

"Finally, a powerful practical resource giving Hope to understand what a Narcissist is and importantly what to do to create positive change. Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Hudson bring their expertise together to map out actual plans for creating a pathway of change, health and healing that was not believed to be possible. HOPE is possible for REAL change."

Dr. Gregory Jantz, Ph.D., Founder of The Center • A Place of HOPE, and Best-Selling Author of Healing Depression for Life



SO, YOU'VE BEEN
CALLED A NARCISSIST,

NOW
WHAT



DOING THE WORK TO END
PATTERNS OF NARCISSISTIC &
EMOTIONAL ABUSE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DR. DAVID B. HAWKINS & DR. JOHN HUDSON

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So, You've Been Called a Narcissist, Now What?

Doing the work to end patterns of narcissism and emotional abuse

Dr. David B. Hawkins
Dr. John Hudson



LEADING AUTHORITY IN
TREATMENT OF NARCISSISM
& EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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Prelude: *Dr. David B. Hawkins*

You've Been Called You a Narcissist, Now What?

What the....? I am not a Narcissist. I am the same person she married. I haven't changed. Why am I suddenly the bad guy? I'm sick of it.

She keeps throwing all these terms at me - narcissist, gaslighting, blame-shifting. Everything's about me. It's all about how bad I am, how I'm making her crazy. How about how she makes me feel? How about me feeling just as crazy?

I'd like to tell her what I'm feeling, but you can only imagine how that would land. It's all about her feelings, her sadness, her frustration, her anger. It's all about her, and if I try and stop her to tell her how I feel, she accuses me of not listening to her and having to be the one with the bigger hurt.

She says she can't live with me the way I am, and if I don't get help, she's done.

Sound familiar? I'm betting it does, because I talk to men everyday who feel this way. I'm Dr. David Hawkins, Director of The Marriage Recovery Center and Emotional Abuse Institute and the men I work with are totally confused, totally frustrated and they don't know how they got to where they are in their marriages. Their wives are reading books, watching videos and listening to podcasts about Narcissistic men, and now their wives are making demands for change.

Men tell me there are a boatload of books available to help women, but none to help them. In fact, so many men complain about the lack of material available for men, my colleague and co-author Dr, John Hudson and I decided to write this book.

Let's face facts. What you're doing isn't working. We get it. You're angry, hurt and very confused. Out of that confusion you say and do things that only make matters worse. We can help.

It's time to step back and consider the problem you're facing. It's time to assess your situation and make a solid plan that leads to change—change for the good.

Chapter One: *Dr. David B. Hawkins*

Taking a Step Back

So, why are you reading this book? Is it because your life is not working? Have you faced criticisms and ultimatums again and again, been accused of being selfish, narcissistic and emotionally abusive, and can't ignore these complaints any longer?

These complaints and criticisms haven't come from nowhere, of course. They have arisen from an issue known as narcissism, for which the simplest definition is profound selfishness. The complaints have more than likely arisen because of emotional abuse, which is a result of narcissism and profound selfishness and involves the devaluing of another person, over and over.

You've heard these terms and likely have some familiarity with them. We'll teach you more. We suspect you're reading this book because you and someone you care about are unhappy. You've ignored danger signs for

too long and now the spark has become a fire and the flames are hot.

I'm glad you're here.

The Need for Disruption

Being here and reading this material, as good as it is, is not enough though. you're ready for improvement, you must embrace change. Change requires disruption. Any time we change directions in our life it's because something isn't working. Our inner resistance to change becomes less than our desire to be different, or some force/person, external to us, has created a need for change.

You didn't pick up this book because your life was working but probably quite the opposite. It's not working. You're unhappy. Your mate is unhappy. In all likelihood your children are unhappy as well. You can no longer tune out the criticism.

However, beyond reading this book, you likely have mixed motives, with mixed feelings and mixed

thoughts. You want to change and grow on the one hand but have also found ways to be comfortable with the life you have on the other. You desperately want to cling to your old life while simultaneously wishing you could be different.

In the face of mixed feelings and mixed motives, it becomes difficult to chart a new course. Changing directions, after all, requires clarity---and you don't have that.

Danger Signs

Inviting change and embracing disruption requires clarity, which you don't have. Part of the reason you don't have clarity is because you've been ignoring danger signs. We've all ignored danger signs to our own detriment. We've looked at the warning signals on the dash of our car and hoped they would disappear. We've looked at our increased weight, perhaps increased blood pressure, and wished those danger signs didn't exist.

When it comes to issues pertaining to narcissism and emotional abuse, countless men have tried to silence

the outer challenges of their mate and the inner convictions of their conscience by saying:

“It can’t all be me.” (blame shifting)

“Do I really need to change?” (denial)

“Maybe she’ll back down.” (magical thinking)

“Is she really right?” (minimization)

The questions go on and on and your inner tug of war grows in intensity. The struggle intensifies between a desire to be different and the fight to keep life the same.

You’ve picked up this book because you’re losing your inner battle and it’s time for a shift of attitude. A complete turnaround. Anything short of that is going to fail.

Making the decision to change, to grow beyond narcissism and emotional abuse requires a change of mind and heart. Many men enter treatment with a profound need to change their minds. Coming to me angry, very frustrated and often feeling like a victim, they’ve tried fighting back, shifting the focus, deflecting topics and using many other manipulative tactics and

without exception, they've all failed. The more you fight back, the more you make matters worse.

Shifting Your Focus

In spite of matters growing worse, it is not unusual to tell ourselves that 'things are fine.' This is a rationalization to avoid facing issues. We all attempt to make sense of our lives, and we do so by twisting and distorting truth.

An example of this twisting of information involves what many men tell me when they begin treatment, or MRC's, The Core Men's Group.

"Dr. Hawkins. I'm a fixer. I want to solve this problem. If she would just tell me what to do, I'd do it. I'm a practical man and I solve problems every day. If she would be clearer with me, I would make any changes she wants."

"You're not the 'fixer' you say you are," I say. "It's a story you've told yourself again and again, but it's not true. If it were true, you would face problems, and we

wouldn't be sitting here now. You would lean into the problems that must be faced. You wouldn't make excuses, blame her, or play the victim or feel sorry for yourself.”

That usually causes a stir, because we are often deeply attached to the stories, we tell ourselves. But this is at the heart of what we all need to do; challenge our stories and recognize our inner battle between facing issues and ignoring them.

Consider this: Actually, fixing a problem takes a shift in focus, and a radical change of perspective. Fixing a problem requires an honest assessment of that problem and then a clear gameplan for solving it. Are you ready to do that?

Self-Deception

The stories we tell ourselves, over and over, are interwoven segments of truth and deception. We twist matters to fit the image we have of ourselves, usually distorted to create a favorable self-image.

Many delude themselves with the fantasy that they're facing issues head on, when that is simply not the case. Men come to us believing the following lies:

- "I'm really trying."
- "I'm doing all I can to solve these problems."
- "It's not all my fault."
- "I can't work any harder than I am now."
- "But it's a two-way street."
- "She has to work just as hard as I am."

Have you had any of these thoughts? Any one of these beliefs will keep you stuck. They are all ways of comforting yourself, so you don't feel inner anxiety. Yet, inner anxiety and discomfort are what is needed to shake things up. These thoughts may temporarily soothe your troubled feelings, but they won't help you move forward. You are deceiving yourself and unless you face this fact, you will never get anywhere. Remember, where you are requires disruption of the stories you are telling yourself.

Lost, One Step at a Time

No one sets out to be lost. We start with good intentions, but we easily become lost, one step at a time.

Airline pilots and navigators know the critical importance of staying on course. Remember that even being as little as one degree off course means winding up one mile off course sixty miles later.

This concept helps us understand how we can be well-intentioned, yet hopelessly lost. A small loss of direction can lead you to being hopelessly lost.

Therefore, course corrections need to be part of our daily life. We all must assume we are heading in the wrong direction, so we are open to correcting our course. Successful people make a habit of constant course-correction.

Can you see how you have veered off course? Men, serious about change, must recognize they might be way off course. Tempted to minimize the severity of their situation, they are prone to minimize concerns. Again, we are deceived by the stories we tell ourselves.

Course correction further requires that you set things straight. Any energy you spend focusing on anything other than YOU is wasted. Completed wasted. Any energy you spend not staring at anything other than your problems is wasted.

All wasted energy.

So, will you use your energy to get yourself back on the right track, or will you continue to veer off course? Will you focus on your mate, or will you maintain focus on the one person you can actually change—yourself.

Enabling Versus Intervention

Changing course requires disrupting your life---in other words, embracing an intervention. You must course-correct, stepping back and admitting there is a huge problem and you're the only one who can fix it.

We all need to step back, evaluate and determine if we are expending energy to make necessary changes, or if we are actually using our energies to maintain a certain course.

Enabling is anything you do that maintains the direction you're heading. These may be very subtle decisions. It's important for you to reflect upon all the decisions and actions you regularly take that maintain life exactly as it is.

Any time you focus on others rather than yourself you're enabling a destructive process. You are enabling your current life every time you minimize the harmful effects of your actions. You are enabling every time you distract yourself from the process of change.

Intervention, on the other hand, involves insisting on change. Intervention involves disrupting the status quo. Intervention involves putting your energies into changing direction.

Before changing directions, you need to acknowledge that you've been heading in the wrong direction and make the decision to head in a new direction. You may not be totally ready for a radical change and so interim steps may be helpful, such as reading good literature, attending church, or therapy.

These are ways to begin the process of intervention in your life direction.

Another aspect of intervention involves a shift in focus, away from selfish pursuits and onto others in your world—especially your mate. You must shift your focus to the truth of her concerns, your reactions to her concerns, ways to respond to her concerns, and ways to deal with the deeper truths of the issue. First, however, let's look into the life of a man who needs to change.

Jake and the 2-Way Street

Jake is typical of the men who come to the Marriage Recovery Center. Middle aged and satisfied in most areas of his life. It has been easy for him to ignore the danger signs of her growing unhappiness and increased complaints.

Sure, his wife had pulled away from him physically, but he rationalized that this was something hormonal with her. She had voiced complaints about him for

several years, but he had skillfully shifted the blame back to her.

Her complaints, however, far from lessening, had grown louder. Now she's threatening separation and while he had previously disregarded her concerns, he could no longer ignore them.

Resentful, angry, feeling cornered, Jake had a bad attitude. He arrived defensive, irritated and ready to talk about everything but himself.

I braced myself for what I've experienced so many times—a man who uses his energies in all the wrong ways, digging a hole deeper and deeper---enabling a destructive course. I readied myself for a man unlikely to face his issues, refusing an intervention.

“How can I help?” I asked at our initial meeting.

Jake was somber, appearing depressed and irritable. “My wife says I have to get counseling, or she is going to leave me,” he said.

“Okay,” I said. “What has led up to this, Jake?”

“She’s making mountains out of molehills,” he said. “My pastor says the same thing. He knows both of us and can’t understand why it has reached this point.”

“She must have a reason for making such a threat,” I said.

“Look,” he said sharply, “I know I’m not perfect, but she has no reason to ask me to leave. I’m not leaving my wife and kids.”

Jake went on to share that his wife’s threat was incredibly irritating.

“Think about it like this, Jake,” I said. “Even if I supported you, even if I believed everything you told me and sided with you, where would that leave you? I would be enabling you to stay the same, and that won’t help you. Why don’t we dig deeper into this and learn what has gotten her so upset.”

“I don’t think you’ve got the full picture,” he said. “She moved into a separate bedroom. She’s threatening to kick me out if I don’t get help from you, experts in narcissism and emotional abuse.”

“I’d like to hear more about her complaints,” I said.

“She says I’m dismissive and arrogant,” he said. Jake paused.

“I don’t think I’m any different from my friends,” he said, “probably no different than you. I think my wife is trying to blame me. If that’s what she needs to do to look herself in the mirror, so be it.”

“Is there any truth in what she says?” I asked.

“She says I’m controlling. She says I demand my way. I just don’t see it.”

“Are these complaints new?” I asked, hoping to create a crack in his defensive armor.

“Not hardly,” he answered sarcastically. “She’s dragged me to counselor after counselor, for a long time, and I go. She is usually the one to stop going because she doesn’t get her way. Who’s the controlling one?”

“It may be that she is screaming to be heard, Jake,” I said. “You’re not a bad man, but if even some of what she complains about is true, if there is anything to her

complaint that you can be arrogant, selfish and controlling, why not work on that?”

Railing Against Feedback

Jake is very typical of other men in our program—defensive, resistive and not very forthcoming. He sees everything his wife does as wrong but sees none of his character weaknesses. He tried to convince me that his wife was wrong. He protested, squirmed and wiggled to dismiss information he didn't like. His inner struggle was palpable.

We've all been where Jake is. We've all heard information that went against how we see ourselves. We've all gotten a bad report card and wondered how it could possibly happen. It is at these moments that we have a decision to make: do we dismiss the feedback, or do we embrace it? Do we lean into the information, being curious about why someone might be critical of us, or do we fight it?

Many men seeking help from The Marriage Recovery Center enter treatment rigid, narrow-minded

and argumentative. It is no wonder their wives insist they see “*experts*” for treatment. These men are typically challenging, and in some instances, nearly impossible to work with.

This can be confusing to those who don’t understand emotional abuse because on the surface these men can appear charming. They know when and where to show their aggression, often striving to make a positive impression. They may be leaders in their communities and churches. The perception of these men being selfish and narcissistic clashes with how these men behave in other arenas of their life.

But then I remember what Lundy Bancroft, an expert in the field of narcissism and emotional abuse, said.

“The abuser,” Bancroft says, “can have significant relationships in his life in which he isn’t abusive—as long as it’s not his partner relationship or child in the home. His connection to siblings, to close friends, to employers or employees, can be pretty normal. That’s part of the hell for the abused woman.”

Ah, so there it is. While none of what his mate says fits his view of himself, he can actually be one person to everyone else, and quite another to her.

But how is he able to maintain such contradicting points of view? One word—denial. How are you able to maintain the belief that it's not you she is talking about? Denial! You've decided it's her and so you twist and distort information to fit your story. Something is bugging her, and she's put the blame on you. You're able to come up with twenty explanations for why she's unhappy with you---none of them having to do with legitimate concerns.

Still, her frustrations have grown more intense. The more you fight her, the more depressed she gets. The more you try to get her to back down, the more she backs away. You can't seem to make matters better, and again wonder why you both see things so different.

While you can continue to fight her allegations, you cannot fight the fact that your marriage is faltering. Sputtering really. There's no getting around the fact that she is miserable with you.

Furthermore, her accusations are sticking to you. They are festering. You've tried not to let them get to you, but without luck. They DO get to you, and you don't like it.

Now there is really only one path forward. You must go on a deep journey, well beyond her accusations and your angry response. You must focus on the truth of her concerns, your reactions to her concerns, ways to respond to her concerns, and ways to deal with the deeper truths of the issue.

Doubt Yourself

It's easy to take Jake's side. He can tell a convincing story of how he's been wronged. Some of it may even be true. If we don't align with him, we might still be tempted to remain neutral. After all, 'it takes two to tango' doesn't it?

Well, not always.

His story requires the listener to dig deeper into his situation. Any listener needs to evaluate how he is talking

about his situation. Does he own up to his specific contributions to his marriage issues just as quickly as he points out his wife's actions?

Regardless of who is at fault for what, Jake must face the fact that his wife is ready for a separation if he doesn't more fully accept his part in their problems. It's not a two-way street, at least not now. It's a one-way street, and he better recognize that sooner rather than later.

For Jake to hold fast to his point of view, or for you to do the same, is a certain dead-end. Think about it. While any of us can sit back smugly and cling to our beliefs, to do so leads only to one place---being alone. A wise person once said, "You can be right or be in relationship, not both. Choose wisely."

So, what is the path forward? The path out of any relational mess is a path of doubting yourself. Oh, I know that the world sells self-confidence, a "you can do it" mentality, but all that bravado has its limits. A surer path involves exploring who you are in contrast to her complaints.

So, let's take another look at Jake. Let's examine his approach. He is strong-minded, sure of himself and quite intense. He wants to have control of his life.

But let's read between the lines. Can you imagine trying to counsel him? Sure, mindedness can easily blur into resistance. Firmness can slip into rigidity. Clarity can lead to narrow thinking. Can you see where Jake could become lost in his own point of view?

Imagine being married to Jake. In just a few minutes of sitting with him I sensed his dominance, his forcefulness. I couldn't help wondering how his wife felt when she tried telling him something he didn't want to hear.

No doubt I was seeing the situation long after the problem began, but could it be that his wife began by asking him to be careful about being dismissive? Is it possible that she has felt unheard, dismissed, perhaps even invisible for a long time? Did she really start out insisting he see "a narcissist expert?" Not likely.

Jake wanted everything to be a “two-way street.” Jake wanted to focus on his concerns, not his wife’s. Jake is wrong. His insistence on matters being a “two-way street” led only to him being stuck. His focusing on his wife’s issues led only to him *not* focusing on his own.

Why do I say Jake is wrong? Because, at this point it’s *not* a two-way street. Remember, it can become a two-way street in time, but not now. Now, it’s a one-way street—it’s about Jake opening his mind, letting go of his pride and exploring why his wife is adamant about him needing to change.

More Self-Doubt

Self-doubt means opening your mind, being teachable. Self-doubt can be such a healthy perspective because it creates a window to our inner world, where self-confidence cheats us.

There is a tool we use with men that will become invaluable to you as you begin this book: *first thought wrong*. What do I mean by ‘first thought wrong?’ I mean you must step back and reconsider everything you think. It

means not only must you step back to reevaluate, but you must doubt much of what you believe. I want you to assume that your thinking is off.

After all, if you don't need to check your attitude, if you don't need to 'course correct,' why are you here? It's because your first thought may very well be wrong, and you need to be open to new information. Learning only takes place when we take the role of a student. We must cultivate an openness every time we want to learn something new. This shouldn't be too surprising to hear since learning occurs with an open and receptive attitude.

Dr. Hudson and I have found that most men struggling with narcissistic tendencies struggle with close-mindedness. Their certainty has become rigidity. Their sureness has become denial and self-centeredness. If you are going to learn from your mate, understanding why she has used the 'narcissist' label, you must be willing to consider points of view that might be offensive to you. You must consider 'first thought wrong' and doubt yourself, recognizing you need a coach. Openness and receptivity lead to growth and the possibility of change.

Embracing Her Concerns

Jake's resistance and argumentativeness is not unusual, and it certainly doesn't mean he can't be helped. With backs against the wall and feeling threatened, many men become oppositional. They rigidly attach to old ways of viewing themselves. Instead of embracing self-doubt, and "first thought wrong," they hold to their outdated and distorted self-concept---not a recipe for change.

What is the recipe for change? We recommend taking a critical look at her accusations, sitting with them and actually embracing them. You must thoroughly explore the accusations and concerns she has brought to you. The only way around the thorny question of narcissism is *through it*.

The only reasonable path forward is a radically different approach. This will take some getting used to. Giving up ground won't come easily. We recommend the following steps:

1. *Stop protesting, defending, arguing.* This isn't rocket science. What do you gain by fighting, arguing,

counterattacking? Nothing. You only make matters worse. When you argue, defend, protest, you actually add fuel to her fire. You essentially ‘make her case.’

2. *Consider her concerns.* Why has she called you a narcissist? The label is simply a shortened way of explaining a more complex idea. What does she mean? What are her concerns? She deserves to be heard and fully understood, right? So, find out what she means.

Is she really saying that you’re selfish? Is she saying you’re bull-headed? Is she saying you are domineering and controlling? Is she saying you are insensitive? This is a time to question yourself and ask more questions of her.

3. *Remind yourself that she’s trying to get your attention.* Why? Because she wants a relationship with you. If she didn’t care about you and the marriage she would simply walk away. She is trying to get your attention. She’s not calling names to simply insult you. No, she wants your attention and is likely desperately seeking change.

Let’s get something straight. You can silence your mate with defensiveness—for sure. You can blame shift,

deny, stonewall, pout, erupt in anger, minimize your actions, all in an effort to silence her, but the problem will not, absolutely will not, go away. Calling you a narcissist is simply her way of describing an attitude or behavior that needs attention.

4. *Embrace, lean into her concerns.* Since you can't MAKE the problem go away, why not lean into it. Since denial, dismissal, domination only makes matters far worse, why not do the brave thing and lean in. Face the music. Sit with your discomfort and embrace her criticisms and concerns.

Whether you are, or not a narcissist is another matter. What is likely true is that you have some traits that are concerning enough to make her call you one. So, step up, lean in and embrace her concerns. Tell her you are ready to get down to business. Enough avoidance. Enough defensiveness. It's time to 'man up' and listen to her.

Finally, *do the work.* Ah, now we get to the subtitle of this book: doing the work to end narcissism and emotional abuse.

Someone smarter than me said this: naming the problem is half the problem solved. So true. Once we name an issue, we can get on with the task of solving the issue. All energy used to deny the problem is not only wasted energy, but makes matters worse, prolonging the problem.

Ten Simple Questions

I hope you are beginning to self-reflect and embrace her concerns. We want to help you get unstuck, to get beyond any labels and embrace specific concerns. We want you to let go of pride and defensiveness and get on with the spirit of collaboration—working together to solve a problem.

If you're still struggling, here are a few questions to consider. Please answer 'true or false' to each question **as your mate would likely answer them**. Bear in mind, each of these items is a starting place for even more robust conversations.

1. My opinions, feelings and choices are not respected or heard.

2. I do not feel safe in bringing concerns to you.
When I do, I am met with either aggression or stonewalling.
3. I can never talk about issues without you becoming extremely defensive and angry. I am rarely able to resolve issues.
4. I feel discouraged, worthless, voiceless and invisible in the relationship.
5. I sense that you care very little about my likes, dislikes, values, hopes and desires.
6. I feel like I am always walking on eggshells.
7. I often feel anxious when around you.
8. I have little desire to celebrate and enjoy you.
9. I feel chronic stress, fatigue, insomnia and pain.
10. Because of my overall unhappiness, I have strongly considered leaving the relationship.

What did you discover? Did you notice some trends and patterns? We want you to discover patterns, themes in your relationships. You see, any concern that

your mate has raised has, in all likelihood, been raised many times before. Pay attention.

Stumbling Blocks to an Open Mind

Another potential stumbling block to listening with an open mind concerns the issue of **overt abuse** versus **covert abuse**--- **overt abuse** is actions seen by anyone when they occur. The actions of **covert abuse** are more subtle, often going unnoticed by anyone other than the victim.

An example of overt abuse would be when a man reacts angrily, vents profanity and walks out of the room. That same man may also abuse covertly, or passively, by withdrawing into silence and pouting when things don't go the way he wanted.

Most men deny any overt abuse, and therefore can't understand how they might be labeled abusive. They justify their actions by thinking, "I have never hit her," or "I have never screamed at her." Yet, they are abusive.

It is critical to fully understand the distinction between overt and covert narcissism. Overt narcissists

stand out! We see their flamboyant or aggressive antics. They are typically loud, obnoxious, antagonistic and aggressive. We SEE their actions. We HEAR their voice. We can all point to that individual and say, “There goes a narcissist!”

But make no mistake, covert actions, repeated again and again, are very damaging and take a tremendous toll.

Harm in the Shadows

It’s important for you to see, and acknowledge, harm that is done quietly and in the shadows of daily life. Much emotional abuse takes place where others cannot see it, or if they see the bad behavior, many are reluctant to label it abuse.

Imagine having a broken arm. Now imagine that your family ignores your requests to be careful around you and your broken arm. They bump into it again and again, each time saying they are sorry.

Soon you become irritable. You accuse them of being insensitive, while they complain that you are being

too sensitive. They bump into your arm again and again, aggravating not only your arm but your mood as well. A small matter quickly becomes larger and more significant.

Let's bring the matter closer to home. Take the example of the man who withdraws into silence when offended. He doesn't do that with his friends, of course, but he does it with his wife. What is the impact on his wife who feels his distance time and again?

Most don't consider this abuse, but it is. Any harmful pattern inflicted again and again has the possibility of being abusive. In fact, emotional abuse has been called 'the silent epidemic' because neither victim nor perpetrator talk openly about it.

In all likelihood you have spent years trying to convince her that your actions were not so bad. You have spent years invalidating her experience, creating confusion in her mind. So, can you really blame her for not speaking out?

Remember she still loves you. She desperately wants to make the marriage work. She wants to believe you. You're not all bad and she knows that. So, she is

very confused and is probably asking herself some of the same questions you're asking yourself.

So, we must all join forces to bring the emotional abuse out of the shadows and into the light where we can talk openly about them and make good decisions about how to move forward. That will be the only way to save the relationship.

Owning and ending harm is certainly a major part of what must occur. However, even more is needed to make progress. Real progress involves letting go of your old mindset, which was filled with denial and blaming others, and taking full responsibility for healing. This is a recovery mindset.

A Recovery Mindset

A powerful way to begin making changes is to step back, take a new direction and embrace a recovery mindset. Did you know that there is a recovery mindset? It's true. People who embrace recovery have a different mindset to recovery than those who do not. I'll explain.

It is well-known that a person's mindset sets the stage for their recovery, whether we are talking about an upcoming surgery, a dental procedure, recovery from an addiction or, in this instance, recovery from being a perpetrator of emotional abuse.

Take these real examples:

Paul entered treatment for emotional abuse telling me everything was his wife's fault. He accused her of exaggerating his actions, just like Jake. He was angry, easily ruffled, dismissive and questioned why he was even in our Core Men's Group.

"I'll make no bones about it. I'm here because she's holding our marriage over my head. She said she would leave me if I didn't do the group, so I'm here."

"What do you hope to get out of the group?" I asked.

"I don't have any hopes for the group," he said. "I'm doing it to get her off my back."

There was silence in the group.

"Paul," I said, "if you can't find a better reason for being here, you're not likely to get much from this

experience. I encourage you to think about her concerns and what you might have to learn.”

“He’s voicing some of my same feelings,” Stan said. “I don’t really feel like I’m free to choose the group or not.”

Another man, Jeffrey, spoke next.

“I’ve been where Paul’s at,” Jeffrey began. “I’m not saying I’m any better than he is. My wife also said I had to join this group, but I’ve thought about why she is insistent about it, and I’ve decided she has good reason. I’ve been impossible to live with my wife insisting I come to this group, is just the latest in her efforts to get me to see how difficult I’ve been. I’ve created this situation and now it’s time for me to step up and face the issues.”

“Your attitude is refreshing, Jeffrey,” I said. “You’re absolutely right about your wife. Women don’t insist on change because they want to be controlling. They have been asking for change for a long time and most of you haven’t been listening. This group is an opportunity to really listen.”

I paused, looking at the other men in the group.

“You all have a decision to make,” I continued.
“Do you cop an attitude, fighting your mate all the way? If you do, you squander an opportunity and make matters far worse. Or do you embrace her concerns?”

I sat quietly with the men as they considered my words.

Imagine being Paul’s wife. She has asked him, again and again, to get help. Because he has been abusive, she has begged him to get professional help. Because of becoming easily annoyed and resistant, he’s not only resisted counseling, but has blame shifted all their problems onto her. He has insisted that everyone else needs to change!

Now, imagine this goes on day after day, month after month, year after year. I can assure you that this kind of dominance would wears anyone down. This rigidity, this lack of resilience and cooperation, this stubbornness, IS emotionally abusive.

Changing Your Mind/ Changing Your Heart

It is one thing to decide to be different, which every man in the group says they want to do. However, the ones who really succeed in changing make a heartfelt commitment to change. They have a change of heart as well as a change of mind. This will not be easy. You will need to critically examine who you are and what you believe. You will need to really dive into examining your heart.

Scripture says, “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good things stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” (Matthew 12: 34-40)

Now, there is really nothing revolutionary about this. Consider again Paul, Stan and Jeffrey. All three spoke what was stored up in their hearts. Everything that spilled out in group had undoubtedly been previously heard by their mates.

This is such a critical concept: We broadcast our very integrity, our personhood, to everyone, all the time. We might keep our mouths shut sometimes, but again, “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of,” and so we can discern a lot about a person by the attitudes they convey.

Can I say for sure that Paul is emotionally abusive? No. But, has he broadcast the kind of person he is? Has he revealed to us what is in his heart? Yes. Does his wife *feel* his resentment? For sure.

This is part of the reason we promote ‘depth counseling’ to men. We don’t want superficial change. We want to hold up a giant mirror and invite men to explore what is hidden in their hearts.

Thankfully, each of these men’s attitudes and actions can be changed. Men who really want to change, can. Men who recognize and own their dismissive, defensive and dominant attitudes can, with focus and clear intentions, change and grow. But this takes deliberate effort.

A Decision to Embrace Growth

Every day we face and make multiple decisions. Will we get up a bit earlier to work out or will we sleep in? Will we choose healthy options for lunch, or do we go for a quick and less healthy meal? Will we spend any time in prayer and reflection, or will we scurry through the day?

Every decision brings certain consequences. Every decision propels our life in a particular direction. Your life, however, it is going, is exactly that way you've designed it to be.

So, think about it. Take a moment and reflect upon where you live, how you live and with whom you live. Each is the result of choices made earlier in your life. Your life situation is largely the result of choices you have made, some good and others perhaps not so good.

In the same way, today you face the opportunity to embrace change and growth. Like Paul, you have the choice to blame others for your situation and remain an angry victim. You can rehearse that you've gotten a bad

rap, that you're suffering from unfortunate circumstances. Your choices will then be very limited.

Or, like Jeffrey, you can understand and accept that you are exactly where you've chosen to be and can now make better, healthier choices. Today can be a new beginning.

So, with that goal in mind, let's get on with it. Every chapter is designed to challenge you, question you, enlighten you and give you a new path forward.