desire that more Christians would step into these roles in the lives of those that God has placed in their spheres of influence. I hope that this training will give you clarity about your One-Another ministry.

This study aims to provide tools, knowledge, and insights into one's role in the lives of others. We will meet this goal by studying several One-Another verses and passages in Scripture, examining people in the Bible who exemplify excellent One-Another Care

ministry, learning how to practice One-Another Care ministry in our own lives, and offering hope to others through God's Word.

All believers are called to engage in some form of One-Another ministry. What is "One-Another" ministry? It is simply doing life together with other believers, whether in formal ministry or the context of your informal relationships. Walking alongside someone while reflecting Christ to them as you engage in a relationship. Some synonyms for One-Another Care ministry could be:

*Friendship *Discipleship *Mentoring *Care Ministry *Spiritual Friendship *Counseling *Soulcare *Spouse *Parenting *Serving *Helping *Youth Leader *Women's Ministry Leader *Sunday School Teacher *Mercy Ministry….and the list goes on!

Perhaps you see yourself on that list. If so, you are in the right place! I hope you are ready to commit to the process and stick with it until the end to be well equipped to do excellent One-Another ministry in your own life.

Please consider this one word from my heart to yours as you move through these lessons. *KINDNESS*. My heart for this One-Another ministry is that it would portray kindness to anyone you serve and care for. Suppose you are in a problematic One-Another relationship and feel frustrated, angry, and impatient; default to kindness rather than harshness. It is also kind to practice all of the One-Anothers, even the ones that don't sound kind at first glance. Even confronting someone about their sin is kind and can be done kindly. It is God's kindness that leads to repentance, and it is our kindness that He can use to reach another's heart. Be kind.

"For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

"No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need" (Ephesians 4:29).

I am committed to praying for you as you embark on this new journey with me, exploring God's will for your role in the lives of others. May God richly bless you for honoring Him as you study. May He be glorified!

Privileged to serve you,

Ellen

MORE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY IN ONE-ANOTHER CARE:

Before proceeding, read through the following information about confidentiality and privacy between you and the person you care for.

Information disclosed between you and someone you are meeting with should be confidential only as we believe the Bible or the State requires. Because this is considered discipleship, not professional licensed counseling, we are not bound by the same privacy laws. In certain circumstances, the Bible requires that facts be disclosed to selected others (Matt. 18:15- 20), typically a pastor, elder, or other appropriate support (such as family members.)

When engaging in Care and Discipleship Mentoring, if you believe something needs to be disclosed to others, do not do so without telling the person you will do so unless time is of the essence. Also, please give them the opportunity to participate in that disclosure when appropriate (with the exceptions stated below). Your church leadership can help you navigate these situations carefully; always contact them as well.

If someone discloses that they or their children are being abused, do not handle this on your own. For an adult, immediately call for local domestic violence assistance and follow their advice. For a child, call a child abuse hotline and follow their advice. Let your church leaders know that you have done this. It is helpful to keep these local agency numbers handy in your contacts. A quick Google search will give you that information.

Again, if someone is experiencing imminent danger from domestic violence, abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, or criminal behavior, safety is the #1 priority. Therefore, you must call on the authorities. Safety is always, always, always a PRIORITY.

If someone is in danger, threatening to harm themselves or someone else, call on authorities. A suicide threat is a hotline call, a 911 call, or an ER visit asap. Stay with the person until help comes. A homicide threat is a 911 call for police help. Let your church leaders know what is going on as soon as possible.

If you are unsure whether someone is in danger or if something should be reported, don't hesitate to get input from a counselor or church leader quickly, but do not allow this to prevent timely action. Often, time is of the essence. Call the authorities when in doubt. It is better to err on the side of safety, and it is never wrong to do so.

ALSO IMPORTANT: Another adult (or adults) should always be nearby while we are mentoring a minor. Never spend time with a minor mentee alone. You can create

spaces for private conversation with a youth even though other people are nearby. Do not meet behind closed doors where no one else can see you. A door with a window or a room with large accessible windows can work as long as other adults are nearby. If you believe someone is an exception to these guidelines, be discerning, seek advice, and always err on the side of safety.

Your Ideas and Thoughts About Care and Discipleship and One-Another Ministry

What are your thoughts about One-Another ministry as you enter into this training? Take a few moments to think about the following questions, designed to point your thinking towards the need for One-Another ministry in the body of Christ.

Whether you discuss this in a group setting or are doing this individually, these questions are for you to consider throughout the upcoming study.

NOTE: Although the term *mentor* is used here, it could be substituted for any other terms we defined earlier.

MENTORING SURVEY:

1. How would you define the term *mentor*? What feelings, thoughts, and opinions does it raise for you?

2. Do you have someone you consider a mentor in your life? If so, please briefly define your relationship with them.

3. Do you consider yourself a mentor in someone else's life? If so, please briefly define your relationship with them.

4. Do you have a desire to have a mentor yourself? Why or why not?

5. Do you have a desire to be a mentor to someone? Why or why not?

6. Do you generally feel well-equipped to mentor someone?

7. What keeps you from entering into a mentoring relationship with someone as their mentor?

8. What holds you back from entering into a mentoring relationship with someone as the mentee (the one being mentored)?

9. What are your greatest insecurities when helping people with spiritual and emotional health?

10. What qualities, gifts, and skills would you look for in a mentor in your own life?

11. What qualities would you look for in a potential mentee (someone you are walking alongside)?

12. What struggles do you have in your life that would benefit from having a mentor walk through it with you?

13. Among the people you know, what are their greatest struggles? (Examples: depression/insecurity/spiritual immaturity/etc.)

14. Regarding those struggles, how well do you think you do at helping these people in general?

15. Can you help with the Truths from God's Word that apply to their situations? Why or why not?

16. Is it difficult or relatively easy to be transparent with others? Do you use your testimony when walking alongside others? Why or why not?

Who will you mentor?

Wherever you serve, you will encounter lonely, suffering, and sinful people who need friendship and discipleship. Keep your eyes open and be willing to develop these relationships.

Think of Care and Discipleship Mentoring as an organic form of discipleship. You do not need a formal ministry to be a mentor. You can mentor wherever you relate to others by building relationships naturally.

If your church needs someone to mentor someone in need, you can volunteer more formally. There are no mentoring rules about who to mentor and how to connect with mentees—be open to all kinds of possibilities, and God will use your willingness.

God would not have put so many One-Another verses in Scripture if we were not meant to minister to one another in various ways! Over the coming weeks, we will examine this topic from various angles. Pray that we will be vessels for His purposes in the lives of others.

KEY DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTS, and TERMINOLOGY:

As we get started, it is important to be clear about specific terms used in this training and what we mean by those terms. These will come up repeatedly in our lessons in greater detail, but it is helpful to take a brief look at them now so that you begin to develop a 'one-another' mindset as a mentor.

What exactly is Care and Discipleship Mentoring? What do we mean by "One-Another Care?" What makes this stand apart from other forms of mentoring is the three main ways that a mentor helps someone who is struggling with sin or suffering:

1. We help them to target the heart
2. We help them to think biblically
3. We help them apply the gospel

One-Another Care is not secular psychology or theory. Secular, humanistic psychological theory begins with the premise that people are born inherently 'good' and that psychological help can tap into that good and focus on one's strengths. A biblical worldview is entirely different. The Bible says that we are born in sin and have no good in us.

There is nothing inherently "good" within any of us. Nothing in us could earn salvation, and we cannot become worthy of God's favor on our own. We deserve only God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3). We are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). But thanks to God, who chose to send His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus lived without sin, and His death on the cross paid the penalty we deserved.

Secular thinking may contain some truths, helpful observations, and overlap in common grace means of helping strugglers. It is possible to find some help there, but for a believer, the bible shows us an even better way. That is the way of applying the one-anothers while helping the struggler to apply the gospel to their situation, to think biblically, and to grow in knowledge and application of God's Word. This type of in-depth discipleship is not about "feeling better," "doing better," or being a "better version of yourself." It is not "self-improvement". There are no "5 steps to a happier life" in biblical mentoring.

It is about growing in Christlikeness. That requires heart change.
Heart change brings life change!

Care and Discipleship Mentoring adheres to the doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture. What does that mean? Here is a good explanation, taken from Truth In Love Biblical Counseling Center's statement on sufficiency:

Truth in Love Biblical Counseling

Statement on Sufficiency of Scripture

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone constitute God's breathed-out, inerrant, and infallible Word. Scripture stands as our full and final authority in all matters it addresses, providing complete sufficiency for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteous living, as Paul declares in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

The Bible contains all truth necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and thoroughly equips believers for every godly endeavor. As the Psalmist proclaims, God's Word is perfect, sure, and completely reliable, converting the soul and making us wise no matter our education or intellectual capacity (Psalm 19:7-9). This sufficiency means that Scripture, properly interpreted and applied in partnership with the Holy Spirit, is our foundational resource for biblical counseling and discipleship.

We maintain that God's Word effectively addresses the full range of human struggles, providing both the categories for understanding problems and the solutions for addressing them. The Bible speaks authoritatively to spiritual, emotional, and relational challenges, offering divine wisdom for life's complexities. As Hebrews 4:12 affirms, Scripture is living and active, piercing to and exposing the deepest parts of human nature and motivation.

Typical themes or topics of discussion in mentoring:

These concepts will be included in upcoming lessons in more depth, but as you consider developing mentoring relationships, it is essential to understand that struggling people need your help digging deeper into the heart. We will talk more about what this means in our next lesson, but for now, consider how equipped you believe that you are to discuss these kinds of things. This is not to discourage you! It is meant to whet your appetite for the lessons ahead:

Biblical decision making

Mental Health struggles with diagnoses such as bipolar, OCD, psychosis, etc.

Identity in Christ

Fear of Man

Indicatives and Imperatives in Scripture

God's promises that apply to you

Loss, grief, and lament

discontentment

Guilt and Shame

Emotions such as anger, fear, stress, insecurity, depression, anxiety, etc.

Discontentment

Sexual struggles (pornography, sexual identity, infidelity, etc.)

Financial struggles

Marriage issues

Relationship problems

Trauma

Abuse and oppression

Addictions

And more….

You are more equipped than you probably think you are on most of these topics, but a few might require finding further help for a mentee. Knowing your limits as a mentor in the more complex cases is important. We will talk about that in upcoming lessons. But – if you have your own testimony, a basic working knowledge of God's Word, and you have the Holy Spirit indwelling, there is plenty to discuss with a mentee, even if they also need deeper help elsewhere!

Start with what you know. First, be an encourager. Anyone with a bible can do that! Purpose to grow in knowledge and application, which is a life-long venture as a Christian. Sharing your own story can go a long way towards encouraging someone struggling to understand their own story, especially if they wonder where they fit into God's story. Encouraging someone, even if you aren't prepared to go deeper with them, is no small thing. Part of your role as a mentor is to help a mentee get more help if there are things you are unprepared to handle. You can remain an encourager while doing so! The more equipped you become, the less you will find yourself looking elsewhere for help with your mentees.

You can also learn and grow alongside your mentee. If a topic is outside your knowledge base, read through a recommended book together. The recommended resource list for this lesson includes a few books that cover some of the topics listed above. Ellen most commonly uses these books in her mentoring and counseling relationships, and they would be well worth exploring for yourself and your ministry.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES for your library:

Please go to ellencastillo.com and click on the resources page. You will see a list of recommendations for each lesson in this training. Updates and new resources are added continually, so this is a fluid listing and a resource for you in your ongoing ministry.

Ellen follows "the 80/20 principle" for resources.

So many resources are available to use these days, but not all are equal. It is rare to find one that you will 100% agree with, but that does not mean it is not a worthwhile resource to utilize! There are so many varying opinions on doctrine, theology, counseling methods, and philosophies of caring for others, and we will not likely ever agree with each other on these things. It is essential to agree on the 'spine issues' of

salvation and other orthodox Christian beliefs. In biblical counseling, it is important to agree on the doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture, although you might find varying ways of defining that, some more clear than others. It is less critical to agree on the 'rib issues' like baptism, version of the bible, utilizing common grace helps in counseling, etc.

As you read books, listen to podcasts, read articles or journals, keep the 80/20 principle in mind. That means that, generally, it is still valuable if a resource is 80% agreeable and 20% or less not agreeable to you. Ellen only recommends resources that fall into the 80% agreeable category (in her opinion). On the other hand, if a resource is only 20% agreeable and the rest is objectionable, she does not recommend or utilize it. These are generalizations, of course, and only a loose guideline to help you use discernment in books and other resources you choose to use in your ministry. It is unrealistic only to use 100% agreeable material – that would be very difficult to find! But if you grow your library with the 80/20 principle, you will have an excellent toolbelt for your ministry.

For Lesson One, resources are listed for you to consider adding to your library. These are more general, not topical, since we are just getting started. But some of them would be valuable to you right now if you wonder what to cover in a mentoring relationship you are involved in. The list will have new additions now and then, but for now, there is plenty there to get you started! Adding these to your library digitally or in hard copy will be worth the investment.

What is your story of how you landed here in this Care and Discipleship Mentor training?

My (Ellen's) journey into the world of Biblical Counseling happened over 20 years ago when I encountered Jesus's healing in my life in a fresh way. At the end of this lesson, I am including a (long version!) telling of my own story so that you know who I am, why I do this, and how my ministry came about. Please take a few minutes to read through it later, on your own, before you start Lesson Two. I hope that it will encourage you to know the heart behind this training a bit more.

If you wish to type out your extended version, feel free to do so, but that is not required, and we won't have time in our meetings to share these long version stories. The purpose of thinking it through is to take a pause, consider what God is calling you to, revisit His work in your own life before you embark on this new journey, and reflect with a grateful heart for how deeply He loves you and, therefore, those you are mentoring. You do not have to share it with anyone else (but I would love to read it if you are inclined to send it to me; no pressure!)

To know more about each other as we get started, some of you might be willing to tell the group a brief (short version, a couple of minutes is all we have time for) of what brings you here (time allowing). You could tell us something like: Why you are interested in this training? How did you end up interested in this type of ministry? Has The Lord worked in a personal way that led you to want to 'pay it forward' and help others, or are you here because someone suggested that you are gifted for it, or is there another reason you would like to be equipped to help others?

1 Peter 3:15: "But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

Once you have read this entire Lesson One, look for the pdf of Lesson Two on ellencastillo.com soon, and dig in!

Ellen's Story:

GETTING PERSONAL:

The following is a personal testimony by me, Ellen Castillo, the author of this course. It is written not to bring attention or any credit to myself but to give glory to God for how He has worked in my life. After several years of struggling with guilt and shame even after my salvation, He revealed that I was not applying the Gospel to my heart issues. This moment changed my walk with Him in a profound way, and it changed my life forever. I am so grateful. Your story may or may not be similar to mine, but we all have a story to tell. Part of mentoring (or any One-Another ministry) is to share your story with others. I share this story with you now so that I can "mentor" you with it. Sharing personal stories can sometimes be challenging, but it always bears fruit. God wastes nothing and redeems everything. He redeemed my past, and I am so thankful. He has, or will, do the same in your life for His glory, your good, and other people's good, too! Your story is what qualifies you to be a mentor. Here's mine:

NOTE: I wrote this several years ago, in 2012, and presented it in front of my church. Many details have changed since then, but the impact still holds!

Jesus is enough!

I could easily summarize this whole testimony in those three words: It is my privilege to share with you something God has done in my life in the past few years.

I once heard a comedienne say that when she was a young girl, she had heard Nicky Cruz give his powerful testimony about his life in drugs and gangs, and it was unlike anything she had ever heard before because it was so profound. At that time in her life, she had not experienced much that she thought was worthy of sharing in a testimony.

She then thought to herself, "When I grow up, I'm gonna get me a testimony." Then she said, "I did grow up and get a testimony, but it was not the one I wanted."

I could relate to that. As a young girl, life was relatively uneventful and pretty normal. I even remember thinking that bad things only happened to other people. There is not much of a testimony to mention about those years. But then, as an adult in my mid-20s, I did get a testimony, and much of it was not the one I would have wanted either.

After I graduated from college, I got married and began my career as an occupational therapist in psychiatric hospitals.

My entire worldview at that time was rooted in humanistic secular psychology. I was not a Christian at this time, and had the opinion that anyone who claimed any faith was just using it as a "crutch" and not taking control of their own life. I was all about thinking I was in control!

I fully believed that secular psychology held all the answers to life's problems. I think that the whole reason it appealed to me was because it was supposed to make you feel better about yourself, feel more comfortable with life, and just feel good in general. So I was not only all about thinking I was in control – I was also all about being comfortable!

The last thing I would have done back then is look for comfort from the God of All Comfort! I never thought that God could fill that void because I did not believe in Him. I even called myself an atheist. I felt that Christianity was, in my wording, stupid. I could never figure out how an intelligent person could believe in something that sounded like a fairy tale to me.

In 1981, we had our first baby. A problematic pregnancy resulted in what I felt at the time was like a nightmare. At two days old, our baby girl died in my arms. I used to believe that when a person died, they just ceased to exist. With that lack of hope, I had nothing to get me through the grief but to delve back into my psychological thinking that said, "You feel bad, so now you need to find ways to make yourself feel good."

I wanted to be comfortable, so I returned to my career in psychology and started trying to feel better. I did not feel better, but I could not admit that. Deep down, I had also started to feel guilty about our baby's death, wondering if an x-ray I had may have caused the genetic disorder she died from. There is no way we could ever prove or disprove that, but that thought was way too painful to face, and I could find nothing in psychology to make me feel better about that feeling of guilt.

So I did what many people do—shoved it down and refused to consider it. I went on like this for years!

After seven years of grieving the loss of that baby, some close friends of ours started to notice some very obvious changes in their lives. I couldn't help but notice that they had changed, and we started corresponding. I asked my friend Nancy what had made her change so drastically; she saw that as an opportunity to witness the love of Christ to me. He is the drastic change that had happened in her life!

Even though at the time I considered it a psychological problem to consider yourself a Christian, I found myself compelled to ask her questions about why she had changed so much. Her answers made me angry at first, and then I would re-read them and start to think maybe she was on to something that I needed.

Then I'd remind myself that being religious was just another symptom of a mental problem, and I'd again think she was just being stupid. Eventually, she shared a very clear gospel message with me, and as a result of those letters, I became a Christian. This was, by the way, to my total shock! But I suddenly wholly believed. That was in 1988.

Even though I had become a believer, I continued to hang on to much of my belief in secular psychology. I also continued to feel very guilty about our baby's death, and I think I even wanted to hide it from God somehow.

The remnants of my psychology-thinking said, "Take care of that one myself; don't give it to God. It's my problem, and I will find a way to handle it." I had no idea at the time how seriously that was holding me back as a Christian from genuinely enjoying God's grace.

On top of the guilt of the baby's death came some more years' worth of guilt that I kept shoving down, all as a result of my perceived failures as a mom. As more years passed and that mom-guilt (as I call it – you know how they say "guilt" is a mom's middle name) continued to get shoved down, we decided to adopt kids from the foster system.

We had not gotten pregnant for many years, and we had always wanted to do so. Within a couple of years, we added three adopted kids to our family, and then, as soon as we moved in the final adopted child, I got pregnant. Two years later, I was pregnant again. Yes, adoption can sometimes cure infertility!

By this time, I was a homeschooling mom with six kids and had this notion that I was now doing everything right as a Christian mom. We attended a church that reinforced the idea that it was essential to "do everything right," so I naively felt that there were some built-in guarantees that my kids would be solid in their faith as adults.

Looking back on that era, I think I believed deep down that my guilt feelings would be cured (or maybe just buried deep enough that they wouldn't bother me anymore) if I just did all the right things. That was my way of trying to take care of it myself—by doing good things to cover it all up. But that kept coming up empty, and I remained plagued by mom guilt.

My weak spot is my kids. If I ever revert to the mom guilt, it's when my kids are not doing well, even the ones who are now adults. I want to share a few things that are part of my current testimony, including how God has given me freedom from that mom guilt despite bad circumstances.

Having adopted older and special needs children brings with it some difficulties that I don't think we fully expected. We had to learn quickly that you don't just love the hurt out of them when a child's past is full of abuse of every kind.

As I write this, some of our adult children are not walking with the Lord. I will leave out any details so as not to betray their privacy. I will summarize it by saying that we have come up against some complicated and serious things that I never imagined I would face as a parent.

So, having alluded to some current, very heartbreaking, and challenging circumstances with my adult children, am I currently experiencing that mom guilt again? I can honestly say that I am not (although, at times, I have been tempted to slip back into that!)

Because of something God showed me a few years ago, I have learned that I can trust God in any circumstance. If I begin to revert to the mom guilt, it doesn't last long anymore because of what the Lord has taught me through these trials.

I remember several years ago, as I tried to deal with all that mom guilt, I came to the point of thinking, "I accepted God's forgiveness when I got saved, and I believe that He forgives me, so it must be that **I just need to forgive myself**."

It never occurred to me to determine whether I was even guilty! Of course, no parent is perfect, but the things that most bothered me and that I felt so guilty about weren't even really things that I was guilty of! But I didn't see it that way then.

I am not sure what it is about moms, but we often tend to take on guilt that is not ours to carry. We can confess, repent, and accept God's forgiveness if it is our guilt. If we feel guilty about something that we are not guilty of, how silly it is that we would carry that around, but we do.

I kept thinking I just needed to forgive myself (since I felt so guilty). I wanted to do that to feel better about how things turned out with our baby and later with our other kids. I worked at forgiving myself and worked on it some more, never being able to forgive myself or understand HOW to do that. I eventually took a particular Bible study that I thought would finally teach me HOW to forgive myself because I was feeling ready to move on from that.

In the Bible study I took, I read, " The concept of self-forgiveness is not anywhere to be found in Scripture. It simply is not a Biblical concept."

That was a hugely revealing moment. I suddenly realized that I had believed a *lie* that came straight out of secular psychological theory, not the Bible. I realized that I had tried to do God's job in my life for years by trying to forgive myself.

I always understood that Jesus forgives us because of the finished work on the cross. I never doubted that. I also understood that we are to extend that forgiveness to others. But I threw in this self-centered concept that I also needed to forgive myself.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." There is no SELF-forgiveness there – I AM forgiven, my sins were nailed to the cross, and that is enough! If I truly believe I am forgiven, that takes care of needing to forgive myself!

My children are sinners who need a Savior, just like you and me. My husband always says that we can't take all the credit for what our kids do right, so we also can't take all the blame for what our kids do wrong. This is easier said than done for a mom who is prone to mom guilt!

I have come to a much better place than wallowing in mom guilt. I have hope because I know that in my own life, Jesus is enough.

The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 gives me hope and encouragement. I know that God would graciously receive my children with open arms if they came to Him, just like the father in the parable.

My job is not to feel guilty about their choices ---- my job is to LOVE. And pray.

This self-forgiveness issue was just one of the ways in which my thinking was way off base as a Christian, but it was the most important one to get rid of because it tripped me up for years. I believe it stunted my growth until God set me free from that line of thinking.

To make sure I don't fall back into that kind of mindset, I have for the past few years been compelled to make sure that I am pressing into Jesus more than ever before as I enjoy doing in-depth study in the Word of God, having a meaty prayer life, and surrendering to a lifestyle of serving God.

I need these disciplines in my life, not because I have to do all the right things anymore – but because I know that when I am not seeking God faithfully, I am prone to wander. I sometimes struggle with seeking comfort from things other than Christ, even after I realize Christ died to set me free from such behavior. I am prone to avoiding God and trying to take control back into my own hands. I am prone to spiritual laziness and a weak study and prayer life.

God, in His Word, has SO met all my needs and given me all that comfort and all those answers I was looking for in all the wrong places. Learning to understand and present a clear Gospel and to apply the Gospel to my heart and life continually has deepened my walk with the Lord, and it has also opened many doors for One-Another ministry. As a result of that moment when I realized my thinking about "self-forgiveness" was not Biblical, I was launched into a new lifestyle of ministry as a Biblical Counselor. Sharing hope with other women, girls, and their families is something I never would have imagined I would do. As soon as I understood the Truth more clearly, I could not hold back and have felt compelled ever since to share that HOPE with others!

Because I've left my former "religion" of secular psychology behind, I have found a new place to look for comfort and for the answers to life's problems. It's called the Bible. The Truth of the Gospel has set me free; praise the Lord!

John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

We need to add nothing to it! Jesus IS enough!