

Connecting with His Outrageous Love

GOD



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By Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Dennis Stokes, with Christine Weddle

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER FLOW	7
GETTING STARTED	9
GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUPS	9
CHAPTER 1 INITIATING LOVE: WHO MAKES THE FIRST MOVE?	11
CHAPTER 2 LONGING FOR LOVE: DO I DESERVE IT?	29
CHAPTER 3 BEING ADOPTED: WHERE DO I BELONG?	49
CHAPTER 4 LOVING GOD: DO I EVEN LIKE HIM?	67
CHAPTER 5 LISTENING TO GOD: DOES HE SPEAK?	83
CHAPTER 6 SPEAKING TO GOD: DOES HE LISTEN?	101
CHAPTER 7 DETERMINING WHAT'S TRUE: HOW CAN I KNOW?	117
CHAPTER 8 BECOMING CONVINCED: WHO CAN I TRUST?	133
CHAPTER 9 THE HOLY SPIRIT: WHO IS HE IN ME?	149
CHAPTER 10 WORSHIPPING GOD: DOES IT REACH BEYOND MUSIC?	167
CELEBRATING YOUR GROUP	183
WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?	185
SERIES OVERVIEW	187
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	189



INTRODUCTION

The world you live in is filled with dreadful perils and exciting opportunities. It's a thrilling and scary time to be alive. Advances in technology have given us things that our great-grandparents couldn't have even imagined: altering the DNA in the food supply, telescopes peering almost to the edge of the universe, the Internet, and much more. And yet weapons of mass destruction, pandemics, pollution, and terrorism have heightened the risk of our time on earth. It's not safe!

Now here's the good news: Amid this dizzying pace and horrific potential for disaster, there is still hope — and it's found in Jesus.

CHAPTER FLOW

Think of your time spent in each chapter as a mini journey — an exploratory trip into a significant topic on your way toward authentic spiritual transformation through Jesus.

Most chapters in each module have the following sections where you will “pause” your heart and mind along the way.

A SHORT STORY

Each is based on real life experiences.

PAUSE 1: EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

This section encourages you to look at the Bible to see what God has said. We'll print out most of the verses for you, from a variety of Bible translations. But nothing beats reading your own Bible to make you comfortable in God's Word. You'll be reading the *New International Version* (NIV), unless we say otherwise. Sometime we use *The Message* (MSG), *The New Living Translation* (NLT), *The Living Bible* (TLB), the *King James Version* (KJV), or *The Amplified Bible* (AMP). As you move from chapter to chapter, you will gradually try different approaches to studying, processing, and applying these passages.

PAUSE 2: EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

Our information-driven society makes it easy to walk away from profound truth without considering what it really says about us. This section helps you identify where you are in terms of the topic, and how you got there. You will also explore what it might take for you to become more like Jesus.

PAUSE 3: COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Our “What’s-in-it-for-me?” culture often promotes self-centeredness and shallowness in our relationships. This section will help you examine biblical principles for knowing and relating to God and others with authenticity, honesty, humility, and love.

PAUSE 4: JOURNEYING FORWARD

Being connected with Jesus as your default lifestyle means learning to trust Him with what’s true about you — all the way, every day. This section invites you to process and write out what you are learning as you live in Him, as well as what you’re doing about what you are learning. We strongly encourage you to memorize the key verse provided for each chapter as a way of building this vital spiritual discipline into your journey.

DIGGING DEEPER

Like the photo album you make after a trip, in this optional section you can pause to recap and process the highlights of your experience so far. We’ll give you a few “extras” if you want to explore and experience the topic of the chapter more deeply.

IMAGES

In each chapter we’ve included pictures and artwork to help you reflect on the topics. They are there to stimulate your imagination and heart when words fall short. Take time to gaze at the images and place yourself within these visual stories. If a photo disturbs you, that’s okay; try to figure out why.

YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH EACH CHAPTER

For each chapter, expect to devote about an hour to personal preparation — more if you choose to do the optional “Digging Deeper” section. So pace yourself. You might try working a little at a time on a chapter — say, one section a day or twenty minutes a day — or take a longer time of concentrated reflection. Find a rhythm that fits you best. Your group may want to consider discussing one chapter per session or dividing up the chapter and discussing it in two sessions.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

We’ve provided a leader’s guide that can be downloaded at www.NavPress.com. Search for the ISBN or book title.

GETTING STARTED

To get the most from your study, we encourage you to do three simple things:

1. Read the verses meditatively, inviting the Holy Spirit to help you unpack what He wants you to understand from each verse. We've printed most passages from the New International Version (NIV) but occasionally quote from other translations for a fresh rendering. You may want to use your own Bible for any or all verses in this study.
2. Mark the verses to help you engage as you read. Be creative! Underline, draw circles or arrows →, highlight, use colored pencils — whatever will help you process as you go.
3. Pray throughout your study, not just when you see a prayer-oriented question. Ask the Lord to shed light on what you're studying and to help you connect what you read to the realities in your life.

GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUPS

1. Confidentiality: Do not repeat anything said or heard inside the group to anyone outside the group. Refraining from gossip builds trust.
2. Safety: Respect each other's boundaries. Also accept each other's perceived realities without needing to comment or "fix" how someone feels or sees things at the moment. Nobody should feel forced to share anything that they prefer to keep private. Providing each other space and supportive care will promote safety.
3. "I" Statements: Be yourself; take off your masks. Share information only about yourself — not "we, they, or us."
4. Interference: Avoid giving advice, talking while someone else is sharing, or subtly competing by saying, "I'm just like you" or by sharing a similar story. Instead, listen attentively, learn from each other's life experiences, and offer brief and affirming feedback.
5. Individuality: Accept and enjoy the diversity in your group, including being at very different places on your spiritual journeys. Allow everyone (but don't force anyone) to discover areas of need or brokenness. Avoid probing or intrusive questioning, as well as tampering with or elaborating on each other's personal sharing.
6. Emotional Sharing: Expect and allow each other to experience a full range of emotion, even if this makes you uncomfortable. This might include crying, raising their voice, or being silent. When this happens, avoid interrupting, communicating that another's feelings are unacceptable or "bad." And don't touch or hug without

permission. Allow for times of quiet in your group because silence can be one of the most powerful healing environments.

7. Roadblocks and Obstacles: It is important to allow people to process their thoughts and feelings without needing to come to clear resolution. It is also normal to experience obstacles and setbacks. Remember that being stuck can be a catalyst for members to move forward. Trust the process!
8. Holy Spirit: Only God can perform the healing and growth needed in our hearts. The purpose of the group is to provide a place where the support, love, and acceptance of God can be modeled and felt and where the truth of God can be discovered and embraced.
9. Personal Responsibility: Recognize that true lifechange can occur only with God's help as we yield to His leading. The group can provide accountability through prayer and support.
10. Group Limits: Don't expect your group to provide therapy, counseling, or other in-depth one-to-one support for members. Know when to refer each other to someone outside your group who is better equipped to help.

BENEFITS OF HEALTHY GROUP PROCESS

1. A safe place to share vulnerably and honestly.
2. New relationships.
3. An opportunity to be listened to in an accepting and grace-filled environment.
4. A forum for embracing truth, gaining perspective, and growing spiritually at your own pace.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION: After reading these guidelines together, discuss these questions in the group:

Knowing myself, here are several practical things I will do to help make our group a safe place:

-
-
-

In a small group these specific things can make me feel unsafe:

-
-
-

Take time to pray together before you begin this journey.

CHAPTER 1

INITIATING LOVE: WHO MAKES THE FIRST MOVE?



It happened on a crowded sidewalk in Madras, India. The vibrant singing of the street-preaching team captured the attention of a university student. The man who addressed the crowd was talking about “meeting Jesus Christ.”

How can you meet a person who’s been dead for 2,000 years? thought the young intellectual.

As if he’d heard the young man thinking, the street preacher said, “He is not dead. He is alive. You will know He is alive when you meet Him. He will release you from the relentless struggle with guilt, shame, and the pursuit of perfection. He will enter your life, and there will be measurable, day-by-day transformation in your life. By these results you will know that He is alive.”

Curiously drawn by the idea of a risen Jesus, the young man protested, “But I am not a believer. I do not go to church like you do. I am a Hindu.”

“I was a Hindu before I met Him,” the street preacher replied. “What He did for one Hindu, He will do for another.”

So kneeling there on the crowded sidewalk, my roommate, Shankar, made his first approach to Jesus.

Shankar decided that if all that was claimed about Jesus is true, then he must meet Him. But he also decided that if Jesus did not bring about a measurable change in him, he would reject Jesus, as he had rejected 360 million Hindu gods already.

When Shankar returned to our room on the day of this experience, he did not tell me about it. He wanted to verify the transformation — to find out if what resulted from the encounter was real enough to be seen by someone who was not expecting a change.

During the next week, I saw a difference in Shankar. He seemed free from bondage to habitual sins. “You are changed!” I observed, expressing surprise.

*"You see it?" Shankar asked.
"Yes."
"It must be Jesus!"
"What are you talking about?" I asked.
"I met Him. I met Jesus!"
Shankar led me to Jesus.¹*

Jesus is ready to meet anyone . . . and everyone . . . at any time. In fact, He always takes the first steps. He comes to us because He loves us and longs to do us good. Meeting Jesus transforms our lives if we accept the invitation to embrace Jesus' initiative of love and respond to Him.



¹ Samuel Kamaleson, "And Then the End Will Come," *Pray!*, January/February 1998.

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

SOME SUGGESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED: When you see questions in this module, like the ones here, give yourself time to reflect and go wherever they take you. Then write your thoughts and responses to each question. Your group won't discuss every single question. But it helps if you've given each question some thought. When you come to Scripture passages in this series, just s-l-o-w d-o-w-n. Take time to "chew" on the verses, which is the root meaning of "meditation." Please mark up this book! Circle key words. Underline or use a highlighter on key phrases. Fill the margins with your questions, comments, doodling — whatever you want. Also feel free to read from your own Bible and mark it up, too. Ready to give it a try?



When you consider Jesus, what images come to mind?

Some people think Jesus has been just plain dead for almost 2,000 years. Others imagine Him alive somewhere in heaven — or else somewhere in between, like the "undead." Consider these verses:

HEBREWS 7:23-25. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

At this point, how confident are you that Jesus is alive? Why?

Consider these passages and write down your observations about Jesus' initiative of love to you.

JOHN 3:16-18. For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. (NLT)

JOHN 3:19-21. This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is. (MSG)

According to these verses, how have people historically responded to Jesus' initiative of love? What response do you think God longs for?

In JOHN 15 Jesus is saying good-bye to His beloved friends just before His death. As you pause to read these verses, highlight any connections you see between God's love for us and our love for others.

JOHN 15:9-17. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants,

because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

If God has initiated love to you and to all those around you, how might this perspective affect your relationships with others? (Consider your friends, relatives, or families — or even someone who has wronged you.)

God notices you. The fact is he can't take his eyes off of you. However badly you think of yourself, God is crazy about you. God is in love with you. Some of us even fear that someday we'll do something so bad that he won't notice us anymore. Well, let me tell you, God loves you completely. And he knew us at our worst before he ever began to love us at all. And in the love of God there are no degrees, there is only love.

— RICH MULLINS

ROMANS 5:1-11. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

A CREATIVE IDEA

READ ROMANS 5:1-11 again, and this time think about doodling, drawing, and diagramming to respond to what you're reading. Here are a couple of samples on how you could get creative with the key ideas in Romans 5:1-11.

ROMANS 5:1-2. Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

MADE TOTALLY RIGHT BEFORE GOD

- ➔ Peace with God
- ➔ Access to God's Grace
- ➔ Hope of Glory

ROMANS 5:3-6. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. (NLT)



How does it make you feel to realize that God loved you dearly before you even gave Him a thought?

Can you look back on your life and see fingerprints, no matter how small, of how God was expressing His love to you personally?

Isaiah was a prophet of God who wrote to the nation of Israel during a time (approximately 700 BC) when they were going downhill morally and spiritually and were being threatened by the brutal Assyrian Empire. The Israelites thought their sufferings proved that God didn't love them anymore. But they were wrong about God's intentions. These are God's passionate words to them in the midst of their struggle. Jot down your impressions of His words — or draw them — in the margin.

ISAIAH 43:1-4.

But now, God's Message,

the God who made you in the first place, Jacob,

the One who got you started, Israel:

"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you.

I've called your name. You're mine.

When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you.

When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.

When you're between a rock and a hard place,

it won't be a dead end —

Because I am God, your personal God,

the Holy of Israel, your Savior.

I paid a huge price for you:

all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in!

That's how much you mean to me!

That's how much I love you!

I'd sell off the whole world to get you back,

trade the creation just for you." (MSG)

Now try reading Isaiah 43:1-4 again — out loud this time. Personalize God’s words by putting your own name in the verse or saying “me” and “my” wherever you see an underlined word. Consider saying it more than once — yell it, whisper it — as many times as it takes to get it inside of you.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17.

*The LORD you God is with you,
he is mighty to save.*

*He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.*

In the space below, write back to God whatever your heart feels, or simply talk to Him about it.



PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

So here we are, confronted with God's initiative of love to us. Reflect on and respond to at least one of the following questions. You will see lots of questions that could technically be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Be willing to go on and explain your answer a little too.

Do you honestly believe God likes you — not just loves you because He feels obligated to, but truly likes you?



What are your personal responses to God's initiative of love (maybe excitement, distrust, fear, numbness, joy, suspicion, shame)?

How difficult or easy is it for you to receive love from someone? Identify any of these "love blocks" you are aware of.

- I don't trust that you mean it.
- What's in it for me?
- Unresolved wounds from the past make me hesitate.
- I know I don't deserve it.
- I fear what you'll expect from me.
- If you really knew what I'm like, you wouldn't offer me love.
- I don't want to get too close or too committed.
- Other? _____

How difficult or easy is it for you to receive Jesus' love? Consider if any of these "love blocks" stand in the way of your accepting Jesus' love.



If you get convinced from the top of your cap to the soles of your slip-ons that your (Abba) loves, cares, and yes! LIKES you, you'll start experiencing a calm and tender compassion for yourself that changes — well, everything.

— BRENNAN MANNING AND JIM HANCOCK, *POSERS, FAKERS, AND WANNABES*

PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Walking with Jesus means — among other things — talking with Him and listening to what He has to say. It's connecting and interacting from His heart to yours and back again. It's pondering His words and the intentions of His heart like they really mean something to you. It's responding to His many expressions of love with your own expressions of "I love You, too, Lord."

One of many practical ways to respond to Jesus' love is to listen to what He has said in the Bible. An effective means of doing this is to memorize a verse or passage of Scripture so you can think about its meaning over a period of time.

Nobody is advocating memorizing Bible verses to impress anyone or to win some prize. But it's an amazing way to give God a new kind of vocabulary to speak into your life.



What — if anything — would motivate you to take the time to memorize one verse each week or two while you're working through this study?

In each chapter you will be given a suggested verse to memorize that captures the essence of the topic. At the back of the book is a list of all verses (see page 186).

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD'S LOVE

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

*The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.*

*He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.*

I know of no other single practice in the Believer's life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. That's right. No other single discipline is more useful and rewarding than this. No other spiritual exercise pays greater dividends than this! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your counseling will be in demand. Your attitude and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.

— CHUCK SWINDOLL, *GROWING STRONG IN THE SEASONS OF LIFE*

HELPFUL “HOW-TO-MEMORIZE” HINTS

Let’s memorize Zephaniah 3:17 right now. Not just paraphrase it, but memorize it word for word. When you’re memorizing a new verse, it really helps to repeat it one phrase at a time before adding the next phrase. Research shows that repeating out loud instead of silently helps you memorize more accurately and remember longer.

1. Start by saying the topic, the reference, and the first phrase out loud 2–3 times. As you memorize, think what it means to have God actually “with you” everywhere you go. Say:

“God’s Love . . . Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you . . .”

2. When you can do that word perfectly, add the next phrase. Say it out loud 2–3 more times until you feel confident you have it. Say:

“God’s Love . . . Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you,

he is mighty to save . . .”

3. Then add the third phrase. Repeat topic + reference + first three phrases out loud several times. It may take you 4–6 times to feel confident. Don’t rush! Meditate on the awesome truth that God “delights in you” as you say:

“God’s Love . . . Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you,

he is mighty to save.

He will take great delight in you . . .”

4. Add the next phrase. Meditate on each phrase as you repeat it out loud several times:

“God’s Love . . . Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you,

he is mighty to save.

He will take great delight in you,

he will quiet you with his love . . .”

5. Finally add the last phrase, and the reference again. Repeat the whole thing (topic + reference + verse + reference) several times until you feel confident that you have it memorized accurately. The keys to actually remembering it days later are: phrase-by-phrase, out loud, slowly, meditating, repetition. Say:

“God’s Love . . . Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is with you,

he is mighty to save.

*He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.
Zephaniah 3:17"*

6. Test your accuracy by writing the verse out from memory. Don't stop until you have it down word for word.
7. Then review the verse several times every day throughout the week. Also, if you are in a group, you all might want to review the verse together out loud when you meet.

The purpose of memorizing key verses of Scripture isn't just to remember the words; it's to experience God through the truth revealed by the words.

God has expressed His love to you in more ways than you can count. Practice responding in the space below by writing a prayer back to God, saying in return how you think or feel about Him — and His love.



PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

It's your life . . . it's your journey. So that means it's up to you how you respond to the ideas in this chapter. Pause 4 in every chapter will be like this one — completely open-ended to invite you to zero in on whatever specifically touched you most. Or whatever disturbed you the most. Whatever that is, grab on to it — don't gloss over it! During this final Pause, revisit that verse and respond to one or more of the reflective questions. Then pray about what step you should take to "walk as Jesus did" in the coming week.

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

At the end of every chapter we'll invite you to select one verse or passage that you read, studied, listened to, or memorized during the week that was meaningful to you. Begin by copying the verse and its reference below so you'll be able to find it later.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Then you'll be invited to select one or more of these reflective questions and journal your response. The point is not to answer all of the questions but to help focus your reflection on what God is saying to you. Most chapters have a final journal page to give you space to write.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?

JOURNAL

Think of the journal page as part of your spiritual fitness routine. Your spirit, heart, and mind have just finished some vigorous exercise. This is the cool-down phase. Not to be hurried. We suggest two things:

1. Journal on any of the preceding reflective questions.
2. Memorize and meditate on the Scripture memory verse below.

If at all possible, don't leave your study time without capturing in writing the most important things God revealed to you.



Last, we'll suggest a key verse on the chapter's topic for you to memorize. If a different verse touched you more, feel free to substitute it. Taking 5–10 minutes to memorize the verse right after completing the chapter study may help anchor in your heart and mind what you've learned.

CHECK YOUR ACCURACY!

Write the verse below from memory.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD'S LOVE — ZEPHANIAH 3:17

*The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.*

DIGGING DEEPER

At the end of most chapters you'll find something extra to help you called "Digging Deeper."

- It might contain resource material, additional Scripture verses, historical notes, a chart, an article, a private or interactive project to put the topic into practice, etc.



THIS LAST PART IS OPTIONAL! But we'll let you in on a little secret: Some of the best stuff in the **CONNECT** series is found in this section.

JOHN 3:16 is undoubtedly the best-known verse in the Bible. It is also the most familiar verse about God's love. Maybe you already have it memorized. But close your time of personal study by pausing to meditate . . . chew on . . . think about . . . thank God for . . . the wonderful truths embedded in John 3:16. To get you started, here's a different angle on this familiar verse:

MEDITATION EXERCISE 1

*For God
so loved
the world
that he gave
his one and only Son,
that whoever
believes
in him
shall not perish
but
have
eternal life*

*The greatest Lover
The greatest degree
The greatest crowd
The greatest act
The greatest gift
The greatest invitation
The greatest simplicity
The greatest person
The greatest deliverance
The greatest difference
The greatest certainty
The greatest possession*

MEDITATION EXERCISE 2

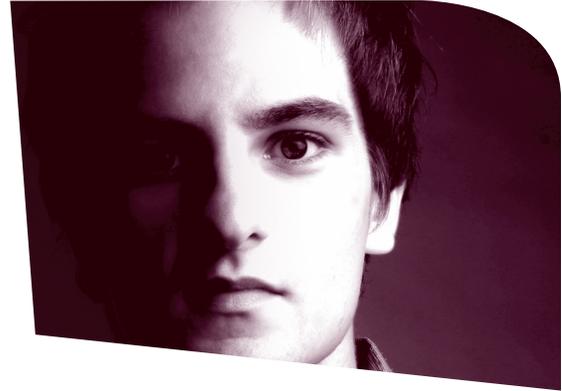
Get creative with these verses by marking with circles, underlines, highlighting, or arrows. Or try a diagram, a drawing, or a simple doodle.

ROMANS 5:6-11. When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. (NLT)



CHAPTER 2

LONGING FOR LOVE: DO I DESERVE IT?



Below is an actual letter written by George, a Russian, shortly after the fall of Communism. Though his English isn't perfect, he perfectly expresses some of the timeless longings and essential questions that all of us carry in our souls.

Hello Dear friends!

Here I am, George. I am 22, that is very many years. But I don't know why I live. What is this life for? If it is cruel I'm tired to live. Who can help in it? What should I do? There is no sense in my life. I see no sense in it. Maybe only death is freedom. I need any love. I feel tragedy everywhere. I feel soul my pain.

Who is God? Do I really need to Him? I'm tired. Afraid. I can't anymore be waiting happiness. I can assure you, I'm tired. What should I do?

I hope hear from you soon. Don't keep me waiting.

Best wishes,

George

NO SENSE IN LIFE. TIRED. PAIN. The cries of mankind are heard in George's words. Instinctively, George — and the rest of us — reach for love to give purpose and meaning to life's hard times. But is there really enough love to quiet our hearts and soothe our souls?

From your observations, what usually happens to children, adolescents, and adults — even baby animals — who don't get enough love?

George writes, "I need any love." From your perspective, why is the need for love so universal, and so urgent?



PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

It's one thing to know in your head that God loves you. It is quite another thing to experience God's love. That is where we're going in this chapter.

Read this passage from Scripture, marking it as you go. In the margin, write any comments, feelings, and questions that come to you — especially about human need and the giving, receiving, and withholding of love. Include your emotional responses to this emotional story Jesus tells.



LUKE 15:11-32. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

¹³ Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

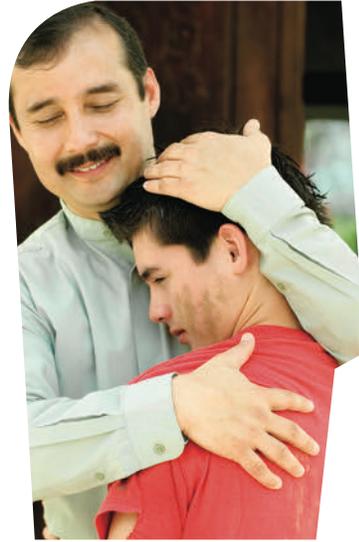
²² But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound."

²⁸ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been

slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

³¹ *"My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*



Describe one thing you learned from each character about giving and receiving love.

The prodigal son:

The older son:

The father:

Imagine yourself within this story. Consider the love dynamics in this family. Who do you identify with the most? Explain.

How do you feel toward the father? What surfaces inside you as you consider God as “Father”? In what ways (if any) have you resisted receiving His love?



God has never pulled back his arms, never withheld his blessing, never stopped considering his son the Beloved One. But the Father couldn't compel his son to stay home. He couldn't force his love on the Beloved. He had to let him go in freedom, even though he knew the pain it would cause both his son and himself. It was love itself that prevented him from keeping his son home at all cost. It was love itself that allowed him to let his son find his own life, even with the risk of losing it.

Here the mystery of my life is unveiled. I am loved so much that I am left free to leave home. The blessing is there from the beginning. I have left it and keep on leaving it. But the Father is always looking for me with outstretched arms to receive me back and whisper again in my ear: "You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests."

— HENRI NOUWEN, *THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON*

Here's one of those “extras” we promised to help you explore and experience this topic of God's amazing love more deeply. The story in Luke 15 — sometimes called “The Prodigal Son” — could be retitled “The Prodigal Father,” because the word prodigal means extravagant, and that is exactly what we are confronted with: a picture of the extravagant mercy of God. We'll miss much of the meaning and power in the story if we see it only through our limited modern perspective. But look at it from the reality of Middle Eastern (perhaps Arabic) family life of 2,000 years ago, and you'll be blown away by this father's fiercely jealous and protective love for his renegade son!

THE STORY SAYS . . .	THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE SAYS . . .
<p>Verse 12 The younger son told his father, "I want my share of your estate now before you die." So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. (all verses NLT)</p>	<p>A son never inherits until his father dies — it's unheard of. So by "demanding" his inheritance early, the son was saying, "Father, I can't wait for you to die!" The father is expected to explode and discipline the boy harshly for the cruel implications of his demand. What an amazing quality of love that grants the Beloved freedom — even freedom to reject the Lover!</p>
<p>Verse 17 When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, "At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ' . . . I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'"</p>	<p>What is motivating the son's change of heart? Simple: He is broke and hungry! He's at the end of his rope. He feels ashamed of himself, but he may only dimly understand the depth of pain and shame he has brought on his whole family, especially his father. He also seems unaware that going home really isn't an option in his culture. Because of his shameful choices and lifestyle, the whole community treats him as dead. They are culturally obligated to kill him as soon as he returns to the village. The boy is already "dead" to them.</p>
<p>Verse 20 And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.</p>	<p>His father has been watching and waiting for him for . . . how many years? Even though it is very humiliating for a Middle Eastern nobleman to be seen running in his flowing robes, this father runs to the boy at the edge of the village. Yes, out of love, but even more to protect the boy from being killed by the villagers before reaching home. By kissing him publicly (a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness) he places the boy under his protective care.</p>
<p>Verses 22-24 But his father said to the servants, "Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening . . ." So the party began.</p>	<p>These weren't just spontaneous expressions of affection from the father. He chose each act to communicate deep meaning to his son and to everybody else. In Middle Eastern cultures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robe — assures son's acceptance in the community • Signet Ring — bestows remarkable trust and family authority • Shoes — indicate son is a free man, not a servant or hired man • Banquet — restores son to good standing in the community <p>Taken together, the father's dramatic actions purposefully protect the son from the community's hostility and restore him to fellowship.</p>

THE STORY SAYS . . .	THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE SAYS . . .
<p>Verses 29-30 . . . but he [the older brother] replied, “All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. . . . Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!”</p>	<p>The older brother feels entitled to a place of privilege in his father’s household because of his hard work and compliance all these years. He figures that he has earned a “right” to his father’s love— rather than seeing it as sheer gift, not earnable and therefore not los-able. He shows no more signs of affection or love (than his younger brother does).</p>
<p>Verse 32 “We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!”</p>	<p>The son learns that this isn’t about blowing his inheritance money or making immoral life choices. Hoping to compensate his father with his labor is just another slap in the face. This is about a relationship he killed and can do absolutely nothing to heal. This is about his father’s mercy and jealous love that moved him to protect and restore a new— even better— relationship as his pure gift of grace.¹</p>

In light of this historical information, what new insight do you have into the story of your Father’s love for you, His child?

JOURNAL your thoughts and responses to this passage. How does it relate to the title of this chapter, “Longing for Love: Do I Deserve It?”?

¹ Insights from Dr. Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).

PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

Maybe you're thinking, *Yeah, I guess He loves me, but...* It's one thing to be told you are loved — by God or a parent or a lover or whomever. But it's another thing for you to trust that love and receive it. Hearing words of love doesn't necessarily mean you're experiencing love.



How safe do you feel with God?

Has God withheld anything that, if given, would express deeper love to you?

Are these statements usually true (T) of you, or usually false (F)?

- I freely admit that I need love.
- "Needing" love makes me feel weak and vulnerable.
- I can accept love when it is offered.

We started this discussion claiming that everybody needs to be loved. In fact, God created us with needs so that we could experience being loved! Our needs (including our need for love) are not weaknesses. But they feel like weaknesses because they make us unbelievably vulnerable — to God and others. And our needs are permanent; we will never outgrow our need for love. We experience love when someone meets a need we have.

Think of someone you know who loves you. What are two or three specific needs he or she is meeting in your life?

Consider these words from Jeremiah and this quote from Henri Nouwen:

JEREMIAH 2:13. My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found. Why do I keep ignoring the place of true love and persist in looking for it elsewhere? Why do I keep leaving home where I am called a child of God, the Beloved of my Father? . . . It's almost as if I want to prove to myself and to my world that I do not need God's love, that I can make a life on my own, that I want to be fully independent.

— HENRI NOUWEN, *THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON*

Where else have you searched for love – other than from God? What were the results?

How do you think love and trust are related? When have you had trouble receiving and trusting expressions of love from God or others? Explain.



The degree to which you trust me is the degree to which I can love you – no matter how much love I have for you in my heart. If you don't trust me, you can't experience the love I have to give you, no matter how hard I try to express it. Put positively: The degree to which you let me love you is the degree to which you'll actually feel loved.

– PARAPHRASED FROM BILL THRALL, LEADERSHIP CATALYST, INC.

God wants His love to help us feel valued and secure as His beloved children. But He also wants His love to help us live our lives well. That's why His love includes an aspect of training and correction – sometimes called discipline. Consider Solomon's words to young people:

PROVERBS 3:11-12. My child, don't reject the LORD's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you. For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights. (NLT)



How do you feel about God your Father correcting (or disciplining) you? [See the optional “Digging Deeper” section to explore this topic more.]

How do you like to be loved? If someone said to you, “Ni gwendente!” would you feel loved? Probably not – unless you happen to be from the Kikuyu tribe in central Kenya! What communicates love to you? Consider these common “love languages” (adapted from *The Language of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent, PhD). Number them from one to seven, with one being your favorite/most preferred way to have love expressed to you.

___ Affectionate touch

___ Quality time

___ Words of affirmation

___ Acts of kind service

___ Thoughtful gifts

___ Expressions of beauty

___ Other

The point is that God speaks every “love language” there is. How have you experienced God expressing His love to you in two or three of these ways? Describe that a bit.

Is there someone God might want to love through you in one of these ways? Write that person’s name here, and explain how you can express your love to him or her this week.



God, who spoke us into existence, speaks to us now: “Come out of self-hatred into my love. Come to me now.” He says, “Forget about yourself. Accept what I long to be for you, who I am for you – your rescuer – endlessly loving, forever patient, unbearably forgiving. Stop projecting your sick feelings onto me. You are a broken flower – I will not crush you – a flickering candle – I will not extinguish you. For once and forever relax: of all places you are safe with me.”

– BRENNAN MANNING AND JIM HANCOCK, *POSERS, FAKERS, AND WANNABES*

PAUSE 3 _COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Very few of us escape the pain of rejection or disappointment in relationships. Describe a time when you felt rejected by someone you thought cared about you. What did it feel like to have love withheld or withdrawn? What impact did this experience have on you?



Do you ever wonder if God would turn His back on you? Why do you think He might withdraw His love from you?

Have you ever wondered where God was when something painful was happening to you? If so, express that by completing this sentence: "God, where were You when . . ."

From the following verses, make a list of some ways God demonstrates His love to us.

HEBREWS 13:5. He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! (AMP)

ROMANS 5:8. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

EPHESIANS 2:4-5. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

PSALM 13:1-6.

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has been good to me.*

In today's world, very few relationships last forever — even those that start out loving. How does this expression of God's passionate love for you stack up against other relationships you've had? Does God's love for you seem too good to be real or true?

Go back to the verse you just read — Hebrews 13:5. Read it again, visualizing the Lover of your soul inviting you into a love relationship with Him. Respond however you feel like responding.



NOTE ON HEBREWS 13:5: *Do you know that God swears?*

In Bible times, when an Israelite wanted to take an oath or swear that he really meant what he said, he repeated it three times. So when God Himself said, "I will not, I will not, I will not," He wasn't stuttering! He was making the most solemn vow He could make. Maybe the closest thing we have in our culture is taking an oath in court to tell the truth. Why do you think God would take such a solemn oath and swear to His love for us?

As you read the following passage from Romans, jot in the margin any of your observations about love — needing it, giving it, deserving it, receiving it, losing it.

ROMANS 8:31-39. What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one — for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one — for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting at the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

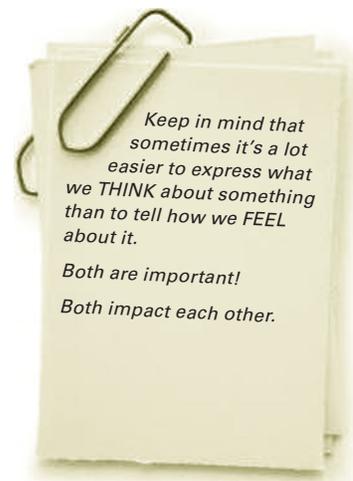
³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow — not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below — indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NLT)

What do you think this "love story" in Romans 8 has in common with the love story Jesus told about the father with two sons (from Pause 1)? How are the stories different?

Go back to Romans 8:31-39. This time read it out loud . . . and slowly. Meditate on this awesome passage by personalizing it: Substitute your name and the words "I, me, my" for "we, us, our." What does it feel like to know that "nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate [you] from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

In light of what you've learned about God in this study, where do you think God really was when painful things were happening to you?



F. B. Meyer said, "God's love is like the Amazon River flowing down to water one daisy." Write your own simile for God's love by finishing this sentence your own way.

God's love is like . . .

PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD'S MERCY – EPHESIANS 2:4-5

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

Remember . . .

- *Out loud*
- *Phrase by phrase*
- *Repeat often reflectively*
- *Write it out for accuracy*

DIGGING DEEPER

REMEMBER, THIS IS OPTIONAL.

REALITY CHECK: For many of us, parental discipline was anything but loving. If you haven't experienced it, you've probably seen it: parents punishing, abusing, or humiliating their kids, or else spoiling them and leaving them to fend for themselves.



Whether you experienced loving correction and training from your parents or harsh punishment or not-so-benign neglect, how do you think it still affects your response to God's love and discipline today?

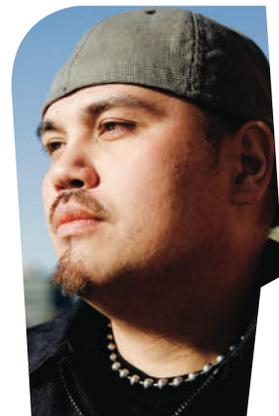
As you read this passage, take notes on how and why our heavenly Father trains us (in left column) and how He wants us to respond to His loving discipline (in right column).

HOW AND WHY GOD DISCIPLINES US	HEBREWS 12:1-11	HOW WE SHOULD (OR SHOULDN'T) RESPOND
<p>GOD GAVE US JESUS AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO LIVE LIFE WELL.</p>	<p>Do you see what this means — all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. <u>Strip down</u>, start running — and never quit! <u>No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins.</u> <u>Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in.</u> Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed — that exhilarating finish in and with God — he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!</p>	<p>Deal with the sin baggage that's sapping my energy — don't ignore it.</p>

⁴⁻¹¹In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through—all that bloodshed! So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children?

My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's **training**, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly **live**? While we were children, our parents did what **seemed** best to them. But God is doing what **is** best for us, training us to live God's holy best. At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. (MSG)

Of all the things you marked, and all the possible responses to God's love mentioned in this passage, is there one you would like to express to God consciously in the next week or more? Explain.





CHAPTER 3

BEING ADOPTED: WHERE DO I BELONG?



I was back in church the week before as one of our members stood at the pulpit telling us about how she had come to adopt her little son. She and her husband had found him through an agency called A.S.K. (Adopt Special Kids). First they had to fill out a questionnaire, with questions like “Could you adopt an addicted baby? A child with a terminal illness? With mild retardation? With moderate retardation? With tendencies toward violence against others?” She ticked off the list, and then she cried. Veronica stepped to her side. “God is an adoptive parent, too,” she said. “And [God] chose us all. [God] says, ‘Sure, I’ll take the kids who are addicted, or terminal. I pick all the retarded kids, and of course the sadists, the selfish ones, the liars . . .’”

. . . The mystery of God’s love as I understand it is that God loves the man who was being mean to his dog just as much as he loves babies; God loves Susan Smith who drowned her two sons as much as he loves Desmond Tutu. And he loved her just as much while she was releasing the handbrake of her car that sent her boys into the river as he did when she first nursed them. So of course he loves old ordinary me, even or especially at my most scared and petty and mean and obsessive. Loves me; chooses me.

— Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*¹

From your personal experience or observation, what does abandonment feel like? What does it feel like to be chosen for something? . . . not to be chosen?

What is your experience with physical adoption?

¹ Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Random House, 1999), 254–255.

PAUSE 1_

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



In the following passages from the Old Testament, God is described as an adoptive parent. His adopted “children” are the ancient Israelites (sometimes nicknamed Jacob, Jeshurun, or Ephraim, sometimes pictured as a son and sometimes as a daughter). These verses sketch their national history over hundreds of years, starting when God embraced Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, and later when God rescued the Israelites miraculously from slavery in Egypt.

But like many adoptive families, their relationship was rocky.

As you read God’s take on their relationship, mark the passage and make comments on any points that touch you about their relationship and what this illustrates. Note especially the ways God took the initiative to demonstrate His jealous love for them (to be jealously and protectively and exclusively cherished by the Lover of our souls).

DEUTERONOMY 14:1-2. Since you are the people of the LORD your God . . . you have been set apart as holy to the LORD your God, and he has chosen you from all the nations of the earth to be his own special treasure. (NLT)

Read DEUTERONOMY 32:6-14 from your Bible.

DEUTERONOMY 32:15-18.
But Israel soon became fat and unruly;
the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed!
Then they abandoned the God who had made them;
they made light of the Rock of their salvation.
They stirred up his jealousy by worshiping foreign gods;
they provoked his fury with detestable deeds.
They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not God,
to gods they had not known before,

to new gods only recently arrived,
to gods their ancestors had never feared.
You neglected the Rock who had fathered you;
you forgot the God who had given you birth. (NLT)

Jesus says: If you want to know what God is like, look at me. If you want to learn that your God does not come to rule but to redeem, watch me. If you want assurance that you did not invent the story of God's love, rest your head on my chest and listen to my heartbeat.

— BRENNAN MANNING AND JIM HANCOCK, *POSERS, FAKERS, AND WANNABES*

HOSEA 11:1-4.

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love;
I lifted the yoke from their neck
and bent down to feed them.*



EZEKIEL 16:1,4-16.

Then another message came to me from the LORD:

⁴“On the day you were born, no one cared about you. Your umbilical cord was not cut, and you were never washed, rubbed with salt, and wrapped in cloth. No one had the slightest interest in you; no one pitied you or cared for you. On the day you were born, you were unwanted, dumped in a field and left to die.

⁶“But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, ‘Live!’ And I helped you to thrive like a plant in the field. You grew up and became a beautiful jewel. Your breasts became full, and your body hair grew, but you were still naked. And when I passed by again, I saw that you were old enough for love. So I wrapped my cloak around you to cover your nakedness and

declared my marriage vows. I made a covenant with you, says the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

⁹Then I bathed you and washed off your blood, and I rubbed fragrant oils into your skin. I gave you expensive clothing of fine linen and silk, beautifully embroidered, and sandals made of fine goatskin leather. I gave you lovely jewelry, bracelets, beautiful necklaces, a ring for your nose, earrings for your ears, and a lovely crown for your head. And so you were adorned with gold and silver. Your clothes were made of fine linen and were beautifully embroidered. You ate the finest foods — choice flour, honey, and olive oil — and became more beautiful than ever. You looked like a queen, and so you were! Your fame soon spread throughout the world because of your beauty. I dressed you in my splendor and perfected your beauty, says the Sovereign LORD.

¹⁵But you thought your fame and beauty were your own. So you gave yourself as a prostitute to every man who came along. Your beauty was theirs for the asking. You used the lovely things I gave you to make shrines for idols, where you played the prostitute. Unbelievable! How could such a thing ever happen? (NLT)



This story uses graphic language and it gets more graphic later on. But for now, try to summarize what each of these passages tells us about the dynamics of the relationship between God and His adopted children, the Israelites, illustrating what went wrong in the relationship.

GOD'S LOVING INITIATIVE TO ISRAEL	ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO GOD	HOW GOD FELT
Deuteronomy 14:1-2—God chose Israel from all other nations to be His people	They were supposed to be holy, different from all other nations	God viewed Israel as His chosen "special treasure"
Deuteronomy 32:6-18		
Hosea 11:1-4		
Ezekiel 16:1,4-16		

PAUSE 2_

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Perhaps you're wondering what (if anything) those Old Testament passages about Israel have to do with us. In these three passages from the New Testament, God is still described as an adoptive parent. But now His children aren't limited to ethnic Israelites: Now they are chosen on a radically different basis (yet symbolically portrayed through the Israelites). As you read, notice what Jesus has to do with one becoming God's child, and the dynamics of the relationship between God and His children.



ROMANS 8:14-17. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (NLT)

Read 2 CORINTHIANS 6:16-18 from your Bible.

EPHESIANS 1:3-10. All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ — everything in heaven and on earth. (NLT)

From these passages, how can one be adopted into God's family? Why is Jesus necessary for spiritual adoption?

How is being adopted into a physical family similar to — and different from — being adopted by God?

From all the passages you read in Pause 1, write here on one or more of these questions: How do you think God feels about His children? If you were a holy, perfect God, would you adopt someone like you into your family? Why do you think God is willing to adopt people into His family through Jesus?

The adoption analogy may break down in your experience. Sometimes adoption is a very positive thing, but it can also be messy and bring lots of painful baggage with it. Remember that spiritual adoption involves a loving heavenly Father who loves us jealously and who swears, "I will not, I will not, I will not" ever abandon you.

If you could ask your heavenly Father anything at all about adoption into His family, what would you ask Him?



We are children, perhaps, at the very moment when we know that it is as children that God loves us — not because we have deserved his love and not in spite of our undeserving, not because we try and not because we recognize the futility of our trying; but simply because he has chosen to love us. We are children because he is our father, and all our efforts, fruitful and fruitless, to do good, to speak truth, to understand, are the efforts of children who, for all their precocity, are children still in that before we loved him, he loved us, as children, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

— FREDERICK BUECHNER, *THE MAGNIFICENT DEFEAT*

PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Becoming a child of God connects you to a totally new, totally diverse expression of family. Having a handle on your identity within that family is key to living in it. Mark the places you see this new identity in Christ's family coming out in the following verses.

GALATIANS 4:5-7. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir. (NLT)



1 JOHN 2:29-3:3,9-10. Once you're convinced that he is right and righteous, you'll recognize that all who practice righteousness are God's true children.

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it — we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to.

But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him — and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own. . . .

People conceived and brought into life by God don't make a practice of sin. How could they? God's seed is deep within them, making them who they are. It's not in the nature of the God-begotten to practice and parade sin. Here's how you tell the difference between God's children and the Devil's children: The one who won't practice righteous ways isn't from God, nor is the one who won't love brother or sister. A simple test. (MSG)

From these verses try to summarize:

What are some of the “family traits” — and privileges — of God’s children? How will other people recognize that you are a child of God?



What is in store for God’s children later on?

What does it mean to you to know that you belong in God’s family forever? Tell Him how you feel about that any way that seems appropriate — a prayer, a song, a picture, whatever.

What image have you seen in this chapter (or elsewhere) that either creatively demonstrates or contradicts a theme from this chapter? Explain.

Well, surprise! Whether anyone bothered to tell us this before and whether we like it or not, God loves who we really and truly are. God calls us, as God has called everyone since Adam and Eve, to come out of hiding just as we really and truly are. No amount of spiritual cosmetology can make us more presentable to God – God buys us in an As-Is condition and says, “I’ve been looking for you! I have just the place for you!”

— BRENNAN MANNING AND JIM HANCOCK, *POSERS, FAKERS, AND WANNABES*

A CLOSING BLESSING

May all your expectations be frustrated,

May all your plans be thwarted,

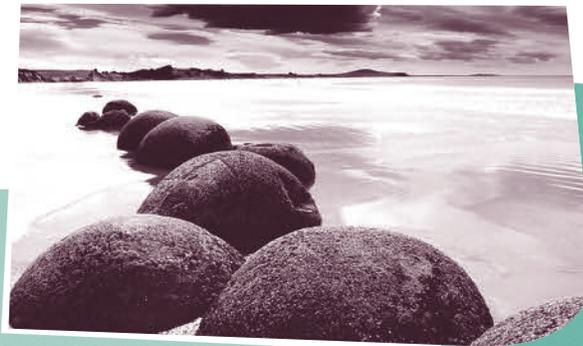
May all your desires be withered into nothingness,

That you may experience the powerlessness and poverty of a child and sing and dance in the love of God who is Father, Son, and Spirit.

And today on planet Earth,

May you experience the wonder and beauty of yourself as Abba’s child and temple of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord.

— Larry Hein



PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

ADOPTED IN CHRIST – EPHESIANS 1:4-5

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Scripture Memory Option:

Memorize this verse or select another verse about spiritual adoption through Jesus that touched you. Copy it here. Memorize it and meditate on it throughout the coming week.

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus indicates that our core problem is a relational predicament with God. We're alienated from God and we need to be adopted into His family through accepting Jesus. Read the following article describing the relationship between God and the human race. As you read, jot down your questions, comments, and responses.



SPIRITUAL ADOPTION:

How Do I JOIN GOD'S FAMILY?

EZEKIEL 7:27. I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

MATTHEW 7:1-2. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

How in the world did we get to be so far away from God? Maybe it's all His fault. Maybe He's the one who drifted away from us. Maybe He walked out on us because we didn't measure up to His impossible standards.

But according to these verses, we're alienated from God by our own choices . . . and by who we are. We fail to meet our own moral standards. And if we want to know exactly what our own moral standards are, just take a look at how we judge (and condemn) others in our hearts.

Take a peek inside: When have you ever criticized someone to his face or behind her back? Whatever you think is so wrong with the other guy — that reveals your moral standard. Who among us hasn't judged others? And who among us hasn't turned around and done the very same thing — or worse — in action or in thought!

HEBREWS 9:27. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Isn't it only fair that God judges us by our own moral standards? Our inability to keep the moral standard we expect of others (let alone God's even higher standards) is the real basis for the alienation between God and every human being.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know something is wrong. Humans long for a deep love. But as a people we just aren't capable of delivering. This often makes us feel flawed. Sometimes we believe that we just don't deserve to be loved. Inside the tapes play over and

over, our shame convincing us that, "I am bad. I am worthless. I deserve to be punished. I don't deserve to be loved. The problem isn't just what I've done. If that's all it was, I could try to stop doing it. No, the real problem is who I am. And there's nothing I can do about that."²

So we do everything we can to hide . . . to avoid exposing our inadequacy . . . to prevent anyone from getting close enough to see us. Of course this just leaves us incredibly lonely and disconnected and alienated behind our masks. The human problem is like a fatal disease. It kills. Everyone dies. And it requires a radical solution.

EPHESIANS 1:5. He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Alienated relationships need relational solutions. God knows this, so He just doesn't allow our disdain, disbelief, or avoidance of Him to put Him off or dampen His deep and continuing love for us. In fact, from before time began He set in motion a plan to counteract our resistance and carry our shame for us so that we could be adopted into His family. At the very center of His plan was His Son Jesus. In fact, He has no other plan to build His family.

Jesus came as an innocent baby, lived a blameless life, died a cruel death as payment for us, and rose from the grave to live as the victor over death. He is fully alive today as the only one who can remove our sin and shame, and the only one who can offer us hope and meaning now, as well as life eternal!

EPHESIANS 2:7-8. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! (MSG)

But wait a minute . . . Who is this God? And why should we trust Him? Isn't He distant and harsh . . . the intolerant God who punishes . . . the one who allows suffering . . . the one who's made such a mess of the world? Yeah, why should we trust Him?

Well, we should trust Him for the best of all reasons: because He is exquisitely trustworthy. Why wouldn't you trust someone who:

Keeps His own moral standards	Is eternal	Is powerful
Feels and grieves for your pain	Is just and holy	Is beautiful
Is merciful and tenderhearted	Is kind and good	Is honest
Is everywhere and beyond	Loves you jealously	

Because guess what? That is exactly how God is described in the Bible. In fact, those irresistible traits are just the beginning of God's beauty and goodness! But what about Jesus,

² Ralph Ennis, et al., *The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ: When Guilt-free Isn't Enough* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Navigators, 2004), 9.

you say? Didn't He die 2,000 years ago? Maybe He's sort of "undead" now. So how can He really offer hope today?

EPHESIANS 2:4-7. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

God's radical solution for humanity's problem was to send us a gift — His precious Son as a perfect human representation of the Father, to live and die and overcome death — and by doing all that to draw people into God's family through adoption. What was humanity's problem? Our inability to measure up to the perfection of a holy God is our core problem. Every one of us falls short of His glory (see Romans 3:23). We are deeply flawed in our nature. Unless our sin can be canceled out somehow, there is no way any of us could ever stand in God's presence.

In His great love for undeserving humanity, God chose the one solution that was the most expensive to Himself: He sacrificed His beloved Son. Jesus' blood served as the only perfect sacrifice, and it has the power to wash away our sins and our flaws, as well as the shame attached to them. This was God's relational solution for our relational problem. When we deserved condemnation for abandoning God, He offered mercy and adoption through Jesus. By so doing, Jesus gives us His righteousness, His perfection, through faith. In our wildest dreams and deepest longings, we humans could never have come up with such an amazing plan!

JOHN 1:12. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (NLT)

DO YOU WANT TO BE ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY? Because you can refuse, you know. Millions of people have chosen to remain orphans, outside God's family, not because they were "unqualified" but because they were unwilling. Remember, God takes the addicted, the terminal, the sadists, selfish, and liars.

Your part is to recognize that you aren't perfect like God, and you're not worthy of His love. Maybe your mother's love, but not God's. Never have been. Never will be. Nobody else is, either. So don't even bother trying to get yourself straightened out for God. Ask Him for His mercy, love, and forgiveness. Believe in Jesus as the one who goes between you and God and destroys the barrier of alienation. Just ask to become part of His family through Jesus. The following is an idea of what you can pray, but in your own words . . .

Dear God,

I know I don't deserve the love from You that I so long for. Please forgive me. I thank You for sending Jesus to break down this wall between us. I want to be adopted into Your family



through Your Son, Jesus. Please come into my heart and give me life and hope and meaning and a personal relationship with You.

Thanks! I believe that You will, because You aren't a liar and You've promised to forgive and show mercy and adopt me if I ask.

I want to know and deeply love You too, Father.

God's part is absolutely predictable, first because He promised, and second because He's done it so many times for others. He forgives — everything, immediately, unconditionally. He adopts you as a beloved son or daughter into His family. He lavishes His love on you and embraces you as His precious child! He guides you into a love-filled, meaningful life here and in eternity with Him as your God!

YOUR RESPONSE (IF YOU'RE STILL CONSIDERING ADOPTION)

Perhaps you desire to explore this some more, or perhaps you are ready to accept Jesus' offer for mercy. At this point, what do you think and feel about the possibility of being adopted into God's family?

YOUR RESPONSE (IF YOU'VE BEEN ADOPTED)

How do you think God may desire to work through you to encourage those still considering adoption?

Ideas could include things like praying for them to meet Jesus, taking little initiatives of love to serve them, helping guide them to discover Jesus more fully in God's Word, sharing your spiritual adoption story, etc.

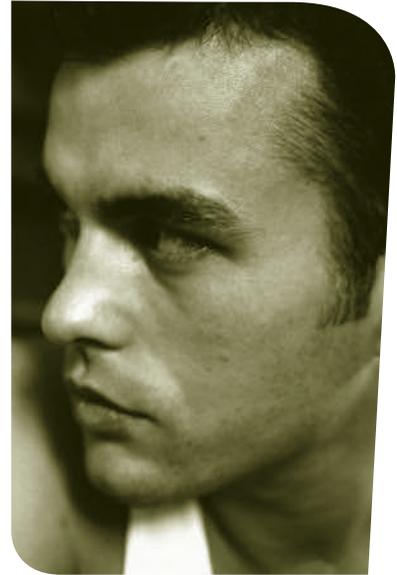
GROUP EXPERIENCE

Plan a special time when members of your group can share their "spiritual adoption" stories with each other.



CHAPTER 4

LOVING GOD: DO I EVEN LIKE HIM?



John got stuck between stepfamilies. While growing up, he just couldn't seem to get over being angry. Now in his late twenties, he is trying to make life work. He wants to keep his successful job and marry Suzanne. That's where things get really confusing. The way John sees it, his father's workaholicism was the core issue in his family's breakup. Yeah, he was great at business, but lousy everywhere else that mattered.

Frankly, John worries that he's a lot like his dad. Even worse, he wonders if he has what it takes to be a man. This lingering fear keeps him from committing to Suzanne. But how long will she wait for him?

And his dad isn't the only one John is angry and disappointed with. Where was God in all of this?

Didn't He know that John needed a dad who loved him and his mother? He often questions why a God "of love" ever allowed so much pain. That's where he's stuck. "How can I like a God like that . . . much less love Him?"

When someone moves toward us in love, we respond . . . one way or another. So what about you? In the past when someone made the first move to show love to you, how did you usually respond? What has influenced your response to love — positively or negatively?

Suppose God filled you with all the love that your heart could hold. Imagine yourself flourishing within the forgiving, unconditional, and undeserved love of God. How would your life change?



It is impossible to love God in our own strength. And we can't earn God's favor by trying harder to love Him more. We're just too weak and flawed to make that cut. But God is a merciful God who empowers His children both to receive His love and to love Him back!

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Read what Jesus said about the importance of loving God.

MATTHEW 22:34-40. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."



What do you think makes these two commandments the greatest of all?

One man who loved God with all his "passion and prayer and intelligence" (Matthew 22:37, MSG) was King David. As you read one of his prayers, highlight or take notes on whatever you observe about David's heart for God.

PSALM 27:4-11.

*The one thing I ask of the LORD —
the thing I seek most —*

*is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
delighting in the LORD's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.*

*For he will conceal me there when troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.*

He will place me out of reach on a high rock.

*Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.*

*At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the LORD with music.*

*Hear me as I pray, O LORD.
Be merciful and answer me!
My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."
And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming."
Do not turn your back on me.
Do not reject your servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the LORD will hold me close.
Teach me how to live, O LORD.
Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me. (NLT)*

From everything you marked, summarize what you think it means to have a heart for God.



Now you're going to hear from a whole crowd of people who loved God passionately. Underline the words in each verse that express how these people responded to God's character and His love initiative. It might also help to put that thought in your own words in the margin. We've done the first one as an example.

*PSALM 27:8.
My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, I will seek.*

*PSALM 30:4.
Sing to the LORD, you saints of his;
praise his holy name.*

*PSALM 37:3-5.
Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Delight yourself in the LORD
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

*Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this.*

PSALM 37:7.

*Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when men succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.*

PSALM 42:1-2,4.

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God? . . .
These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go with the multitude,
leading the procession to the house of God,
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving
among the festive throng.*

PSALM 63:3.

*Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.*

PSALM 73:25.

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*

PROVERBS 3:5-6.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

PROVERBS 3:9.

*Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the first fruits of all your crops.*

PROVERBS 9:10.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

MATTHEW 4:19. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

JOHN 1:12. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

JOHN 15:5. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

ACTS 5:29. Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

EPHESIANS 6:7. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

HEBREWS 11:6. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

JAMES 4:7-8. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

1 PETER 1:16. For it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 PETER 5:6-7. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

That's a lot of ways to love God! With these thoughts in mind, describe what it would look like for you to have a heart for God and to love Him with all your "passion and prayer and intelligence."



How do you simply like to be with Jesus? What tends to distract you from enjoying time alone with Jesus?

In Psalm 27 we saw that David (like any lover) delighted to think about God's beauty. How is God beautiful to you? Don't answer that question in writing. Instead, pause awhile and enjoy "contemplating" His beauty. Then tell Him what you see in Him that is so attractive to you.

PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

To not like God is to misunderstand His character and heart toward us. It's important to take time to explore those misunderstandings that naturally lead to a tainted view of His love.

Does it ever feel like God stops loving you when you fail to love Him well (with all your heart)?



Have you ever felt disappointed or angry with God? Explain.

Sometimes we withhold our love because we feel that those who should have loved us and been there for us just weren't. It can be as simple as parents too busy at work or as devastating as abandonment, abuse, or divorce. Our experiences growing up can color our concept of God and hamper our ability to respond with love.

Check below if you've ever wondered, Where were You, God, when . . . ?

- your parents divorced
- someone you loved died
- a natural disaster or terrorist attack killed innocent people
- a relationship ended
- an injury/illness trashed your dreams
- an unwanted pregnancy derailed your plans
- a rejection or loss crushed your hopes
- (other) _____

*A four-year-old child asked his full-time babysitter, "Why do Mommy and Daddy work so much?"
"Because they want to provide this nice house and other things for you," was her reply.
"If we had a small house would they spend more time with me?"*

How did these experiences influence your love for God?

In light of brokenness and wounding in your life, are you aware of any part of your life that you have consciously or subconsciously kept "off-limits" to God?

Maybe you can't really relate to any of these struggles. If that's the case, just wait awhile. Sooner or later life will leave us angry or disappointed with God. The point is that He would far rather have you draw near to Him in the honesty of your pain (see James 4:8) than "spiritually stuff it" because of the lie that there are certain things we shouldn't feel toward God.

PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Love Story was a popular movie from the seventies based on the thesis, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Do you think Jesus would agree with that statement? Do you agree with it? Do you know any verses to support your opinion?



We want to be honest with God. We want an authentic relationship with Him — not just a religious mask. That means sometimes facing the ugly and shameful things in our lives and dealing with them in confession (admission of evil) and repentance (turning from evil to good). Read these verses about coming clean and into the light with God.

PSALM 139:23-24.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

JOHN 3:18-21. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants. (NLT)

JAMES 4:7-9. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

From these verses, summarize the results of admitting what is true about us and coming into God's light through confession.

Pause to invite God to bring up any unresolved sins or other issues that you've been hiding in the darkness. Consider whether He wants the two of you to deal with them now together. (If you want to dig deeper on this topic of confession, see "Digging Deeper" at the end of this chapter.)

It's only natural to want to live with, abide with, and come home to those we really love. Coming home to Jesus isn't something we do only once in our lives; just ask any older believer who has hit some bumps in the road. When Jesus was saying farewell to His friends before His death, He implored them with these words:

JOHN 15:9-10. I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done — kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. (MSG)

Read John 15:1-17 from your Bible. Take notes below on these questions: As we practice "abiding" or "making our home" in Jesus,

What will happen to us?

What will be true about us?

What do you think it means to "abide in" Christ or "come home" to Christ? What does Christ promise will happen if we do?

What would it look like for you to "abide in Jesus"?



Write here one or two practical ways you can (and will) express love nonverbally to whomever it is you are living with right now – a roommate, friend, spouse, or family member.

Only occasionally did a Bible writer come right out and say, “I love you, God” (see Psalm 18:1; 116:1). More often people expressed their love for God by:

- Praising Him (for who He is)
- Thanking Him (for what He has done)
- Trusting Him (by putting themselves under His care and influence)
- Serving Him (by offering their lives back to fulfill His purposes)
- Obeying Him (by living out His truths, commands, and guidelines)

Be encouraged in the next few weeks to experiment with an expression of the love you do have for God that uniquely incorporates the list above. Think in terms of how you connect best and invite God to meet you there.

You’ve processed a lot in this chapter. If you need to, take a break before looking back over your study and responding about your journey in the next section. Chances are what you’re thinking about will bleed into the following weeks and be ongoing, and that’s great (not to mention, the definition of what it really means to “journey”).



PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- ... how God views reality?
- ... our worship and intimacy with God?
- ... the deep issues of our hearts?
- ... our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- ... other things going on in your life?

Select one image from this chapter that expresses your experience in trying to listen to God. Journal what the image stirs up in you.



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

LOVING GOD – MATTHEW 22:37-38

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."

REMEMBER:

Don't lose what you've invested in putting God's Word in your heart. Now is a good time to review your previous memory verses, checking here when you can say them accurately. If you selected different verses to memorize, great. Review them now too.

- God's Love* *Zephaniah 3:17*
- Christ Died for Us* *Romans 3:18*
- Adopted in Christ* *Ephesians 1:4-5*
- Other Verses?*

DIGGING DEEPER

Love also means learning to say you're sorry. To hear what someone's deep confession sounds like, read Psalm 51 from a couple of versions of the Bible. You will hear David (the wild man with a heart for God mentioned in Pause 1) as he brings his hidden issues into the light — serious issues, including lust, adultery, violence, murder, cover-up, and shame, to name a few.

Sin. Shame. Distrust. Dislike. Disappointment. *These are very deep matters of the heart, especially if they are hindering your ability to receive or return God's love for you. But they are the very things God longs for His kids to come right up and dump into His lap! Take some time alone now to talk to God about anything that has surfaced in this study so far. You have His undivided attention!*

Examine to see if you need to talk to God about areas in your life that you feel guilty about or are ashamed of. Then take any phrase from David's prayer — whatever touched you most — and pray it back to God in your own words in connection with your own life and struggles.

In light of this verse, how might it help you to also share this with a trusted friend?

JAMES 5:16. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

If you were to leave any of your sin or shame issues hidden and still off-limits to God's touch, what impact might that have on your love relationship with Him?





CHAPTER 5

LISTENING TO GOD: DOES HE SPEAK?



No one had ever truly listened to Linda, so the idea of truly listening to God seemed strange to her. Her own thoughts, demands, cries, and desires crowded the space that listening might fill. She felt an unquenchable need to be listened to and to be understood in order to feel real. Besides, why does God need to be listened to? He is God and has no such need.

At a head level, Linda knew God deserved to be listened to. The idea of sitting in His presence and surrendering her habitual demand to be listened to was just strange . . . and yet quietly appealing. For now, she would listen some so as to “purchase” the right to be listened to. Maybe someday she’d learn to listen without her personal agenda crowding out God’s voice.

What a staggering idea! God — the supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe — has chosen to reveal Himself to us. Why? Most likely, He wants to make friends with us!¹ In this chapter we will explore what God’s Word says about . . . what God says.

Can you recall a time when you felt certain that God was speaking to you personally? How did He speak? What did He speak about?

¹ J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979).

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

PSALM 19 describes the most universal language that God speaks – the language of His creation.

As you read it, underline key ideas and jot down your thoughts and impressions.



PSALM 19:1-8.

*¹The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*²Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.*

*³There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.*

*⁴Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

*In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
⁵which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*

*⁶It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.*

*⁷The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul.*

*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

*⁸The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

God's speaking through nature is like a great symphony concert! Some hear only the instruments. But others (who may know the Composer and the words) hear meaning along with the music.

Whatever God's creation reveals about Him is available to all people everywhere. So what do you think? How does God's creation speak about Him?

If God has spoken to the human race, are we listening? Study and highlight the passages below for other ways that God has spoken, what He speaks about, and why He chooses to communicate with us at all.

HEBREWS 1:1-3. In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

1 PETER 1:10-12. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

2 PETER 1:16-21. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

From these passages and Psalm 19, summarize:

- How God has spoken . . .

- What He speaks about . . .

When Jesus speaks to us, we can trust what He says. Find out why from these verses:

JOHN 1:14

JOHN 6:63

JOHN 6:68 *Only Jesus has the words of eternal life*

JOHN 8:31-32

JOHN 14:24

JOHN 17:6-8

MARK 13:31

God is capable of creating and running the world in silence. Why do you think He has revealed Himself to humankind? What does this suggest to you about God's commitment to connect with us?

PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

Do you feel God wants to speak to you?



To what extent do you pay attention to God speaking? What motivates you to listen to God?

There are times when God decides to keep quiet. Consider the words of Amos.

AMOS 8:11-13. "The time is surely coming," says the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine on the land — not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from border to border searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. Beautiful girls and strong young men will grow faint in that day, thirsting for the LORD's word." (NLT)

Have you ever experienced a season of communication "famine" when you felt God was keeping silent with you? Why do you think God may be silent sometimes when we don't want Him to be?

WARNING: DON'T LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF OTHER SPIRITS.

DEUTERONOMY 18:9-13. When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, be very careful not to imitate the detestable customs of the nations living there. For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. It is because the other nations have done these detestable things that the LORD your God will drive them out ahead of you. But you must be blameless before the LORD your God. (NLT)

JOHN 8:43-44. [Jesus said:] "Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me! For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies." (NLT)

1 JOHN 4:1. Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. (NLT)

The Bible warns us over and over that not every voice we hear in our spirit is from God. People in virtually all cultures and times (including the ancient Israelites) have tried intentionally or naively to hear from spirits other than God's Holy Spirit.

Have you ever tried to hear from the spirit world through witchcraft, fortune-telling, mediums, or psychics? Why do you think God hates so intensely these attempts to hear from Him secondhand — so intensely, in fact, that He calls these practices spiritual "prostitution"?

What are some of the consequences of dabbling in these practices?

Imagine getting this invitation from God.



YOU ARE INVITED!

Isaiah 55:1-6

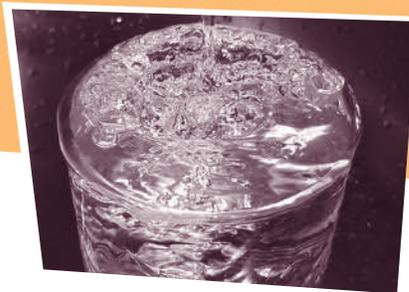
"Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink – even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk – it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food. Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David." . . .

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. (NLT)



Lord, I'm so thirsty.

I want the free drink You offer me.



PAUSE 3 _COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Our creative God has lots of ways to speak, just as any two people can communicate through spoken words, letters, e-mail, body language, facial expressions, actions, and gobetweens, just to name a few. Let's do a quick survey of the Bible to find out how God speaks.

In the margin gauge yourself on how often and how well you are hearing God when He speaks in these various "languages" of love.



1. LISTEN TO GOD'S CREATED WORKS

ROMANS 1:20. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

*PSALM 19:1-2.
God's glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.*

*Their words aren't heard,
their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere. (MSG)*

God has placed us in a universe with His fingerprints all around. It is His creation. An observant eye and a reflective mind will perceive the truth and meanings God has placed in nature regarding Himself.

Example: God created more than 70,000 species of beetles. One meaning—God creates and values diversity.

Give one example of something in creation that speaks to you about God.

2. LISTEN BY READING HIS LIVING WORDS FROM THE BIBLE

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

HEBREWS 4:12. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

3. LISTEN BY MEMORIZING PASSAGES FROM THE BIBLE

PROVERBS 6:20-23.

*My son, keep your father's commands
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
Bind them upon your heart forever;
fasten them around your neck.
When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you.
For these commands are a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline
are the way to life.*

PROVERBS 22:17-19.

*Listen to the words of the wise;
apply your heart to my instruction.
For it is good to keep these sayings in your heart
and always ready on your lips.
I am teaching you today – yes, you –
so you will trust in the LORD. (NLT)*

You've been exposed to Scripture memory in chapter 1. How have you experienced any personal advantages and challenges of your memorizing Scripture?



4. LISTEN TO HIS PEOPLE TEACH SCRIPTURE

EXODUS 24:7. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

NEHEMIAH 8:8. They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.
(NLT)

What's the best spoken message you've heard recently? What made it good?

5. LISTEN BY STUDYING THE BIBLE

EZRA 7:10. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

ACTS 17:11. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. (NLT)

Bible study goes deeper than Bible reading. When you study, you analyze what you read and you write down your discoveries and applications, as you are doing in this study. If you had lots of time and could study anything you wanted from the Bible, what would you choose?

Books:

Topics:

Characters:

6. LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

JOHN 16:12-15. I [Jesus] have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

How do you think we'll recognize the Holy Spirit when He speaks to us?

7. LISTEN TO GOD IN SILENCE

ECCLESIASTES 5:2. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

ISAIAH 30:15. This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."

HABAKKUK 2:20. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

JOHN 10:2-4,14,27. The shepherd of his sheep . . . calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . He goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. . . . I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. . . . My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.



God does not shout at us very often. Rather, as in most loving relationships, He usually speaks softly and tenderly to us. But often we're just too busy to listen, looking for Him in the wrong places, or paying more attention to other voices than to His. Developing the habit of quietly listening to God will deepen your relationship with Him.

In 1 KINGS 19:11-13 Elijah listened for God in a powerful wind, then an earthquake, then a fire — but God was not there. When He did speak, God gently whispered. Why do you think God chooses to whisper more often than He shouts?

A Caution on Balance . . .

God does not contradict Himself. Therefore, when we begin to listen to His words, His people, and His Spirit within us, we must be careful to measure the truth of what we are hearing with His written Word — the Bible.

YOU CHOOSE! Which of these various ways to listen to God would you like to focus on intentionally in the coming weeks? [See “Digging Deeper” at the end of the chapter for practical suggestions to get you started.]



CLOSING EXERCISE—LISTENING TO GOD

God wants to communicate in a personal way with each of us. Sometimes the only reason He hasn't spoken to us personally is that we haven't taken the time to truly listen. The following exercise² is an opportunity to listen to Him, to bare our souls to Him, rather than merely reflecting on ourselves with our cognitive mind. You'll need to set aside some extended time alone for this — perhaps 45–60 minutes. In another study in the *CONNECT* series, we'll walk you through an experience of emotional healing through listening prayer. For now, simply enjoy learning to recognize His voice. In getting ready to hear from God, the following steps have helped lots of people.

1. **STILL AND QUIET YOUR SOUL** — “But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother” (Psalm 131:2).
2. **RESIST THE ENEMY** — To resist Satan's attempts to deceive and blind you, pray something like this: “In the name of Jesus I prohibit any demonic forces speaking or interfering with this time.”
3. **INVITE AND FOCUS ON GOD'S PRESENCE** — Acknowledge Him as the one who is truly present and ask Him to help you experience His presence. Pray something like this: “Come, Lord Jesus, come.”
4. **ASK GOD TO SEARCH YOUR HEART** — Talk to Him about what He reveals and confess any known sin.
5. **ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO YOU** — Samuel prayed: “Speak, Lord, for I, Your servant, am listening.” As you go into listening prayer, ask the Lord, “Do You have anything You want to say to me about any of these areas of my life, or anything else?” (such as self-image, thoughts, history, relationships, behavior, emotions, etc.).
6. **WAIT IN SILENCE** — Quiet your heart with words like, “My soul waits in silence for God alone. Be still and know that I am God.”
7. **WRITE DOWN YOUR IMPRESSIONS** — These may be words, phrases, visual images, or thoughts that come into your mind through the still, small voice of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

REALITY CHECK

Prayer is NOT all about you! Listening prayer can simply be about being with God in worship, enjoying His presence without any questions or agenda.

² Adapted from *Emotional Healing Personal Guidebook* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Navigators People Resources Team, 2001), 15.

PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



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SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD SPEAKS – HEBREWS 1:1-2

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

DIGGING DEEPER

TOOLS FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

In this chapter we've given you several tools to help you listen to God:

Tool 1 – Reading the Bible Systematically

Tool 2 – Memorizing Verses

Tool 3 – Hearing God's Word

Tool 4 – Studying God's Word

Tool 5 – Listening Prayer

These classic spiritual disciplines can help you deepen your intimacy with God. But like a carpenter's tools, they're not meant to be used all at once! We invite you to sample and grow into them. So over the next year, we encourage you to come back to these tools again and again until you've given each one a focused one-to-two-months try.

TOOL 1: SYSTEMATIC BIBLE READING

Reading systematically through the Bible (yes, the whole Bible!) can give you an overall view of God's message. If you've never read through the Bible, you might want to start with the New Testament first. This will give you a context for reading and understanding the Old Testament. You might want to try an easy-to-read Bible translation such as the *New International Version* (NIV), *New Living Translation* (NLT), or *The Message* (MSG). Choose a reading pace that is realistic. Use a simple chart to keep track of which books and chapters you read.

Here's a challenge. If you read the Bible for only 15–20 minutes a day (about what we spend reading the newspaper), you can finish the New Testament in about three months.

Here's a bigger challenge. Why not set yourself a goal to read through the whole Bible every year for the next three years? Only 15 minutes a day will get you there!

TOOL 2: SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Some people are naturals at memorizing and they enjoy it; most of us aren't. But every one of us can memorize (hey, we all know our names, addresses, phone numbers). To be meaningful, three steps are important when you're memorizing:

- First, understand what you're memorizing by reading the context, maybe looking up key words, and trying to paraphrase what the verse means in your own words.

- Second, memorize it accurately, word for word. (You don't paraphrase your telephone number, do you?)
- Third, review and meditate on the verse daily for a month to store it in your long-term memory.

As you review, think about the ideas and concepts God is communicating to you. Ask God for wisdom to understand and apply the verse. You will find that God will bring verses to your mind during the day to guide and comfort you.

And remember W.W.J.D.? What did Jesus do when the Devil tempted Him in the desert? He quoted Scriptures that He had memorized earlier for such a time as this. In our world filled with temptations, Scripture you know by heart can protect you!

TOOL 3: HEARING GOD'S WORD

Other people who have studied the Scriptures can help us understand what God is saying. Listen to what they have learned. You can hear sermons in churches, on audio podcasts, and on TV. Read books and magazines to broaden your exposure to others' experiences with God. There is so much that others have written, painted, and sung through the twenty centuries of church history that can enrich our walks with God. Never forget that we always stand on the shoulders of other spiritual giants.

TOOL 4: STUDYING GOD'S WORD

Don't substitute somebody else's walk with God for your own personal walk. Always go back to the Scriptures for yourself. Studying the Bible implies that you're going deeper, looking for patterns, understanding concepts, while seeing the obvious. With a few basic how-to's, you can study a single verse, a longer passage, a whole book, a topic, or a Bible character. The Bible is a unique book written over many centuries, in three languages, and by many people inspired by God. Trust us: You won't exhaust this gold mine in your lifetime! So don't worry about ever becoming bored with God's love letter. You'll never master it, but perhaps it will master you.

TOOL 5: LISTENING PRAYER

As described in Pause 3, this is a dedicated time to hear God speak into your heart, bringing His agenda to you — not the other way around. These seven steps may help you hear Him better:

1. Still and quiet your soul.
2. Resist the Enemy.
3. Invite and focus on God's presence.
4. Ask God to search your heart.
5. Ask God to speak to you.

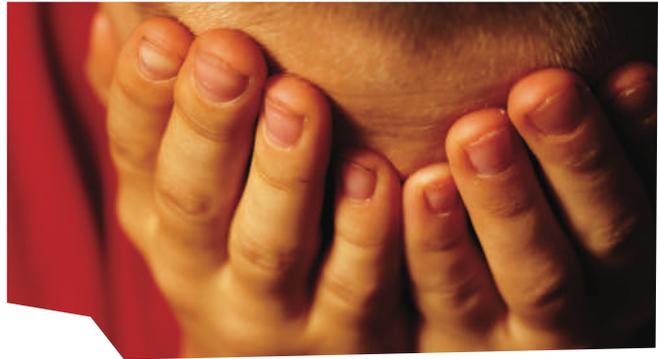
6. Wait in silence.
7. Write down your impressions.

Which one of these tools, or ways of listening to God, would you like to practice regularly in the coming one or two months? When and how will you begin?



CHAPTER 6

SPEAKING TO GOD: DOES HE LISTEN?



It was exactly one week after his father died. Fifteen-year-old Mike felt the vacancy left by his dad grow until it almost swallowed him. He felt angry and numb and afraid all at the same time. Mike cried out to God – the only Father he had left. Even as he did, he had so many questions. Could the God of the universe hear his voice and truly understand his heart cries? How would God handle all these confused and contradictory thoughts and feelings? Still, he tried his best to pray.

In the weeks following, God nudged into his numbness with gentleness and compassion and comfort. Years later the deep reality that God is there and that He listens still provides the foundation Mike needs as he faces life's deep issues.

They say that “in foxholes there are no atheists.” Well, you don’t have to be in a uniform to feel like you’re at war. So when you hear the bullets whistling by – whether fired by someone you love or used to love, by the accuser Satan, by painful circumstances, or even by your own shame and failure – it really helps to know that God is listening to your struggles and your cries.

Before you begin to process all the words in this study, take a minute or two to consider all the images. Select one that captures how you have (or have not) experienced speaking to God. Comment briefly on how the image affects you.

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

In your everyday experience, when are you most likely to talk with God? What do you usually talk about?

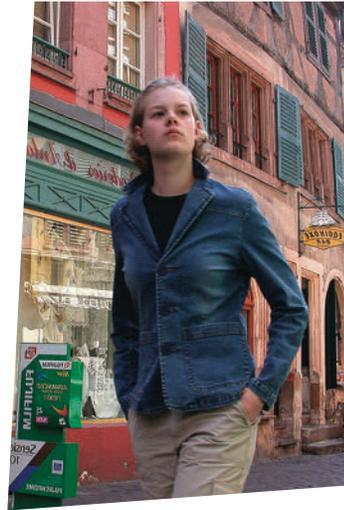
If God isn't truly compassionate, then prayer is just a lot of hot air, right? Before we get to the how-to's and why-to's of prayer, read these verses and make a few notes about the heart of the One you're talking to.

ISAIAH 49:15-16.

*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*

HEBREWS 4:14-16.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.



Compassion is the essence of [God's] nature and tenderness is his heartbeat. . . . God is, perhaps, more tender than you know.

— BRENNAN MANNING AND JIM HANCOCK, *POSERS, FAKERS, AND WANNABES*

What did you notice about God or Jesus in these passages that encourages you to engage in a dialogue with Him?



Let's explore what Jesus said about prayer. As you read these passages, record your thoughts and feelings about relating to a God who listens to all your words and thoughts, and even hears the imaginations of your heart. Also note how it seems God wants to be talked to.

MATTHEW 7:7-11. Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

JOHN 16:23-24. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

MATTHEW 6:6-13. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹This, then, is how you should pray:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us today our daily bread.
¹²Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."*

Think about metaphors again. What can you compare prayer to? Complete this sentence your way:

Prayer is . . .

Read MATTHEW 20:29-34. If Jesus already knows what we need and want, why do you think He still insists that we ask Him for it — and keep on asking?



Does the reality that God is listening right now motivate you to talk with Him or do you hold back for some reason? Either way, let it be a starting place for a conversation.

We can boldly come to our attentive God not in arrogance, demanding rights, but humbly, believing He loves us and desires good for His children. There are no magic formulas for “how to speak to God” — except to be authentic.

PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

The fact is that what you say to God, and whether you talk to Him at all, depends on what you think He's like and how you expect Him to respond. Maybe you see yourself working for God, the CEO of the universe, where only the big stuff reaches His desk and He expects you to take care of the rest yourself. Or maybe you see yourself playing beside God, your Dad (that's what the Greek word *Abba* means). He happily sets aside whatever is on His desk to give you His undivided attention.

How will your prayers be different from one day to the next?



In general, how do you expect God to answer your prayers?

When we ask God for something, there are three possible answers to our requests: Yes, No, and Wait. Can you describe times when God gave you any of these answers? What does that tell you about Him?

Do you feel okay getting emotional with God in prayer? Do you feel the freedom to be real with God in prayer (where both your heart and head can honestly connect with Him)? What does or might that look like for you?

What questions, if any, remain in your mind about prayer?



Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to You with my empty cup, uncertain in asking for any small drop of refreshment. If only I had known you better, I'd have come running with a bucket.

— NANCY SPIEGELBERG, *DECISION MAGAZINE*

PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

Let's move in closer now and tune in on some people as they prayed. In the margin jot down at least one thing about each prayer that particularly interests you for your own conversations with God. They illustrate three of many kinds of prayers:



SUPPLICATION

1 SAMUEL 1:10-11. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. And she made this vow: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime." (NLT)

INTERCESSION

EPHESIANS 3:16-21. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

CONFESSION

LUKE 18:9-14. He [Jesus] told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

¹³Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'"

¹⁴Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself." (MSG)

Summarize the two or three most interesting things you observed about prayer from these passages.

But that's only part of the picture. There is a lot more to praying than making requests and confessing sins. The book of Psalms includes many prayers by some very desperate people pouring out their angry, defeated, and shamed hearts to God in prayer. Select a couple of these "heavier" prayers to read, or choose your own. As you read them, circle phrases that sound like something you might have said to God in prayer in some of your own dark moments.

PSALM 6:1-9.

*¹O LORD, don't rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your rage.*

*²Have compassion on me, LORD, for I am weak.
Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.*

*³I am sick at heart.
How long, O LORD, until you restore me?*

*⁴Return, O LORD, and rescue me.
Save me because of your unfailing love.*

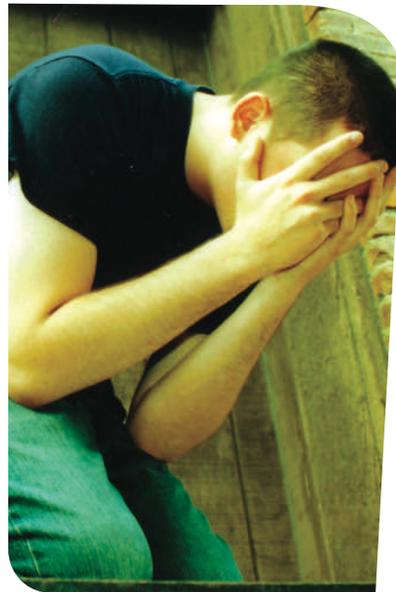
*⁵For the dead do not remember you.
Who can praise you from the grave?*

*⁶I am worn out from sobbing.
All night I flood my bed with weeping,
drenching it with my tears.*

*⁷My vision is blurred by grief;
my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.*

*⁸Go away, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.*

*⁹The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD will answer my prayer. (NLT)*



It is in the dark struggle with God that we are surprised by His response to our anger and fear. What we receive from Him during our difficult battle is not what we expect. We assume He wants order, conformity – obedient children. Instead, we find that He wants our passionate involvement and utter awe in the mystery of His glorious character. . . . He draws us to the extreme edge of life, where we cannot live by a careful, well-planned control. This is where the desert begins. It is where darkness draws us to the realm of desperation and dependence. It is the place where trust can grow.

– DAN B. ALLENDER AND TREMPER LONGMAN III, *CRY OF THE SOUL*

PSALM 31:1-2,7-8.

¹*O LORD, I have come to you for protection;
don't let me be disgraced.*

Save me, for you do what is right.

²*Turn your ear to listen to me;
rescue me quickly.*

*Be my rock of protection,
a fortress where I will be safe. . . .*

⁷*I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love,
for you have seen my troubles,
and you care about the anguish of my soul.*

⁸*You have not handed me over to my enemies
but have set me in a safe place. (NLT)*

PSALM 88:1-5,8-9,13.

¹⁻⁹*God, you're my last chance of the day.
I spend the night on my knees before you.*

*Put me on your salvation agenda;
take notes on the trouble I'm in.*

*I've had my fill of trouble;
I'm camped on the edge of hell.*

*I'm written off as a lost cause,
one more statistic, a hopeless case.*

*Abandoned as already dead,
one more body in a stack of corpses,*

*And not so much as a gravestone –
I'm a black hole in oblivion. . . .*

*I'm caught in a maze and can't find my way out,
blinded by tears of pain and frustration. . . .*

¹³*I'm standing my ground, God, shouting for help,
at my prayers every morning, on my knees each daybreak. (MSG)*

PSALM 44:23-26.

Get up, God! Are you going to sleep all day?

Wake up! Don't you care what happens to us?

Why do you bury your face in the pillow?

Why pretend things are just fine with us?

*And here we are — flat on our faces in the dirt,
held down with a boot on our necks.*

Get up and come to our rescue.

If you love us so much, Help us! (MSG)

What new insights about prayer have these passages given you?

May these prayers help release you to talk honestly with God about the bad as well as the good in your life. Perhaps this is a good time to just set aside this book for a few minutes and have a real authentic talk with God about some of the concerns on your heart. Don't worry. He can handle you better than you can imagine.



PRAISE AND ADORATION

Praise and adoration – that’s the last kind of prayer we’ll explore in this chapter. God loves it when we set aside our own agendas and simply **ADORE** Him in prayer! Such prayers include **PRAISING** Him for who He is and **THANKING** Him for what He has done. Listen to how others have expressed their adoration to God by choosing one of these prayers.

Psalm 71:14-24
Psalm 113

Psalm 100
Psalm 117

Psalm 103
Psalm 145

Find a way to include this element of prayer in your week or consider practicing it together as a group when you talk through this study.



God gave us the Psalms to teach us to pray.

– DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD LISTENS — JOHN 16:24

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

DIGGING DEEPER

In the twenty centuries since the birth of Jesus, His followers have developed many ways of praying to God. Every method is not for everyone. Here are a few creative prayer ideas for you to consider. Remember, the goal is not to perfect a method, but rather to enjoy interacting with your jealously loving and listening Father. So check just one of these that you would like to include in your spiritual journey in the coming weeks.

1. P.R.A.Y.

One simple guide for praying is using the acronym PRAY:

- **P**raise (praising God for who He is)
- **R**epent (asking forgiveness for wrongdoings)
- **A**sk (requests for others and ourselves)
- **Y**ield (opening our hearts to God's work in us)



2. EXTENDED TIME ALONE WITH GOD

Take an outdoor prayer retreat by setting aside one uninterrupted hour to be alone with God in nature. Use your time to meditate on Psalm 19, observe nature, and listen to whatever God wants to say to you. Consider extending your one hour to a whole day next time (more about this in chapter 9).

3. PRAYER BUDDY

Here's a good way to pray with someone else. Select a psalm. Take turns reading just one verse aloud, then pausing to talk to God about that verse. Then the other person reads the next verse and talks to God about it. This way of praying gets you talking with God about what's on His heart, as well as what's on your hearts.

4. SPIRITUAL/PRAYER JOURNAL

Even if you don't journal regularly, it's a good idea to write down the most important things you think God is saying to you. Consider keeping a spiritual journal, where you write down what you sense God saying to you during your Bible reading, study, or special times with Him. Journaling can help you crystallize your thoughts toward Him and His thoughts toward you. Eventually you'll find a style and structure that works best for you. You can also record your prayer requests with the date you began praying for it. Be sure to leave space to record God's answer.

5. DAILY DEVOTIONS or QUIET TIME

Many have combined listening to God AND talking to Him by having a daily time alone with God, a quiet time or devotional time. There are many ways to structure this time. Here is one way:

- First, thank God for a time to listen to Him and talk to Him. Ask Him for wisdom as you read the Bible.
- Second, read a Bible passage. This may be part of a Bible study, reading program, or memory verse. Seek to get to know God as a Person and to apply His Word to your life.
- Third, pray over the concerns of your heart, praise Him for who He is, and listen to Him in silence.

Don't become overly concerned with a form or how long you have a quiet time. Instead seek to experience God and grow in His love and truth. Writing in a spiritual journal will help you remember what you hear God saying to you during your quiet time together.

I asked for strength that I might achieve;
He made me weak that I might obey.

I asked for health that I might do great things;
He gave me grace that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel a need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I received nothing I had asked for
But all that I had hoped for.

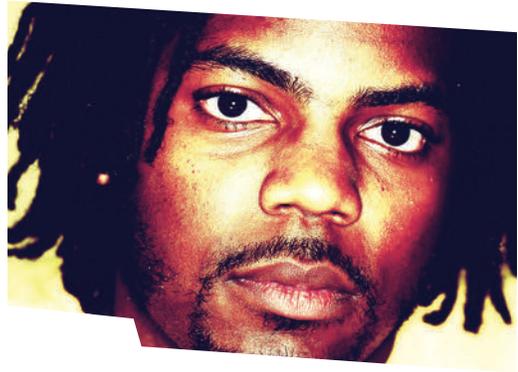
— Author unknown





CHAPTER 7

DETERMINING WHAT'S TRUE: HOW CAN I KNOW?



Jamaal was the star of his high school debate team. He came by his skills of intellect and analysis and persuasion honestly: His father was a lawyer, and most family conversations sounded like debates. So Jamaal, unlike many others, learned to trust sound reasoning, good evidence, and rational explanations in making decisions. Pleas based on emotion just irritated him. But what about moral and ethical decisions or decisions about what to build his life on spiritually?

Jamaal really struggled with ethical questions — like whether his country should be at war or not and whether capital punishment was okay. How was he to decide? It troubled him that he could defend the pro side with logic and evidence at one weekend's debate contest — and win. The next weekend he would debate the con side of the same question oh so logically — and win again. Logic alone couldn't tell him what was really true and right . . . what to believe and trust for his own moral code.

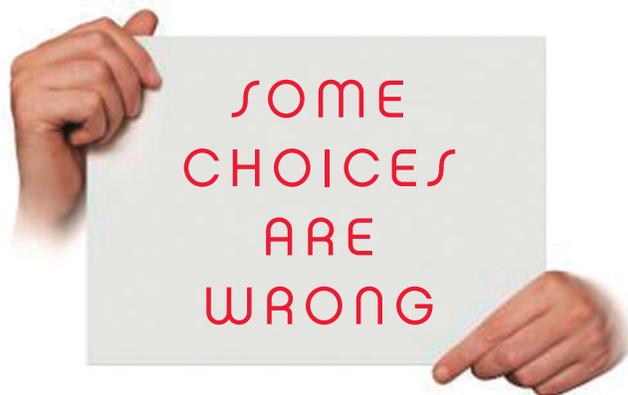
Jamaal was proud of his intellectual successes on the weekends, but he was miserable over his social "failures" all week at school. Popularity eluded him and he was as lonely as ever. In desperation, Jamaal prayed, "God, don't let me leave high school and hit college in this condition. I need to know what's really true about life and spiritual issues. What do I do with issues that defy logic and contradict political correctness? Please show me another way. You created the universe, God, and You manage to keep it running. You must know what's really true. Would You reveal it to me?"

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

So far you've explored the "fact" that God loves you. How do you know whether that "fact" is true or not?

Let's say someone in your group answers the above question this way: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." How would you react to his basis for knowing the truth about God's love?

Do you agree or disagree with this sign?



When courtroom witnesses swear to tell the truth, they often have their hands on a Bible. What do you think is the meaning of this practice?

Imagine that you're a judge or a police detective or a juror. What clues would convince you that a witness was telling the truth — or was lying?

Paul told the Thessalonians to "test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Are you more likely to test almost everything you're told or to believe almost everything you're told? In other words, do you consider yourself more skeptical or more trusting? Explain.



PAUSE 2 _ EXPLORING THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

We live in the Information Age. But we also get bombarded with misinformation, which can lead to deception. So in the flood of advertising hype, political correctness, opposing viewpoints, and spin, how can we find truth to trust in?



Of course, not all truths are equal. To illustrate, there is . . .

- Feeling truth: “This deadline makes me feel exhausted and frustrated.”
- Amoral truth: “The earth orbits the sun.”
- Personal moral truth: “I must recycle aluminum cans for environmental reasons.”
- Universal moral truth: “No one should murder.”

It’s this last kind of truth — universal moral and spiritual absolutes — that we’ll explore in this chapter.

We all do trust — to varying degrees — in some verbal expressions that are “truth statements.” But how do we sift through the lies, the illusions, and the mere opinions to decide what is true and real and trustworthy? A key question for any statement becomes, “Upon what do you base this thought?”

Consider this: Truth always has a source. The reliability (or unreliability) of the source is critical because truth is only as trustworthy as its source.

For example, pretend for a moment that you are a judge or a police detective. What would it take to convince you that a witness was telling the truth . . . or that a suspect was lying? Your answers to those questions reveal your “criteria” for accepting truth statements.

Below are seven common criteria for truth. We all use these criteria to decide what we’ll accept as truth statements that we can trust, commit to, and act upon — as well as which statements we will reject as untruth, half-truths, lies, fiction, or just someone else’s opinion. These seven criteria apply all the way from truth statements about ordinary life (I trust Ford cars) to global-worldview moral beliefs (I trust the Bible as God’s living Word). In most cases we trust truth statements based on not just one but several of these criteria — whether we are conscious of doing so or not.

So, we are asking you to take a closer look at the basis you use to make your decisions about truth. Why? Because only the truth that you trust can transform you!

Let's say you are trying to decide whether Statement X is true or not. You'll probably consider:

1. **RELIABLE FACTS.** Statement X is true if/because . . . others can observe and come to a similar conclusion. Historical and scientific evidence supports these truths.
 - The Yankees won the World Series in 1998–2000.
 - Rome ruled Israel during the time of Jesus.
2. **CONSISTENT STATEMENTS.** Statement X is true if/because . . . it makes logical sense without any inner contradictions.
 - When it's raining, there are clouds in the sky.
 - Disciples of Jesus are those who love and obey Jesus and invite His influence.

(NOTE: These truth statements may contain mysteries and paradoxes, but they are not contradictory to one another [God is a triune God – He is One with Three Persons]).
3. **CONCLUSIONS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.** Statement X is true if/because . . . it has proven to work for us personally and consistently over time.
 - I know from experience that using discount coupons reduces food expenses.
 - After eight years of benefiting from daily Bible reading, I trust that continuing my quiet time habit will help me live life well at home, at work, and with friends.
4. **CONCLUSIONS FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE.** Statement X is true if/because . . . experts or people we know to be trustworthy say it is true.
 - Car manufacturers recommend changing the motor oil at least every 5,000 miles, so I change my oil to keep my car running smoothly.
 - My mentors believe that submitting my career choices to God will not only honor God but also will be best for me.
5. **GOOD CONSEQUENCES.** Statement X is true if/because . . . it affects personal and social health in a beneficial way, such as promoting goodness and diminishing evil, or at least describing positive and negative consequences.
 - Obeying the speed limit reduces the risk of traffic accidents.
 - Yielding my concerns to God in prayer brings me peace.
6. **TRANSCENDENCE.** Statement X is true if/because . . . it has been proven to be trustworthy over long periods of time and across cultures or has been revealed in some valid way. Whatever it predicts happens as predicted.
 - You reap what you sow.
 - Many prophecies in the Bible came true, so I can trust it as the authoritative revealed Word of God to all humanity.
7. **CONCLUSIONS FROM REASON.** Statement X is true if/because . . . it's based on sound intellectual and emotional reasoning. Even without conclusive factual evidence or significant experience, our heads and hearts tell us this is true.
 - I love her and trust we'll have a wonderful marriage.
 - God loves me even when others reject me.

Which three or four of these truth criteria do you use most often as you trust, commit to, and act on truth statements?

When your “gut” tells you not to trust somebody’s claim of truth, which truth criteria are you usually listening to?



Many of us (like David’s family) have chosen “individual thought” as our system of truth. This means that there are no universal absolute truths — none. In this approach, each person decides “what is right in his own eyes” (Judges 25:21).

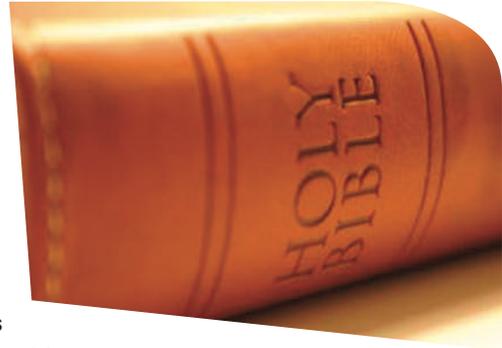
How would it feel to live in the vacuum where there are no absolute moral truths?

What would it be like to believe that there are absolute moral truths?

In our complicated world, many of us are suspicious of truth claims. Marketing ads, political slogans, broken promises from people we want to trust — all these can dull our sense of trusting anything and ultimately anyone. Satan makes it harder by trying to deceive us (see Revelation 12:9).

PAUSE 3_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Truth be told, the Bible unashamedly claims to be an authoritative document revealed by God that declares universal truths about spiritual realities, good and evil, and how to live life well. Furthermore, it claims to be the living Word of God (see Hebrews 4:12). So if God, as its Author, is present everywhere, that includes His promise to enter into this discovery process with us.



The Bible (and twenty centuries' worth of followers of Christ) have claimed that ultimate truth can be found in Scripture. As you read and mark each passage below, try to summarize in the margin how that passage addresses the issue "We can trust God's Word, the Bible, to tell us the truth because . . ." If you can connect it with one of the seven truth criteria, mark that too.

Because . . .

DEUTERONOMY 18:17-22. The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

MATTHEW 4:8-11. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it

is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

MATTHEW 5:17-18. Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

MATTHEW 24:35. [Jesus describing signs of the end of the age] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

LUKE 24:25-27. He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

LUKE 24:44. He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

JOHN 1:17. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

JOHN 10:25. Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me."

JOHN 17:17. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

ACTS 17:11. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

HEBREWS 4:12. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

HEBREWS 6:16-18. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

1 PETER 1:24-25. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 JOHN 1:1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

Try to finish this statement three different ways. According to these verses, we can trust that the Bible is true, and that it reveals truth, because:

1.

2.

3.

Some truth is just beyond our human ability and five senses to figure out. Consider these verses about receiving God's revelation:

ROMANS 1:19-20. What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

GALATIANS 1:11-12. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

What did you observe in these verses about God's revelation?

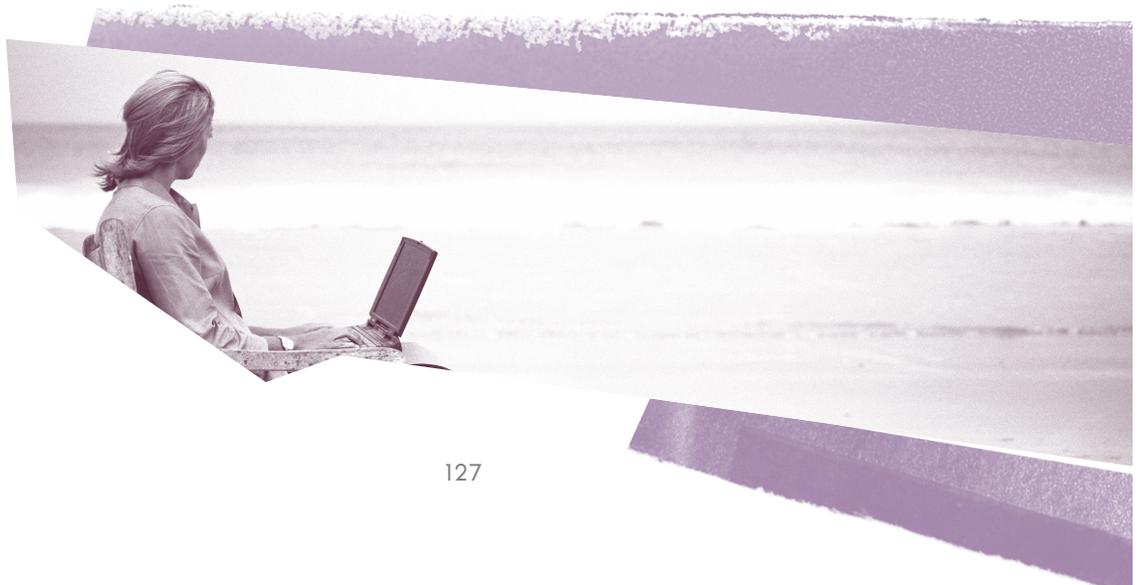
How do you think God views all the different opinions on truth floating around out there? To what degree do you think God is intolerant of views that oppose His?



What are some things you can think of that Jesus didn't tolerate? (Hint: Check out His words to the Pharisees.)

Let's say that you do believe in some universal moral absolutes (that certain rights and wrongs are true for all people all the time). How can we respect thoughts and ideas different from ours without embracing them? Explain that a little.

If you could ask God any questions about truth — or about the Bible — what would you ask Him?



PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

GOD'S WORD — 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

DIGGING DEEPER

EXPERIMENT: To help you clarify how you personally make decisions about what to believe and what not to believe, try this experiment. Sometime this week set aside 15–20 minutes to watch those extended “paid advertisements” on television. Or choose a commercial you’re familiar with. Take notes under the categories below. Here’s an example of an infomercial for a power saw.



PRODUCT/SERVICE	TRUTH CLAIMS	TRUTH CRITERIA
Power saw	Sears Craftsman says it's effective Used to build 12,000 Habitat homes	4—others' experience 1—reliable facts

How much do you trust the truthfulness of the advertisers? Explain.

How much do you trust the truthfulness of God? Explain.





CHAPTER 8

BECOMING CONVINCED: WHO CAN I TRUST?



Does it seem ironic that even the most atheistic of scientists base their conclusions on faith: faith in their logic and assumptions, in their measurements and instruments, in the accuracy of their experiments? They trust the validity and the integrity of their truth systems. However, scientific processes are limited to only our five senses. What about real things that exist beyond the realm of our five senses?

As believers in Jesus, we have trusted a Person. And we have trusted truth statements about Him that are in the Bible. As long as we live on earth bound by time, trust will always be involved in any belief. Absolute certainty may not be possible. But reasonable certainty is! When we reach heaven, all we have trusted in will be confirmed:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

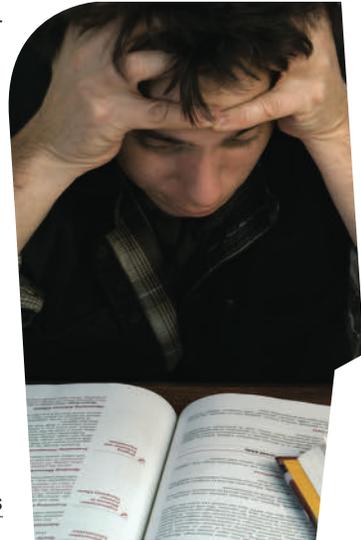
Ultimately we are confident in what we believe because He is the One who told us, and it is impossible for Him to lie. The One who is the Truth always tells the truth.

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Searching for and discerning truth is hard work – especially universal moral and spiritual truth. In chapter 7 we explored the authority and reliability of Scripture to aid us in that search. But does the Bible (actually the Author of the Bible) really tell us enough for discerning good and evil in our complex twenty-first-century global community? Maybe the issues in our generation, not to mention the tough issues in our individual lives, are just too difficult for Him.

Put another way, is the Bible (and the God of the Bible) really sufficient to help us resolve the moral issues and make tough life decisions? Is it sufficient to guide us in a cultural context that seems less “believer-friendly” every day?

As you read the following passages, see how each one might answer the question, “So why should I trust the Bible to stake my life on and to guide me in my daily life?” Record your thoughts and feelings in the chart on page 136.



JOSHUA 1:8. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

PSALM 1:2-3.

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

MATTHEW 7:24-29. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

JOHN 8:31-32. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

ROMANS 15:4. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

EPHESIANS 6:17. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

HEBREWS 5:12-14. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

2 PETER 1:3-4. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

From all the reasons given, what specifically makes you trust the Bible as the guidebook for your life?

Only the truth that you trust can transform you.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH GOD'S WORD?	PASSAGES	HOW WILL GOD'S WORD IMPACT MY LIFE?
Meditate on it regularly and do what it tells me to do	Joshua 1:8	prosperity and success

One person says, "I know that God is sovereign, so I will . . ."

His friend says, "I know that God is sovereign too, but . . .?"

Both know the truth about God's sovereignty. But only the first one seems to trust it enough to live out of that truth. Try to explain what you think the difference is between these two concepts.

Knowing the truth, but . . .



Living out of the truth, so . . .



Can you illustrate times when you did one or the other?

At this point, to what degree do you believe you can confidently rely on the Bible as the authoritative and sufficient source of truth for you to live your life by (for right and wrong, view of reality, decision-making, keys to relationships, preparing for eternity, etc.)? Give an example of how the truth of the Bible actually affects (or could affect) your daily life.

PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

WARNING: There are alternatives to trusting the God of the Bible. The search for truth is difficult, so it's important to bear in mind that you have an enemy and know what tactics he's using against you. Mark or underline whatever you observe about Satan's war on truth.



JOHN 8:44. He [the Devil] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4. Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. (NLT)

2 CORINTHIANS 11:3. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

EPHESIANS 2:2. The devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. (NLT)

If you had to boil down Satan's core (untrue) message to humanity, what would it be?

COLOSSIANS 2:8 also warns us about several very common supposed truth systems that Satan has corrupted.

COLOSSIANS 2:8. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Which one of these common “truth” systems most influences what you think and believe?

- Rationalism – the world or my mind decides what is right or wrong.
- Fatalism – everything is predetermined, so my choices don’t make any difference anyway.
- Traditionalism – the way we or others did it before is right.
- Pragmatism/Emotionalism – if it works or feels good, it must be right.

When you look back on your life, how have these “truth” systems affected you?

If we choose to let these “isms” tell us how to live, we won’t be the first people – or the last – to do so. Consider the two disturbing passages on page 140 – the first from Israel’s first few centuries as a nation and the second describing the future during the last days before Jesus returns to earth.

Historical Comment: Judges 21:25 summarizes what was the darkest and most degenerate period in Israel's history up to that point — a stretch of about 350 years after they settled in the Promised Land called Canaan. During those years Israel:

- *quickly forgot the powerful acts of God that had given birth to their nation and had established them in the land*
- *lost sight of their unique revealed identity as God's chosen people called to belong to Him*
- *became absorbed by Canaan's peoples, morals, gods, social life, and religious beliefs and practices*

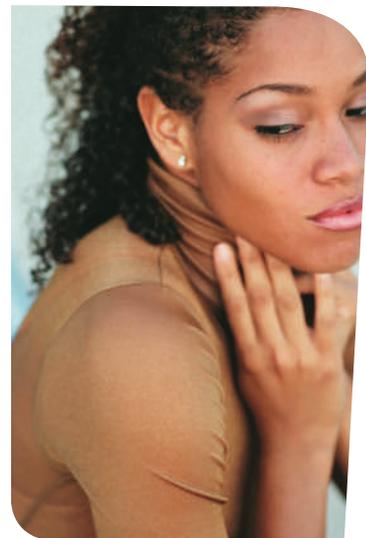
JUDGES 21:25. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

People did whatever they felt like doing. (MSG) . . . whatever seemed right in their own eyes. (NLT)

2 THESSALONIANS 2:9-12. The Anarchist's coming is all Satan's work. All his power and signs and miracles are fake, evil sleight of hand that plays to the gallery of those who hate the truth that could save them. And since they're so obsessed with evil, God rubs their noses in it — gives them what they want. Since they refuse to trust truth, they're banished to their chosen world of lies and illusions. (MSG)

Some of us find the search for truth so hard that we opt for an attitude that says “anything goes” or “I've already made up my mind, so don't confuse me with the facts.” According to these passages, what is likely to result if we go down that road?

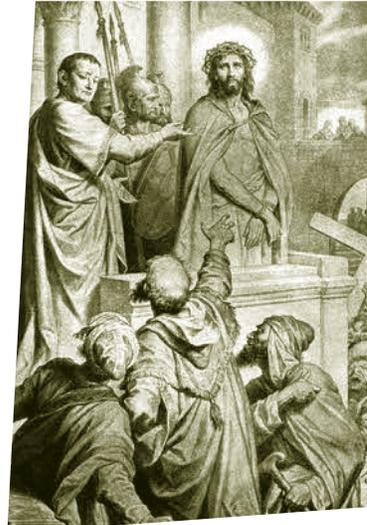
Has the Holy Spirit brought any ways to your attention in which you're refusing to trust truth? Explain.



PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

JESUS BRINGS TRUTH (HIS PURPOSE)

Pilate was a man searching for the truth. Read about his conversation with Jesus in JOHN 18:33–19:6. What do you discover about the search for truth from this story?



Meditate a bit deeper on verse 37 from this story.

JOHN 18:37. Jesus responded, “You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.” (NLT)

When Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Jesus left his question hanging. Share your thoughts on why Jesus chose to leave this open-ended.

JESUS IS THE TRUTH (HIS IDENTITY)

Jesus claimed not only to know the truth, but to be the Truth.

JOHN 14:6. Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” (NLT)

What do you think is the difference between Jesus’ knowing the truth and Jesus’ being the Truth?

JESUS TELLS THE TRUTH (HIS MESSAGE)

Because Jesus is the Truth, He is also a truth teller. Time after time He said, "I tell you the truth . . ." and then revealed some aspect of moral or spiritual reality that He wanted His followers to know. If you look up the word truth in a Bible concordance, you'll find around ninety different references in the four Gospels to Jesus talking about the truth.

Here are just a few of those ninety places where Jesus said, "I tell you the truth. . . ." Look up as many of these verses as you want to in your Bible or check out your concordance under the word truth. In the blank space, summarize the specific truths that Jesus wanted His disciples — then and now — to know and trust.

JOHN 5:24-25 That believing in Jesus is the only way to experience life after death

MATTHEW 17:20

MATTHEW 18:3

MATTHEW 18:18-20

MATTHEW 25:40

JOHN 3:3,5

JOHN 6:47,51

JOHN 8:32,34

Why do you think it was so important to Jesus to clarify these truths for His followers?

How do these “I tell you the truth” statements of Jesus help you answer the question, “Who can I trust to tell me the truth?”? If you really believed the truth contained in every one of these truth statements, what impact would that have on the way you see and live your life and the moral choices you make?



There is such a thing as healthy skepticism and processing when you are trying to determine what's true (just ask the Bereans in Acts 17:11). Peter was probably among the skeptics when an obscure carpenter from Nazareth claimed to be “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” in fulfillment of the ancient prophets of God! Maybe some of Peter's own skeptical friends — seeing how Peter was later so sold-out for Jesus — confronted him and asked, “Peter, how can you be sure all this stuff is true?”

Read 2 PETER 1:16–2:3 to discover what it was that convinced Peter of the absolute truth and reliability of the claims made by Jesus and the Holy Scriptures. Then paraphrase in 3–4 sentences what made Peter so sure of the truth he believed.

Suppose one of your sincerely skeptical friends asks you tomorrow, “How do you know all this stuff you believe about Jesus and the Bible is really true?” In light of all you have studied so far, how would you answer? (Try saying your response out loud as well as writing it.)

This Jesus who insisted on telling the truth to His disciples 2,000 years ago is vibrantly alive today — and He lives to make us come alive to Him and His reality. What assurance does that give you for finding truth to trust and live by in the twenty-first century?

PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

JESUS IS THE TRUTH – JOHN 14:6

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

DIGGING DEEPER

REMEMBER TRUTH CRITERIA 6 – Transcendence? In addition to claiming to be true, the Bible is filled with prophecies made at various times in history and fulfilled later – sometimes many centuries later. Here are a few of the many prophecies about the Christ and how Jesus fulfilled them in every detail.¹

PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

TOPIC	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Place of birth	But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2), 700 BC	Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. (Matthew 2:1)
Born of a virgin	Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son. (Isaiah 7:14, KJV), 700 BC	His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)
His triumphal entry into Jerusalem	Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9), 500 BC	They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. (John 12:13-14)
His rejection	He was despised and rejected by men. . . . Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3), 700 BC	He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:11)
Betrayed by a friend	Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9), 1000 BC	Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. (Mark 14:10)

¹ There are at least sixty-one major prophecies about Jesus that were fulfilled accurately years or centuries later. Read more about them in Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

TOPIC	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Crucified with sinners	[He] was numbered with the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12), 700 BC	Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. (Matthew 27:38)
Hands and feet pierced	They have pierced my hands and my feet. (Psalm 22:16), 1000 BC	Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. (John 20:27)
His resurrection	You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (Psalm 16:10), 1000 BC	You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. (Acts 3:15)
His ascension	Thou hast ascended on high. (Psalm 68:18, KJV), 1000 BC	He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:9)
His return	At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30), AD 50-60	Not yet fulfilled

What impact do these prophecies and their fulfillments have on your understanding of truth and the Bible's authority to proclaim truth?



CHAPTER 9

THE HOLY SPIRIT: WHO IS HE IN ME?



Maria was brought up to believe in Jesus, in God the Father, and to read her Bible. That was pretty much it. For her, the Holy Spirit was a biblical fact – but not a personal reality. The idea of the Spirit’s power was scary. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit seemed intrusive. Her life already felt so fragmented. If she gave the Holy Spirit another piece of her heart, she was afraid there wouldn’t be anything left that was hers.

But the fruit of the Holy Spirit – joy, love, peace, kindness, and the rest – she couldn’t deny. Some of her friends seemed so vibrant and alive with the fruit! They seemed to enjoy a personal connection with the Spirit that Maria didn’t have a clue about. She longed to experience His evidence in her life but remained wary of His control.

So far in this study we’ve learned about God as our Father and about Jesus as His Son and our Savior. But God is and always has been Spirit as well. The Holy Spirit is a distinct Person within our triune God. The Trinity is a mystery . . . a paradox. And no amount of Bible study will de-mystify this. But it is every believer’s privilege to experience the Holy Spirit because He lives inside of us. We are the very temple of God’s Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 3:16).

PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

God's Spirit is present everywhere—and always has been (as both the Old and New Testaments reveal). Underline or circle whatever you notice about the Holy Spirit's activity before Jesus came in the flesh.



GENESIS 1:1-2. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

2 PETER 1:20-21. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

To explore that idea a bit more, read PSALM 139:1-18. As you read, write any words or phrases that describe:

- **Where God's Holy Spirit is in relation to you in time and space**
verses 1-3—knows every move I make, from close up and "from afar"

- **What the Spirit is doing within you/how well He knows you**
verses 1-2—searching my inner world, even my thoughts

YOU HADDA BE THERE

By Robert Longman Jr., Spirithome.com (used by permission)

It appears from what Jesus says in John 16 that the presence of the Spirit is something better, at least in some ways, than having Jesus alive in our midst, even in a resurrected form. . . .

My guess at this mysterious saying goes like this. When Jesus walked the earth, it was a “you hadda be there” experience. “You hadda be there” because it was quite a trip to be around Him and words could not describe it well enough, if the authors of the Gospels are to be believed. But it was a “you hadda be there” kind of thing in another way: if you were anywhere else than where Jesus was, you were not in the presence of the second person of the Trinity. He took on the limits of being a human being, including those of time and space, with the eventual reality of death. These limits go with being “incarnate” (being a body-being).

When Jesus Christ left, “the Comforter”/“Supporter”/“Advocate” (the Holy Spirit) came in His place. The Holy Spirit is, of course, SPIRIT, and has never been a bodily being like Christ. There are some advantages to being just a spirit. The Spirit has no limit of time or space. The Spirit is able to work within minds and through people’s activities, in the everyday realm everywhere, throughout the centuries. Jesus does what could only be done by a bodily being who is in the Spirit, while the Holy Spirit does what a bodily being can’t do by itself. (Whatever the task is, all of God’s Persons are at work in the task somehow.)

Respond to anything in the quote from Robert Longman that caught your heart or imagination.

From these verses, how do we receive the Holy Spirit? How does receiving the Holy Spirit affect us?

EZEKIEL 36:26-27. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

TITUS 3:4-7. But — “When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.” (NLT)

Once we've received the Holy Spirit through trusting Jesus, He takes up residence in our hearts. As the Holy Spirit indwells us, He illuminates the work of Christ and He helps us grasp the truth of Christ. To get a handle on this astounding truth, consider these words of Jesus and Paul:

JOHN 14:16-18. [Jesus to His disciples just before He was crucified] And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him. . . . But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans — I will come to you. (NLT)

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-16. That's why we have this Scripture text: "No one's ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like it — what God has arranged for those who love him." But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you.

¹⁰⁻¹³The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along. Who ever knows what you're thinking and planning except you yourself? The same with God — except that he not only knows what he's thinking, but he lets us in on it. God offers a full report on the gifts of life and salvation that he is giving us. We don't have to rely on the world's guesses and opinions. We didn't learn this by reading books or going to school; we learned it from God, who taught us person-to-person through Jesus, and we're passing it on to you in the same firsthand, personal way.



¹⁴⁻¹⁶The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit — God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion. Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God's Spirit is doing, and can't be judged by unspiritual critics. Isaiah's question, "Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?" has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's Spirit. (MSG)

From this passage, along with Titus 3:4-7 and John 14:16-18, how do you see each Person of our triune God working in you and helping you spiritually? [NOTE: All of the names used in these passages — the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, God's Spirit, Christ's Spirit — refer to the one and only Holy Spirit.]

How do you respond to the awesome truth that you have Christ's Spirit and that He reveals to you what is on God's heart?

How do you respond to the reality that the Holy Spirit has access to your spirit, including even the "thoughts and intentions" of your mind? Do you like the idea of Someone indwelling you? Ponder that idea for a moment. What feelings surface?

PAUSE 2 _EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

When you were growing up, how did you imagine the Holy Spirit?



One name for the Holy Spirit is *Paraclete*— a Greek word meaning “one who is called alongside to help.” Our English words paramedic and paralegal share the same root meaning. What do you think the Holy Spirit has in common with these other people or entities that come “alongside to help” people in need? How is He different?

If you can, describe a time when you believe the Holy Spirit taught, reminded, guided, comforted, or spoke to you.

One metaphor that appears often in the Bible compares the results of righteous living to bearing fruit (see Psalm 1:3 and Matthew 21:43, for example). So it’s only natural that when the Holy Spirit is “rooted” in our hearts, He will begin to produce “fruit” that reflects different aspects of holiness and righteousness.

You have probably noticed that the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as “He” or “Him.” In light of our cultural sensitivity to gender, consider this thought: That’s “He” as opposed to “It.” Scripture uses the personal pronoun “He” so that we’ll always relate to the Holy Spirit as a Person — not as an inanimate “it”!

GALATIANS 5:22-23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Which of His fruit do you see most evident and growing in your life right now? Which of the fruit would you like to become more evident?

The reality is that the relationship goes both ways. Our choices can affect the Holy Spirit; we can even break His heart. That's why Paul begged us not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). In other words, because the Holy Spirit is a Person (not an "it"), He can be deeply saddened by us. Read the following passages from your Bible in light of that truth.

ISAIAH 63:9-10

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

From these passages and your own observation, what are some things that grieve the Spirit of God?

*THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON.
He is not enthusiasm.
He is not courage.
He is not energy.
He is not the personification of all good qualities,
like Jack Frost is the personification of cold weather.
Actually, the Holy Spirit is not the personification of anything . . .
He has individuality.
He is one being and not another.
He has will and intelligence.
He has hearing.
He has knowledge and sympathy and ability to love
and see and think. He can hear, speak, desire,
grieve and rejoice.
He is a Person.*

— A. W. TOZER, *THE COUNSELOR*

For example, how do you think your choices regarding money and sex affect the heart of the Holy Spirit? Why?

Check any statements below that describe your relationship with the Holy Spirit at this point in your journey. Then go back and underline the one you would like to experience more in the coming weeks.

- I am taking steps to come under the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- I am consciously aware of being the "house" in which God's Spirit lives.
- I rely on the Holy Spirit to guide my decisions.
- I recognize the Holy Spirit as a Person with mind, will, and emotions.
- I can point to times when God's Spirit has encouraged me or given me strength to fulfill something in God's plan.



PAUSE 3_COMING ALIVE TO GOD'S SPIRIT

So far we've discovered that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, dwelling in the hearts of those who belong to Jesus, giving us access to the heart of God. But what exactly is He doing? How does He influence and help us?



THE HOLY SPIRIT GLORIFIES JESUS

When Jesus explained to His disciples why the Father was going to send them the Holy Spirit, this is what He said. Write your observations and questions in the margin.

JOHN 14:26. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

JOHN 15:26. When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

JOHN 16:12-15. There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, "The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me." (NLT)

According to Jesus, how would the promised Holy Spirit glorify Him?

The Spirit draws us into the presence of Christ, even to the point of creating a relationship between us and Jesus Christ that can be so close that to speak of being in union with Him does not have to be blasphemous. The bond between us and the risen Jesus Christ is a bond sewn by the Holy Spirit.

— ROBERT LONGMAN JR., SPIRITHOME.COM

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US TO LIFE AND PEACE

Who is the Holy Spirit? What does He actually do? And how do we relate to Him? Study the following verses and write your thoughts, observations, and questions in the margin.

ROMANS 8:6,11. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. . . .

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (NLT)

GALATIANS 5:16-18. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

GALATIANS 5:25. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

You probably noticed that God intends us to “live by . . . be controlled by . . . keep in step with . . . be led by” His Spirit. Explain what you think that means.

Every time we say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” we mean that we believe that there is a living God able and willing to enter human personality and change it.

— J. B. PHILLIPS, *PLAIN BELIEVERITY*

How does the possibility of “being controlled by the Spirit” make you feel?

Explore “living by the Spirit” a bit more by responding to one or two from this list. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit influencing your:

- search for truth and reality
- prayers
- decisions and choices in life
- understanding of God’s Word
- spiritual growth
- desire for belonging
- sense of loneliness

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS AND COMFORTS US

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes several ways that the Holy Spirit helps us. Summarize what each verse says about the Holy Spirit’s activity in our lives.

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

2:18

2:22

3:16-19

5:18

6:17-18

True to His name, Paraclete (“one who is called alongside to help”), the Holy Spirit is always there for us – the “first responder” in doubt, distress, and even in death. From these passages, mark and summarize any ways the Holy Spirit helps you.

JOHN 14:16,18. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. . . . I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (KJV)

JOHN 16:8. And when he [the Counselor/Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (NLT)

ROMANS 8:14-16. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. (NLT)

ROMANS 8:26-27. And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will. (NLT)

Summarize the ways mentioned here that the Holy Spirit helps us and stands up for us.

Think of a time when your heart broke. How do you think the Holy Spirit experienced your pain at that time? How (if at all) did you experience His comfort and help?

What do you imagine the Holy Spirit has prayed for you recently, and how does that make you feel?

From everything you have learned in this chapter, what do you most appreciate about the Holy Spirit and why?

TAKE TIME TO SIT SILENTLY WITH THE LORD

Thank the Spirit of God for His presence in your life. If you have fears or reservations concerning the Spirit, tell Him. Ask Him for His help regarding the things on your heart as well as what might be on His heart for you. Remember His “personhood” as you talk.



PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

THE HOLY SPIRIT — JOHN 14:16-17

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth.

DIGGING DEEPER

LIVING THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Here's something interesting! Jesus called His disciples to "abide in Him" (John 15:1-7, *KJV*). Paul urged the believers in Rome to "live by the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-17). Read each passage in your Bible. Take notes on how you do that and what you'll experience if you do.

JOHN 15:1-7	ROMANS 8:1-17
How to abide in Christ	How to live through the Spirit
Results of abiding in Christ	Results of living through the Spirit

EXPERIENCING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit also distributes spiritual gifts to every member of God's family.

In various translations of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is also called:

The Counselor	The Comforter	The Eternal Spirit
The Helper	The Voice of the Almighty	The Spirit of Christ
The Spirit of Counsel	The Spirit of Power	The Spirit of Fire
The Spirit of Glory	The Spirit of God	The Spirit of Grace
The Spirit of Supplication	The Spirit of His Son	The Spirit of Holiness
The Spirit of Jesus Christ	The Spirit of Judgment	The Spirit of Justice
The Spirit of Knowledge	The Spirit of Life	The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord
The Spirit of Truth	The Spirit of Wisdom	The Spirit of Understanding
The Spirit of Revelation		

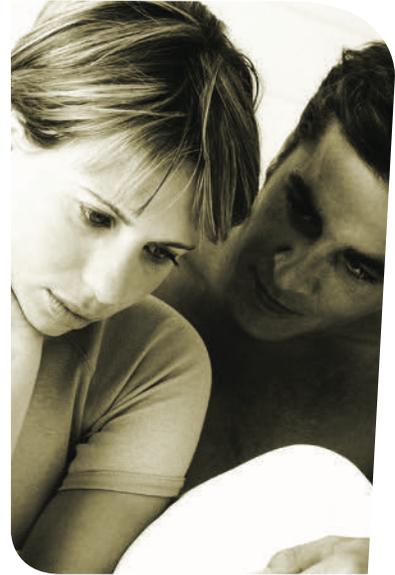
Consider the various names of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Scripture. Select one of the following methods to unwrap some of His names:

1. Circle several of the Holy Spirit's many names that speak to you where you are and explain why.
2. Use a concordance to explore where a particular name was used and why (i.e., read the context).
3. Meditate on the implications of the reality that the Spirit of God (by the name you have chosen) lives in you.



CHAPTER 10

WORSHIPPING GOD: DOES IT REACH BEYOND MUSIC?



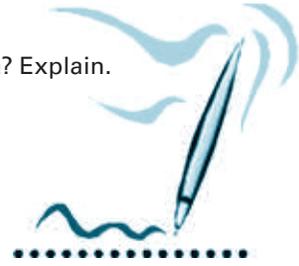
It's Sunday morning again, and James and Jana are having the same old discussion. Time is precious. James wants to go fishing with God and Jana wants to go sing with her friends at church.

Jana is looking forward to the worship service. The singing lifts her soul from the ordinary routines of life, and the liturgy connects her with believers over the centuries. Sometimes the message inspires her, and celebrating the Lord's Supper is meaningful. But the real joy is worshipping God with people she knows and loves. Connecting with them is an oasis in a stress-filled week.

But James feels he worships God better out in nature viewing His awesome works. The sight of the sky lifts his heart upward. The intricacies of plants and animals remind him in a very real way that he is a creature and God is the Creator. What could possibly be wrong with that? The worship service at the church seems shallow in comparison to the depths of God's creation. Much of what he hears and smells and touches in nature seems to penetrate the hardships of life in an urban setting, and it refreshes his soul.

Worship isn't the issue. The issue is how to worship. Today they have found a compromise. Today they will go to early church and then to the mountain lake. There is peace in their marriage, but something still seems unsettled in their souls. What is worship, really?

When it comes to worshipping God, are you more like James or Jana? Explain.



PAUSE 1_EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Review the passages below on worship and write out your thoughts, reactions, and questions.

Underline whatever these passages reveal about the worshippers, and circle what is revealed about the God they worship.

PSALM 29:1-2.

*Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.*

PSALM 95:1-7.

*¹Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
²Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
³For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
⁵The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
⁶Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
⁷for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

HEBREWS 12:28-29. Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire. (NLT)

REVELATION 4:9-11. Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns



before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

From these passages, what is it about God that inspires such passionate worship?

From these passages, what does it feel like when you're worshipping God from your heart?

JESUS ON WORSHIP

Read these passages where Jesus talks about worship, writing your observations in the margin.

JOHN 4:19-24. "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

MATTHEW 4:8-11. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

In your own words, summarize Jesus' views on true worship.



WORSHIP 24/7

We have been made for the reality of God's presence to spill into work, home, our communities, and especially our hearts. (We'll explore several expressions of worship in Pause 3.) Read these passages and consider how worship is meant to involve all that we do:

ROMANS 12:1. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

Here's the same verse from *The Message*:

ROMANS 12:1. So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering. (MSG)

COLOSSIANS 3:16-17. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

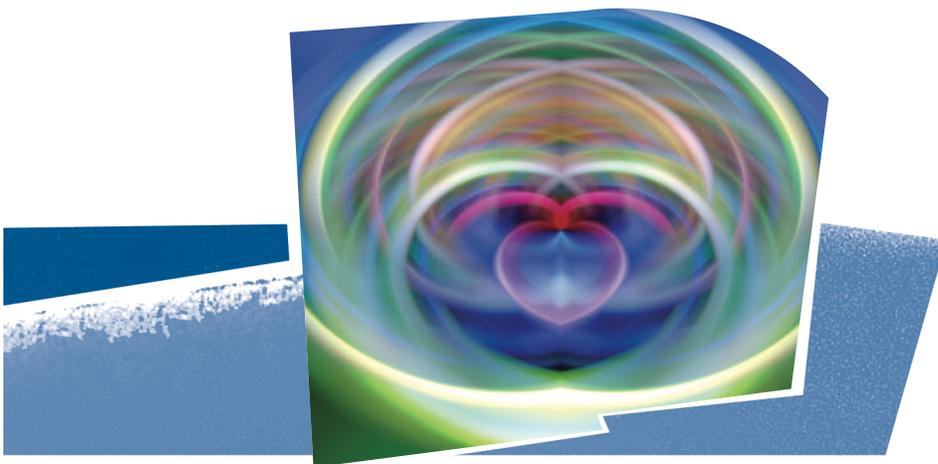
1 THESSALONIANS 5:17. Pray continually.

What would be involved for you to offer your body as a “spiritual act of worship” to your Father?

What risks might you face when you surrender in worshipful obedience to God?

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

24/7 worship is a mind-set more than an activity. Worship recognizes that life has meaning because God is present everywhere and all the time. Worship is an authentic journey into the heart of God as we submit ourselves to Him in all that we are and do. Worship delights in the reality that He is worthy of our soul’s complete adoration and surrender while admitting that we are not worthy to be the focus of His love and delight. Nevertheless, we submit in awe to Him, who is worthy of all glory, power, and honor.



PAUSE 2_EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

WORSHIP GONE AWAY

Worship is so much a part of our humanity that we can't help but do it. The question is not whether we will worship but what or who we will worship. In the Bible, God takes misguided expressions of worship—both religious and “nonreligious” — very seriously. Consider these:



ACTS 17:23. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

ROMANS 1:25. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

MATTHEW 6:24. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

MATTHEW 15:7-9. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

How have you seen both healthy and unhealthy (“in vain”) expressions of worship in your culture?

Anything you focus your affection on can become an idol. What idols or things (if any) may be competing with God for your worship?

An old hymn called "Come Thou Fount" captures the tendency of our hearts when it says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." The stark reality is that if we don't worship in the right direction, we will become spiritual adulterers at heart.

In the second of the Ten Commandments, God says:

EXODUS 20:3-5. You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind. . . . You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. (NLT)

What do you think arouses God's jealousy for you?

How does your heart respond to worshipping a God who loves you with a jealous love?

Noise and words and frenzied, hectic schedules dull our senses, closing our ears to his still, small voice and making us numb to his touch.

— UNKNOWN

WORSHIPPING WELL

When God restored King Nebuchadnezzar to health and power, we read that the king “honored . . . glorified . . . praised . . . and exalted” God (Daniel 4:34-37). Other translations describe worshippers “blessing and magnifying” God. All of these are expressions of worship. Whatever those words mean, it’s a lot more than just singing!

What do you think it means to glorify and exalt and magnify God? (Grab a dictionary if you want to broaden your definition of worship.)

Find an image somewhere that somehow captures what worship looks like to you. Bring that image to your group.

What does it mean to glorify? It is more like the word magnify. . . . When you magnify like a telescope, you make something unimaginably great look like what it really is. With the Hubble Space Telescope, pinprick galaxies in the sky are revealed for the billion-star giants that they are. Magnifying God like that is worship.

— JOHN PIPER, *DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE*

PAUSE 3 _COMING ALIVE TO GOD AND OTHERS

WORSHIPPING GOD IS A LIFESTYLE. Here are several traditional expressions of worship. As you read these passages, pause to consider how each different expression might — or might not — help you come alive to God with a worshipful heart. Use the margin to explain.

1. WORSHIP WITH OTHERS

HEBREWS 10:24-25. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

2. SABBATH AND OTHER SPECIAL DAYS SET ASIDE TO WORSHIP

ISAIAH 58:13-14. If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don't use my holy day for personal advantage, If you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, God's holy day as a celebration, If you honor it by refusing 'business as usual,' making money, running here and there — Then you'll be free to enjoy God! (MSG)

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

3. FASTING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

MATTHEW 6:17-18. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

ROMANS 14:6. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

4. MUSIC, SINGING, AND DANCING AS ACTS OF WORSHIP

2 SAMUEL 6:14-15. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

EPHESIANS 5:19-20. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. GIVING AS AN EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP

PROVERBS 3:9. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

PHILIPPIANS 4:17-18. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

6. SERVICE AS WORSHIP

JAMES 1:26-27. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

MATTHEW 25:35-36,40. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

What particular acts of service have you done (or could you do) that feel like worship to you?

7. OBEYING GOD AS A LIFESTYLE OF WORSHIP

JOHN 14:23-24. Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

MATTHEW 28:19-20. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

What do you think it is about these expressions that opens you up to experience God?

So in your own words, what is worship and why is it important?

Worship is a personal heart response to seeing God as He really is. And it is “all about Him” — not us. Which of these ways to worship God come most naturally to you, and which ones are you less likely to practice?

In light of what you’ve just read, how do you want to “make much of Christ” in worship this week — perhaps in fresh, new ways?



What is worship?

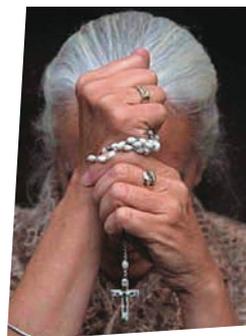
It is making much of Christ!

CLOSING WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

WORSHIPPING GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

Jesus invited the Samaritan woman at the well into true spiritual worship:

JOHN 4:23-24. But the time is coming — indeed it’s here now — when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. (NLT)



Jesus invites you to do the same. As you come almost to the end of this study, here’s an idea for enjoying a special time alone with God — a time to worship God in spirit and in truth. It’s not a requirement, but it is an invitation and an offer that hopefully you can’t refuse!

1. Set aside 2–3 hours in the next couple of weeks when you can get to a quiet, undisturbed place just to be alone with God, the Lover of your soul.
2. Focus on just being in His presence with no agenda. The point is more “being” with Him than “doing” anything specific.
3. Take along your Bible, something to write in and with, this study, maybe a songbook, and something to drink.
4. Enjoy praising, glorifying, exalting, extolling, giving honor, and worshipping Him “in the splendor of His holiness” — however that might look for you.
5. If this seems a little too vague or nondirected for you, you might consider any of these creative options:
 - Take several of the Holy Spirit’s names from the list at the end of chapter 9 and worship Him specifically for each attribute.
 - Meditate on and pray over the memory verses you’ve learned.
 - Review what you wrote on each Pause 4: “Journeying Forward” page in this study.
 - Pray . . . wait . . . read . . . review . . . listen . . . unload . . . sing . . . dance . . . respond . . .
 - Practice listening prayer (from chapter 5).
6. Write down whatever God shows you during this worship time.
7. Don’t try to “do it right”! It’s sincerity He longs for, not perfection. And it’s about Him, not you, remember?
8. Consider doing this with others in your group, using the last 20–30 minutes to share the highlights of your individual worship experiences.

PAUSE 4_JOURNEYING FORWARD

1 JOHN 2:6. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How have you experienced God this week?



Select one verse or passage that was meaningful to you this week and write it here.

We live in a world of images that deeply influence how we look at life. Choose a picture from this chapter that is meaningful or disturbing to you, and briefly explain why.

Now respond to one or more of these questions in the journal on the next page. What has touched you most about:

- . . . how God views reality?
- . . . our worship and intimacy with God?
- . . . the deep issues of our hearts?
- . . . our relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, authorities, cultures, nature, etc.)?
- . . . other things going on in your life?



JOURNAL

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS CHAPTER:

WORSHIP – ROMANS 12:1

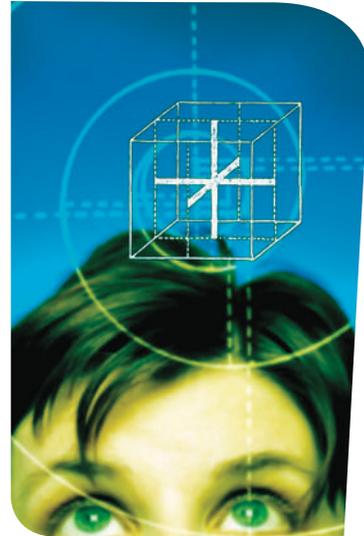
Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

DIGGING DEEPER

OBEDIENCE AND TRUST AS WORSHIP

Find 2 Chronicles 20 in your Bible. The first thirty verses tell an amazing story about God's people being attacked by a "vast army." As you read, notice what part worship and trusting (but risky) obedience played in the outcome of the battle.

What does this story have to say to you about the part worship and obedience play in the personal battles and struggles that you face?



WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

Our God is an awesome God! What more fitting way is there to end your study than with a time of personal worship for God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Here's a creative suggestion to get you started:

- Begin your time of worship by reading 1 Chronicles 16:23-36 from your Bible. It describes how "David appointed the following Levites to lead the people in worship before the Ark of the LORD — to invoke his blessings, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel" (verse 4, NLT).
- Read David's worship song out loud one verse at a time. Pause after each verse to respond to God in your own words, as your heart enters into the spirit of worship.
- And at the end, don't hesitate to join the people in shouting, "Amen!"

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Remember, one of the ways of walking with Jesus is by pondering His words and the intentions of His heart. And one of the many practical ways to respond to Jesus' love is to listen to what He has said in the Bible — memorizing God's Word and holding it close to your heart.

CELEBRATING YOUR GROUP

As you and your group finish this study, it's a good time to celebrate together. Your relationships have deepened through these past weeks. You've learned much from each other – truths, joys, pains. So we encourage you to plan a celebration. Take some time to "Reflect Back," "Envision Forward," and "Pause to Affirm and Pray."

REFLECT BACK

Share how you've benefited from studying God's Word with this group of fellow spiritual journeyers.

How has your walk with God been affected?

How has your daily lifestyle changed?

What emotions surface as you reflect on your times together?

ENVISION FORWARD

What are your spiritual needs as you consider the next phase of your journey?

In what environment might these needs be met?

What continuing relationships will you have with the people in this group (casual friendship to in-depth involvement)?

Are there other people you know who could benefit from studying this series?

Would it be a good stewardship of gifts for one or more people from this group to team up and facilitate a new group? Is God leading anyone to be a part of a new group?

Somewhere deep down, we know that if we are to survive we must come together and rediscover ways to connect with each other, and with the earth that supports our collective life. We are social beings who need one another not just for physical survival but also for spiritual sustenance as we journey together. So our individuality only makes sense in the context of community, where we are free to become ourselves.

— JONATHAN S. CAMPBELL WITH JENNIFER CAMPBELL,
THE WAY OF JESUS: A JOURNEY OF FREEDOM FOR PILGRIMS AND WANDERERS

PAUSE TO AFFIRM

Do you want to express a thank you or affirmation to anyone in the group who has influenced your life? Take time to do that.

PAUSE TO PRAY

Spend time together praying. Thank God for this part of your journey. Praise Him for who He is. Linger longer together.



WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?

You won't find the word memorize in the Bible. But the concept is there both in command and in example ("treasure . . . store up . . . hide" God's words in our hearts). We are encouraged to "study . . . reflect on . . . delight in . . . not forget" God's words (Psalm 119:9-16, NLT; 37:31).

- "lay hold of . . . pay attention . . . listen closely . . . keep [God's words] within your heart" (Proverbs 4:4,20-22).
- "bind them [my commands] around your neck . . . write them on the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 3:3).
- "always treasure my commands. Guard my teachings as your most precious possession. Tie them on your fingers as a reminder . . . write them on the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 7:1-3, NLT, NIV).
- "it is good to keep these sayings in your heart" (Proverbs 22:18, NLT).
- "meditate on [God's words] day and night" (Joshua 1:8).

These same verses also explain the reasons for and benefits of memorizing Scripture:

- "that I might not sin against you . . . [my] feet do not slip" (Psalm 119:9-16; 37:31).
- "they bring life and radiant health" (Proverbs 4:22).
- "find favor with both God and people . . . earn a good reputation" (Proverbs 3:3-4, NLT).
- "you will trust in the LORD" (Proverbs 22:18-19, NLT).
- "you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed" (Joshua 1:8, NLT).
- so that you'll "have all of them ready on your lips" (Proverbs 22:18).
- "your words . . . were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16).

Perhaps even more compelling than these reasons is seeing how powerfully God can use a person who has taken the time and effort to consistently memorize Scripture. When Jesus faced Satan (see Matthew 4:1-11), He drew from the many verses of Scripture that He had memorized in His youth to pinpoint Satan's deception and resist temptation. Where would we be if Jesus had not memorized Scripture? When Peter addressed the huge crowd on the day of Pentecost, he was given no time to consult his concordance and prepare a message! Because he had made Scripture memory a priority in his life, he could quote from three different Old Testament passages that helped bring 3,000 people to the Lord!

If you long to equip yourself to counteract Satan, resist sin, trust and obey God, listen to God's voice, and minister to others, there is no better investment of your time than memorizing Scripture.

A good place to begin is by revisiting the verses you memorized here in this study. Carry the verses around. Put them on your PDA. Put them on your computer. Review them out loud. Often. Write them out until you can say them accurately. Meditate on them. Pray over them. Tell a friend what they mean to you. Put yourself to sleep at night thinking about them. And look forward to listening to God speak to you!

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSES

<p>GOD'S LOVE Zephaniah 3:17</p> <p><i>The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Zephaniah 3:17</p>	<p>GOD'S MERCY Ephesians 2:4-5</p> <p><i>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ephesians 2:4-5</p>
<p>ADOPTED IN CHRIST Ephesians 1:4-5</p> <p><i>In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ephesians 1:4-5</p>	<p>LOVING GOD Matthew 22:37-38</p> <p><i>Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Matthew 22:37-38</p>
<p>GOD SPEAKS Hebrews 1:1-2</p> <p><i>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Hebrews 1:1-2</p>	<p>GOD LISTENS John 16:24</p> <p><i>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 16:24</p>
<p>GOD'S WORD 2 Timothy 3:16-17</p> <p><i>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">2 Timothy 3:16-17</p>	<p>JESUS IS THE TRUTH John 14:6</p> <p><i>Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 14:6</p>
<p>THE HOLY SPIRIT John 14:16-17</p> <p><i>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">John 14:16-17</p>	<p>WORSHIP Romans 12:1</p> <p><i>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Romans 12:1</p>

SERIES OVERVIEW

CONNECT is designed to help you discover and embrace the truth Jesus spoke of in a holistic way. We long to see you enjoying life as a member of God's kingdom and family, deeply experiencing His presence, knowing His truth, resting in His love, and confident in His hope. These studies are designed to be used in small groups where people can encourage, trust, and support each other on their spiritual journeys.

CONNECT is arranged as a series of Bible studies. These studies will present foundational biblical principles for primary relationships in life. Jesus summed up what life is all about when He said, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). Growing in your love for God, for others, and for yourself while managing your personal life in ways that honor Him — now that is a real spiritual journey!

I am amazed at the countless times God pulled from my mind a memorized verse that has been exactly the right thing at the right time! At times it was a comfort, at times guidance. A push ahead or a pull to stop. A reminder of His promise, a prompting for wisdom. A word for counseling another, an insight for those seeking our Lord.

— DENNIS STOKES

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

RALPH ENNIS is the Director of Intercultural Training and Development for The Navigators. Ralph and his wife, Jennifer, have ministered with The Navigators since 1975 in a variety of areas, including at Norfolk military bases, Princeton University, Richmond Community, Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, and with The CoMission in Moscow, Russia. Ralph has a Master's degree in Intercultural Relations. Some of his publications include *Searching the Ordinary for Meaning*; *Breakthru: Discover Your Spiritual Gifts and Primary Roles*; *Successfit: Decision Making Preferences*; *An Introduction to the Russian Soul*; and *The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ*.

Ralph and Jennifer currently live in Raleigh, North Carolina. They have four married children and nine grandchildren.

JUDY GOMOLL is Director of School Agreements as a National Training Team Associate. Before joining The Navigators, Judy was an educator with a specialty in curriculum development. Judy and her husband, George, served with The Navigators as missionaries in Uganda and Kenya for fifteen years, where they helped pioneer ministries in communities, churches, and at Makerere University. Judy led in leader training and designing of contextualized discipleship materials and methods.

In her current role with the National Training Team, Judy is assisting in the research, development, and field testing of spiritual transformation training tools and resources. She also directs our partnership agreements with seminaries and graduate schools.

Judy has an MA in Curriculum and Instruction, and an MA in Organizational Leadership. She and George live in Parker, Colorado.

DENNIS STOKES has been serving with The Navigators since 1973. During that time he has ministered on collegiate staff, as well as being a collegiate trainer and national training consultant. Dennis has designed, developed, and led seven summer training programs for The Navigators, and was the training coordinator for the CoMission project to the former Soviet Union. He is ordained and speaks at training events, conferences, and in church pulpits in the U.S. and twelve different countries. He also leads and participates on numerous training teams. In his role as the National Training Director for the U.S. Navigators, Dennis leads out in strategic planning, leading, and implementing national initiatives for staff training and development.

Dennis and his wife, Ellen, live in Erie, Colorado, and have three children — Christopher, Cheryl, and Amy.

Connect Even More!

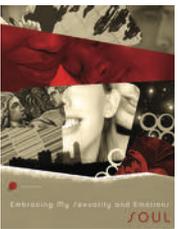
The CONNECT series is designed to help you discover and embrace the truth Jesus spoke of in a holistic way. By using the series in a small group, you will find encouragement, trust, and support from others as you travel together on this spiritual journey.



Identity: Becoming Who God Says I Am

Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Dennis Stokes, Christine Weddle

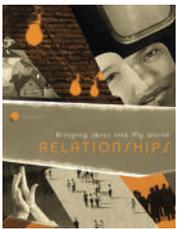
Discover who God says you are and learn to live out your true identity by loving God, others, and yourself.



Soul: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions

Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes, Christine Weddle

Find out how growing in your love for God, for others, and for yourself will help manage your personal life in ways that honor Him.



Relationships: Bringing Jesus into My World

Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes, Christine Weddle

Receiving God's love and in turn loving others is God's plan for us. But loving others as ourselves is not always easy. Learn how to reach out in love to family, friends, and others who may be more difficult to love.



Life: Thriving in a Complex World

Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes, Christine Weddle

Explore important areas—time, money, decisions, commitment—that play a role in living life well with Jesus.