



Module Three



Module 3: Your True Self

Learning Points:

- What is the true self?
- Why your vocation won't fulfill you
- Identify your subconscious paradigms
- Distinguish "normal" vs. excessive anxiety
- Re-wire your false paradigms for true ones



Video 1

Learning points:

- Why your vocation won't fulfill you
- Vocational readiness evaluation
- Identify untrue paradigms

A Necessary Preamble

Welcome back! I hope you're ready to dive deep again, as we did in module 2. In the last module we covered some of the background work for making decisions: articulating our concept of how we see God, forming a deeper relationship with him, learning to talk to him, and learning to trust him. In this module, that background work continues. This time it's background work on ourselves. We're continuing to form that Eternal "Who am I?" which will in turn direct the Temporal "What will I do?"

What we'll do in this next module is the fruit of many years of my own personal background work to understand God and to understand myself. I'm sharing all of that with you in the five weeks of this course, but I want you to know that's it's taken me years. I've found that just about anything worth doing takes a long time, including forming yourself and healing from wounds. St. Teresa of Avila, author of the Interior Castle, said, "Self-knowledge is so important that, even if you were raised right up to the heavens, I should like you never to relax your cultivation of it."

You may find as we go that this module raises awareness in you of a need for healing that may take months or years and involve professional help. If you do feel like you uncover something that goes beyond the scope of True North and is an uncomfortable problem, I want you to know that it's still a good thing. Any time you can become more self-aware and gain self-knowledge, you're making progress, even if that means uncovering a long road to healing. It has to get messier before it gets easier, but it's all progress. As they say, "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't."

Remember, denial it won't help anyone...especially your future spouse, religious order you join, coworkers, children...basically anyone who's important to you in every future decision. Whether you're too hard on yourself or too easy on yourself, or both, pursuing truth and honesty about yourself will always pay off in the long run.

Your Vocation Won't Fulfill You

Let's dive into Module three. I'm going to tell you something that will sound incredibly depressing: Motherhood and marriage don't fulfill me. Was I born to do them? Yes. Do I love my husband and children? Unquestioningly. Do I have a lot of joy and fun and happiness in my life? You bet! Would I trade my life for anyone else's? Absolutely not. BUT they do not fulfill me. And here's why:

My vocation doesn't exist to serve me: I exist to serve it. This is so backwards from what our culture teaches us, which is narcissism. And that leads us to the North Star Quote for today: My purpose on this earth, that informs all my decisions, is to give myself away. In his Easter homily 2020, Pope Francis said *"Life is a gift we receive only when we give ourselves away, and our deepest joy comes from saying yes to love, without ifs and buts. As Jesus did for us."*

When I was engaged, all the pictures at bridal shops and online portrayed the bride almost like a princess. There was so much thrown at me about how to get the perfect dress and the perfect reception. Yes, it was one of the most beautiful and joyful days of my life, but that had nothing to do with me being a princess and people catering to me. And that wedding and reception lasted only *one* day. It flew by in a flash. The question is, are you ready for what comes after? To serve without counting the cost? In Matthew 10:8, Jesus instructs his disciples: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."

One of the foremost examples in my life of agape, or sacrificial love, happened at my wedding reception. Instead of tossing a garter, my husband John washed my feet in imitation of how Christ washed his disciples' feet the night before he died for them. Anything and everything you do now that forms a strong character and is selfless, is a priceless gift to your future self.

I look back at my times doing mission work and any time I took a small opportunity to be compassionate or helpful or invest in my relationship with God, and I can see that it directly benefits my husband and children now. I've still had to grow into motherhood and learning to sacrifice for my husband, but I can see the fruits of that background work. Conversely, I look back at the time I wasted, the times I was selfish or overly self-critical, and I see that it was dead time I could have used to better myself.

The True Self

And here, keeping all that in mind, let's pivot to the concept of the True Self. Imagine the best, most virtuous version of yourself. Think for a moment, "What would I do? How would I be?" Pause this video and write down five ways that your most virtuous, best self would be.

What did you write down? I imagined myself being eminently patient and kind at all times to my children. I imagined myself handling traffic jams with relaxation, letting the rude people just roll off my back. I imagined myself joyfully dropping off baskets of food at elderly people's homes. I imagined myself waking up in the morning with calm and saying loving things to my husband before I had my coffee. Basically, I imagined myself as a giving, selfless, compassionate, kind person who's always thinking about other people and handling conflict with grace.

That's definitely not always reality! But there's an amazing body of work about this concept called The True Self. Psychologists have been studying this concept in many different studies since about 1960. The True Self is a belief held by people across generations and cultures that people really are the best version of themselves. The True Self everyone believes in is the one in which you actually are that best version of yourself you just imagined. When you're impatient, angry, rude, or unkind, scientists found that people believe you're betraying the True Self that you really are. You're acting inauthentically. Fake.

The studies have been unable to prove whether or not the True Self *actually exists*; what is has proven is that everyone *thinks* that it exists. As a Christian, I think it's amazing that this belief in the True Self beautifully complements my belief that each of us as a child of God, made in his image. At our core, at our deepest level, we are good. As a Christian I've learned that sin and evil don't exist in and of themselves; they are a privation of a good that should be there. Again, this is supported by the True Self theory. When you sin, you're betraying your True Self.

Here's a description of the True Self, written by Dr. Charles Whitfield in his book, *Healing the Child Within*. *"True Self accepts ourselves and others. It feels, whether the feelings may be joyful or painful. And it expresses those feelings. Our Real Self accepts our feelings without judgment and fear, and allows them to exist as a valid way of assessing and appreciating life's events. Our Child Within is expressive, assertive, and creative. It can be childlike in the highest, most mature, and evolved sense of the word. It needs to play and to have fun. And yet it is vulnerable, perhaps because it is so open and trusting. It surrenders to itself, to others and ultimately to the universe. And yet it is powerful in the true sense of power."*

Remember in Mt 19 how Jesus said, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these?" That sounds exactly like Dr. Whitfield's description. We know that we're called to be childlike in our love, trust, and vulnerability in our relationship with God.

True Self Assessment

I'm not a mental health professional, but I know firsthand how important it is to heal the wounds that have taken us away from childlike trust in God. Many of us have wounds that need to be healed and we'll be working to identify those areas. As we established in Module one, we are responsible for putting in our own contribution to our growth. Today we have a worksheet with attributes of the true self written by Dr. Charles Whitfield. No one will see this sheet but you, so write honestly on it! You'll rate yourself as to where you stand now.

Please note that it's important not to judge your actions on feelings: *behaving* generously is not the same thing as *feeling* generous. You'll notice as you go that many of the areas that are contrary to the True Self are sins. Some people don't believe in sin; they think you can explain away every bad choice as understandable. I do believe in free will and sin and ultimately the goal is to eradicate sinful habits. But for this module we're taking a softer approach because we're trying to understand what's behind those sins. So, be compassionate toward yourself as you take this honest assessment.

Our God is a God who judges justly, and yes, we will be accountable for our sins. But God is also patient with us, and we should also be that way with ourselves. As you rate yourself and examine your greatest areas of struggle, look at yourself with compassion. That way, healing can begin. Your struggles may come in large part from wounds or trauma in your past.

In the next few videos, we're going to look at exposing those areas that need to be healed, which is why it's important not to skip this True Self worksheet. If you're using this course to determine your vocation, I've also included an optional Vocational Readiness checklist. Please note it is designed NOT to make you feel bad about yourself, but rather to aid you to see where you need to grow.

No person will achieve perfection in this life. You are never finished. Say aloud to yourself, "I am never finished." God accepts you where you are. You are striving and growing and God can bring you to your future vocation before you get everything together perfectly. He did that for me and for every other person on the planet. The goal here, again, is to become aware of where you need to grow. The Vocational Readiness checklist contains items that are all in your control. And remember, when you work in your circle of control, it expands.

As you do today's worksheets, surrender each part of yourself to the Lord by praying the surrender prayer again. He truly can make all things new, including your biggest struggles and insufficiencies. In the next video we'll take a look at subconscious belief systems that can hold us back from our True Selves. So, get on your worksheets for today, and I'll see you in the next video.



Video 2

Learning Points:

- Examined vs. unexamined beliefs (paradigms)
- Identify paradigms you have about yourself
- Your true identity as beloved and adopted

Hello and welcome back! I hope that yesterday's worksheets were a true reality check for you, but not too hard to swallow. I also hope you were able to find peace in releasing it to God in the prayer of surrender.

True vs. Untrue Beliefs

If you really invested yourself in yesterday's worksheets you likely noticed that some frequent pain points came up. The stresses and sins and struggles that always seem to come up over and over again that you just can't seem to kick. I'm no stranger to those habitual stresses. They often come from untrue belief systems that are adopted without questioning.

I can tell you any number of beliefs I have: I believe that God is sovereign, that the best grocery store is Trader Joes, that the best latte flavor is pumpkin spice...you name it! I arrived at those beliefs through examination: I tried different lattes and grocery stores before I decided which was the best according to my tastes. I studied and examined my faith in preschool all the way through college.

I'd like to think that all my beliefs are that reasonable and that all my beliefs are true. However, that's sadly not the case. A little seed was planted in my mind when I was young, and I don't exactly know how, but I know it took root and grew. Some of the people I most loved and admired were very self-critical. They would talk badly about themselves and compare how they looked and how successful they were to other people.

I was so young I didn't know that that was messed up to talk to yourself that way. So that's how I talked to myself for years. The underlying belief I adopted with all this negative self-talk was that I wasn't lovable for my own sake. I was lovable only if I was thin enough and successful enough. I thought my True Self, my actual identity, was never good enough.

That's a huge set-up for failure, right? I went into the very competitive world of musical theater where you experience rejection 98% of the time. And even if you enter a field with less rejection, you're never, ever going to be everyone's cup of tea. You're going to find rejection many, many times in life. I never questioned my deeply-held belief that I wasn't enough. It underpinned everything I did and informed my actions, but I didn't even know to question it.

Effects of Untrue Paradigms

Remember from Module one how the WHO (the Eternal) informs the WHAT (the Temporal)? My concept of WHO I am was wounded and at odds with reality. Therefore, the fruit of that, my actions, were highly unhealthy. They betrayed the reality of my identity. I became obsessed with dieting, exercise, and weight loss and spiraled into an eating disorder after a choreographer told me I was too big to get cast in her show.

Everything became about controlling my weight. Why? Because it was the measure of whether or not I was lovable, according to my paradigm. I was so hard on myself because I wasn't seeing myself in truth. And I know so many men and women who are hard on themselves for how they look. The devil in particular loves to use women's beauty against them- he tries to get us to compare ourselves to each other so that we'll always be found insufficient.

That untrue paradigm continued for years. It was insanity. In that time, I wrote down everything I ate every day, and I had a minimum quota of two hours every day that I had to exercise. I had all these rules about what were the "good" foods, and what were forbidden. I cut out whole food groups because they were tantamount to evil in my belief system. And meanwhile, the scale was my God. If I'd gained a pound, I'd tell myself I was fat and ugly and that no one would ever love me. I thought that those negative, critical voices were truth. The deeper part of me knew that that wasn't right, but I had built these walls and letting them down would expose me to the possibility that I might get fat...and that would be the absolute worst thing in the world, according to my belief system then.

And here's where we circle back into our theme of this Course, which is making life choices: With my paradigms being what they were, my whole brain space was occupied with my calorie intake and output. I couldn't be present to people. St. Paul identifies in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is patient and kind- basically, my obsession inhibited my ability to love! I couldn't give myself away, which is my true purpose here on this earth. My mind was under the influence of the devil's lies (untrue paradigms) that robbed me of growth, vulnerability, real relationship, and happiness.

Maybe you haven't been through something so extreme yourself. Maybe you're going through something just as severe as I did, but your struggle is different. Or maybe you have stress from untrue paradigms but they haven't manifested in something as severe as an eating disorder like I had. Perhaps it's stress over criticism on social media, or feeling a heaviness every day and wishing you were someone else, or something different. Perhaps it's a feeling of being lost and never fitting in. Maybe you ghost people when you get too close because some part of you believes relationships don't work out. Maybe you struggle with pornography because a deeper part of you doesn't feel accepted. In our fallen world, there are a million reasons we can adopt behaviors that hold us back from the people God is calling us to be.

Fully healing those wounds goes far beyond the scope of this course, but if you can identify them then that's an excellent start. Awareness and putting a name on the areas that need to be exposed to the light is a HUGE first step. As I mentioned, I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but I encourage you to seek professional help if you identify areas of chronic dysfunction or stress. I wish I had gone to counseling back when I had an eating disorder, but at the time I

thought it was just for suicidal or crazy people. That is completely untrue! Later I went to counseling when I was experiencing postpartum depression, and I WISH I had gotten out of my own way and just gone earlier. Just as you would go to a doctor if your body is sick, so you also should go to a doctor for your mental health.

You can dismiss your deeply-held paradigms as trivial, but they aren't. They influence your actions every minute. When I'm feeling insecure, I'm much more likely to snap at my kids or shut down. The reason is because that underlying stress eats up my capacity to be patient and present. And that keeps me from making my life a gift as I'm called to do. The goal is to be whole so that you can give of yourself...something that is the work of a lifetime, but also completely worth starting now.

Your Identity

Fortunately, untrue paradigms are exactly that: untrue. Here's the most beautiful, hopeful thing I could tell you today (or ever): Once I began to actually study my faith and read the Bible and know what God was saying about me, his grace stepped in and showed me the truth that had been there all along. The Truth (with a capital T) is that all those terrible lies were exactly that: lies. The truth was that I'd been good all along. Specifically, the verse that began to lift me out of my dysfunctional relationship was Song of Songs, 4:9: *"You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride, with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace."* Another beautiful verse that I love is from Isaiah 62:4: *"For the Lord delights in you and will claim you as his bride."*

Those words were like light breaking through the clouds in my heart, and I finally saw that I am meant to see myself in relationship to my creator, not in relationship to what the world says about me. I was able to regard my body as good, not as something to be constantly restricted and punished. I can't wait to share more on that process, and how you can do it too, in the next video.

I find that that orphan spirit, that poverty of feeling like I was never enough, needs to be healed over and over again. This is why each of us should pray every single day. And sometimes it's wisest also to seek professional help in conjunction with prayer. In the last module we dove into seeing God in the truth of who he is. In this module we're striving to see ourselves in the light of who we truly are. We find ourselves by first understanding how God sees us: Unique, unrepeatable, beloved, found, wanted, desired, and gifted with talents and a mission no one else has.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis wrote these beautiful words: *Christus Vivit: "Young people, beloved of the Lord, how valuable must you be if you were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! Dear young people, "you are priceless! You are not up for sale! Please, do not let yourselves be bought. Do not let yourselves be seduced. Do not let yourselves be enslaved by forms of ideological colonization that put ideas in your heads, with the result that you end up becoming slaves, addicts, failures in life. You are priceless. You must repeat this always: I am not up for sale; I do not have a price. I am free! Fall in love with this freedom, which is what Jesus offers"*.

And it's from that place of security that we make our very best choices. When I'm in poverty of spirit, I find myself grasping at whatever I can get, comparing myself to others, making choices out of reaction to others, becoming self-critical or paralyzed with anxiety.

On the other hand, the true spirit we are meant to have is a spirit of adoption, as St. Paul calls it in Romans 8. In that spirit we cry "Abba, Father!" We can call on God and know he will answer. And pay attention, cos it's time for today's North Star Quote: Knowing who we are to God means we can take risks, live joyfully, follow God bravely, give generously, and work on our missions free of the burden of anxiety or fear.

Tomorrow, I'll walk you through an effective process to help grow and cultivate that spirit of abundance and adoption. Today, your worksheet will help you identify those areas in which you have a poverty of spirit or in which your wounds are causing hurtful actions. You'll also do a journaling exercise to try to grow an awareness of where that orphan spirit comes from.



Video 3

Learning points:

- How the brain develops negative thought patterns
- A practical method to master a healthy mindset
- Four more strategies to support and sustain a truthful self-image

Sustaining Truthful Self-Image

Welcome back to Video three! Yesterday I shared my story of the limiting mindset that kept me entrapped in stress and self-hatred for much of my teens and twenties. Then I shared the realization that I arrived at wherein I began to be able to see myself as good. While the beautiful mountaintop moments of realization were a total grace and helped accelerate my healing, those negative trains of thought and negative self-talk were hard-wired in and it took months to recalibrate my thoughts.

Remember in Module one we established that some things are in our control and others aren't? The "mountaintop moments" where I was given bible verses by friends that helped begin the healing were a gift; I received them but had no control over them. God is eager to give us those moments.

Master a Healthy Mindset

But there's another aspect to healing too: the part that's in our circle of control, and as a heads-up this part takes much more effort and is much slower. BUT once you master it, your mind will be disciplined and you'll find your control has expanded. You'll be able to break through walls in other areas of your life, not just self-image. It's a game-changer.

Even if you're not experiencing an eating disorder, severe depression, an anxiety disorder, or something else that causes a constant mental burden, you can benefit from this mental training. I think that anyone who's on social media needs this! Studies are showing that social media use contributes to feelings of unhappiness, unhealthy comparison, and anxiety. If you feel stuck in your discernment and that uncertainty begins to turn into self-critical thoughts, this method is a great help for that too.

This method came to me through a good friend who kindly gave me a book called *My Stroke of Insight* by Jill Bolte Taylor. Jill was a neuroscientist who suffered a stroke in her mid-thirties that caused her to lose the left side of her brain in a matter of hours. Now, in case you aren't familiar with the two sides of the brain here's a quick anatomy lesson. The right side of our brain is the creative, artistic side. It's the part that plays in a childlike way, is imaginative and appreciative. The left side is the analytical side, the part that can count and sort.

You've heard the expression "train of thought," right? Well, it's true. The brain runs in circuits of thought. When you "board" a train of thought, you strengthen that circuit. The more you think

it, the more quickly your brain jumps to that way of thinking. That's why I had become addicted to thinking of myself as bad or lacking. If I had a bad audition one day back in my acting days, I would walk home and I could feel that familiar train of thought roaring up to the figurative station. The thought was, "See, there's more proof that you're not good enough. You'll never make it. You're defeated already. You're an embarrassment." That's a horribly heavy load to carry around. The more you think the thought, the quicker the train pulls up at the station, until it becomes nearly impossible NOT to think the untrue, self-limiting thoughts.

Back to Jill and her stroke. When she lost the left side of her brain, those negative circuits she had built up over her thirty-something years went with it. She no longer carried the negative self-talk and was able to see the world as with the eyes of a child: to appreciate herself, the gift of life, the beauty of everything, and just be in love with the world. She couldn't speak or write any more, but over time she rebuilt the left side of her brain. And now she has given a TED talk and written a book about her experience. She just refused to allow those negative trains of thought to regrow.

Most of us won't experience a stroke that handily erases the negative thought patterns, but we can still erase the negative thought patterns regardless. I don't know how I would do it without my faith, but with our faith we have an amazing starting point: we belong to God. He's created us and adopted us into his family.

My method of learning to break-down the negative circuits of thought and re-wire my brain goes like this:

1. Recognize when an untrue, negative train of thought is pulling up to the so-called "station" and demanding attention. It brings feelings of stress, tension, and a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. Awareness is key!
2. DON'T get on the train. Press pause in your brain and stop what you're doing.
3. Surrender the thought to God. Ask him to come and save you. For me, I realized that I didn't have the power to banish the thought on my own. Just as in Alcoholics Anonymous how they surrender to a higher power, our negative thought patterns are addictive and we need to be rescued from them. When you surrender, it does 2 things:
 - a. It gives God an opportunity to prove his love for you, which he is so happy to do,
 - b. It strengthens your trust in him which will grow your trust in every other area.

When I asked God to help me, he did. Every single time. I need to be delivered from evil over and over. I'll say it again, because it's today's North Star Quote: When you ask God to help you, he will every single time. We need to be delivered from evil over and over. I didn't do it perfectly all the time; sometimes I'd start thinking the untrue thoughts without realizing it, or I didn't surrender it quick enough and started to spiral down into depression. But the key thing is not to become discouraged. Each and every time you refuse to step on the negative train of thought, you weaken that circuit of thought. Eventually your brain becomes literally re-wired; the circuits re-form into new ones.

It took me about six months before negative trains of thought were no longer my default. But I began to see results in a few weeks. As I've grown and entered my vocation and become a mother and encountered new challenges, I've had to return to this method over and over again. It was by far the hardest the first time, so just know that once you've established healthy patterns of thought, maintaining them is much, much easier. But tending the garden of your mind is work that's never completely done.

Other Ways to Support a Healthy Mindset

Before I leave you in this video, there are a few things to note about taking this mental practice into your daily life:

1. Coupled with this re-train your brain method, it's equally important to replace those negative thought patterns with truth. This is where all the prayer methods we learned in Module 2 come in handy. Reading scripture is a particularly effective way for me of discovering and reinforcing who I am to God and what he wants to do for me. Developing intimacy in prayer with him helps not just to break down negative patterns of thought, but it replaces them with truth.
2. As I've said previously, this is not intended as a substitute for professional help. If you are feeling anxious on a daily basis, please seek out professional help.
3. You should not seek to heal on your own. Gather your posse of people you trust around you. I know it can be difficult to find a network nowadays. I hear all the time from people who feel they don't have enough friends. If you feel you don't have enough of a support network, ask the Holy Spirit to bring you friends. When he does, don't stay in your shell-go talk to them! I've moved a billion times in my life as a military brat and traveling actress. When I was a brand-new mom I moved to a place where I knew absolutely no one. My husband worked evenings, so I couldn't go out. I wrestled with feeling unpopular for a few months, and then finally went to adoration and just said, "Holy Spirit, you made me this way and you know what I need. Please bring me the friends you want me to have." Later that same day, I went to a playroom and saw a mom wearing a miraculous medal. (Don't you love some good God swag?) I introduced myself, and it turns out she was the organizer of a whole group of Catholic moms who were looking for someone to host their group. It was perfect because I was stuck at home every evening anyway, so I was happy to host. In a matter of hours God brought me literally a dozen new friends- I just had to ask in simple trust and ask.
4. It's also important to ask ourselves what triggers negative thoughts. Some things we can't shield ourselves against, but there are things we can. Going off social media or unfollowing others' accounts is a totally valid choice. Unsubscribe from magazines or email lists that bring you down. Move apartments, if you need to, to get out of a bad situation! Your habits, lifestyle, and how you spend your time are in your circle of control, and your mental health is of primary importance.

And that brings us to the end of Module three. Congratulations on making it this far! All the hard work you've done is a gift to your future self and everyone important to you. Well done!

Review

- In the first video we discussed the True Self theory that people universally believe in: that everyone is good and moral. When you behave immorally or do evil, you're betraying your true self. If you are using this course to discern your vocation, you self-assessed your readiness to identify what areas need preparation.
- In the second video, we discussed paradigms, which are belief systems that we adopt without questioning that are deeply embedded in our brains. We looked at our true identity as children of God and strategies to adopt and develop that paradigm.
- In the third video, I shared my testimony of breaking down negative thought patterns and gave a practical method for re-wiring your brain for truth.

Before we leave this module, I want to check in about that action plan you formed back in Module one. How is it going? How much closer are you to your goal of being able to decide between your A or B option? Sometimes taking action is the hardest part, so I want to give you a loving kick in the pants to get moving if you haven't yet. You have nothing to lose and a whole world of good things to gain when you take action on your discernment. Today's worksheet mostly consists of applying the method we learned to re-train your brain, but there's also a space for re-focusing and re-committing to your action plan, so be sure you don't skip that.

Module 4 is going to be a lot of fun: We'll be examining our desires and how they fit in with God's plan for us. Can't wait to see you there!