

the new me

topical mini-studies - version 2



By Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Ralph Ennis,
Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle

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Content Development Team: Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Ralph Ennis, Dennis Stokes, and Christine Weddle

Design: Christine Weddle

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beginnings

Only God can help me step away from my
own imaginings and into His reality.

-Rev. Ken Ross, Sermon: June 22, 2008

IT'S FAIRLY EASY TO WALK AROUND KNOWING WHAT THINGS *SHOULD* LOOK LIKE. But freedom to explore and discover who you were really created to be means you need to start with where things actually are. *The New Me* topical mini-studies are a way to get to a real level, first with yourself and then with others. Used on your own, it will help you see and consider honestly where you are struggling and/or growing. Used with others, it will offer a starting point to begin conversations about where you long for change, for new life, for tastes of God.

YOU ARE NOT LOCKED INTO BEING WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN. There is hope and expectancy. That's because God always meets you where you are—not just where you think you should be. So when you respond to His love by making the choice to trust Christ and experience the new life He offers, you are then “in Christ.” This experience activates the changing power of the Holy Spirit in a new way. He works gently in you and through others, helping you live more fully out of the identity He has given you. But becoming new isn't the result of a do-it-yourself effort. It's through the power of Christ in you that you can anticipate discovery, change, and renewal. *The New Me* is simply meant to invite you into a new place of honesty as you begin.

It's a whole lot easier to believe the truths found in the Bible for somebody else rather than for yourself. But the truth is that all of us who trust Christ for new life are on a journey of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We often struggle with the tension of knowing that we have a long way to go in this process of transformation. The Bible assures us that putting our trust in Jesus makes us new creatures. So why is so much of the “old” still hanging on? In one sense “you already are” and in another sense “you are still becoming” like Jesus. That's okay. You aren't asked to have it all together – just be in the process of growing in His grace.

You may be thinking, “That sounds good, but how I *feel* about who I am doesn't always match what I *know* about who I really am in Christ! My head and my heart are out of synch.” Once again, that's okay. On the journey of spiritual transformation, feelings often lag behind awareness and understanding. So be patient with yourself; God is passionate about transforming all parts of you, but He isn't pushy. Know that the journey is just as important as the destination, and God is eager to meet you along the way.

SO HOW CAN YOU USE THESE STUDIES? You might use them as a journaling tool to work through emotions as you experience them. You can go in any order and skip around from topic to topic if you want to. Or you might choose to start at the beginning and work through one topic a day.

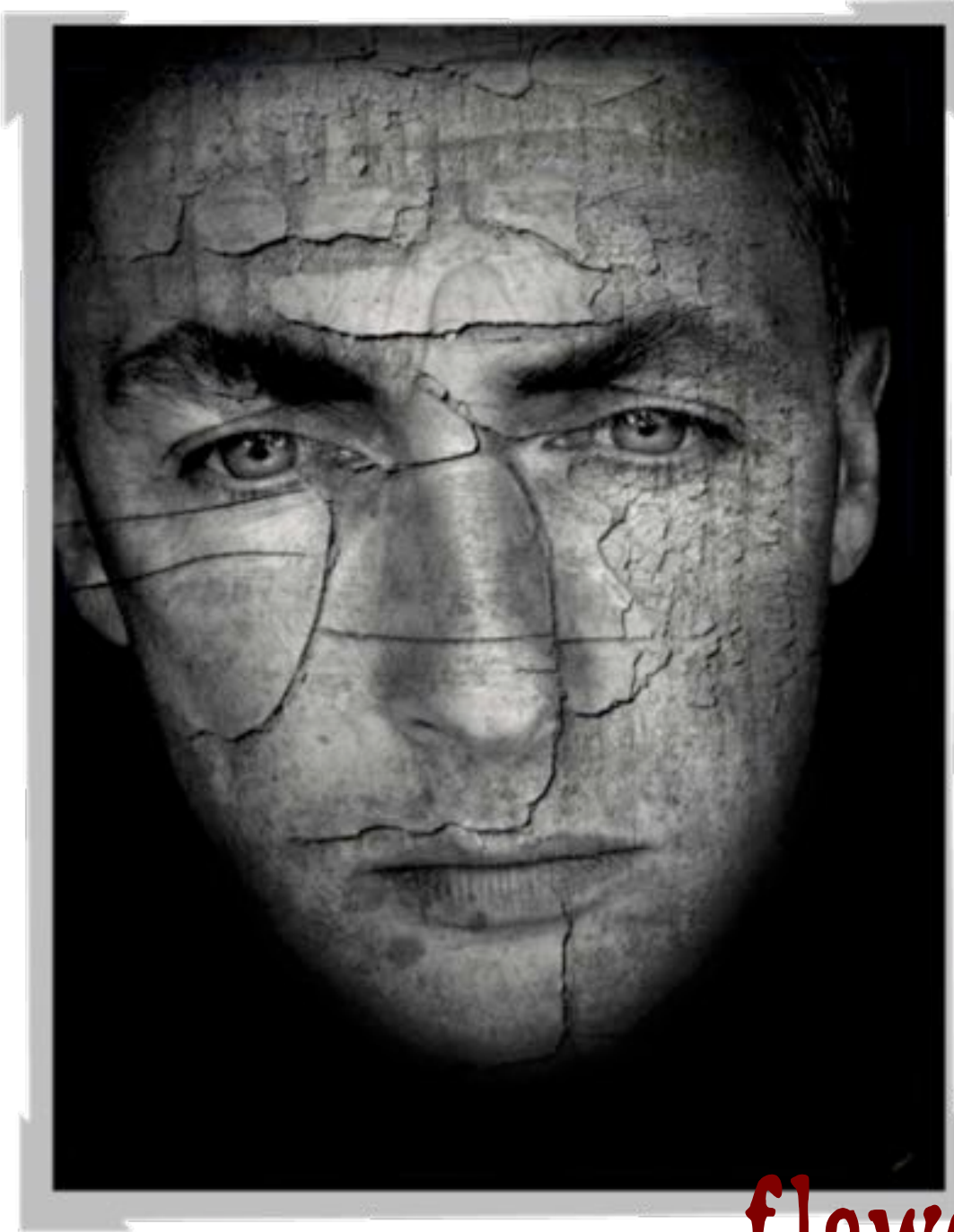
You might find yourself using this piece in one of the following ways:

- As a parent helping a child navigate through these difficult feelings
- As a small group embracing the truth of your identity in Christ
- As a married couple learning to process feelings together
- As an individual working through the more difficult emotions of life

Each topic is divided into three sections—with lots of space for you to jot down your thoughts and questions.

- The first section invites you to identify with the experiences of people struggling with the same emotions and others bringing insight to that struggle.
- The “hope” section offers the truth of God’s Word to meditate on and anchor your soul in hope. These portions of truth aren’t to be used as band-aids on your soul-wounds, but as offering of hope. Acknowledge the disconnect between what is and what should be, and invite the Holy Spirit into the gap.
- The “becoming” section challenges you to consider, wrestle with, and embrace who you are becoming in Christ.
- And Leaders, you will benefit from the “For Leaders” section on pages 121-123.

Over time, through the power of the Holy Spirit and affirming connection to the Body of Christ, you will continue to be changed into the you that you were created to be.



flawed

I may feel flawed, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

haunted

When I let it get quiet, I can hear my science teacher's voice sneering in my head: "No one wants to work with you, so you'll do the rest of the labs this year with me as your partner. How does that feel?" He might as well have come out and just said it: You're a loser. You'll never be like the others. And somehow, even though I hated the man, I can't help but believe he's right, all these years later. I still just can't get it right.

victims

Another injury due to victimization is a deep, pervasive sense of being "all-bad," wrong, dirty, or shameful. No matter how affirming others are of their loveableness and their attributes, victims are convinced that, underneath it all, there is no good inside themselves. . . . They take on badness that isn't theirs. They begin believing that the way they were treated is the way they should be treated. —Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*

WHOSE VOICES HAVE DEFINED HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF?

hope



And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. –2 Corinthians 3:18

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.
–1 John 3:2,3

Other Scriptures: Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; and Philippians 3:20-21

WHAT MIGHT JESUS HAVE TO SAY TO YOU TODAY ABOUT WHO YOU ARE AND WHO YOU ARE BECOMING?



WHAT PARTS OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU FEEL YOU JUST “CAN’T GET RIGHT”?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BECOMING LIKE CHRIST?

WHAT DOES IT DO FOR YOUR SENSE OF PERSONAL DIGNITY AND WORTH?

"I know about this flawed creation of Mine. I did not will it to be flawed, but I will allow it for a while. I must ask you to do the same - allow it for awhile. It is part of my redemptive plan. You need not apologize, agonize, or pretend that brokenness does not exist. You were broken and I loved you. You still are not completely whole and still I love you. I have fixed you, redeemed you, but not perfected you. That will come later.

—Ruth Senter, *Longing for Love*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1991, p. 28



soul ugly

I may feel soul ugly, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM BEAUTIFUL TO GOD

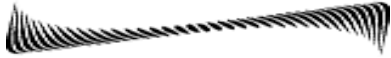
dirty corners of my soul

Last night I ate dinner at the hotel restaurant alone. It's the price of traveling in this job. I could feel the bartender's eyes searching my face, and I made the mistake of meeting his gaze more than once. How can you not, when someone is watching you. And yet if he could see beyond the business suit, into the dirty corners of my soul, his eyes would turn elsewhere. He'll find someone with more to offer than this. I used to be flattered by one night stands. But they each left when I let them really look into my eyes.

i feel really dirty. . . .
i could rip off my skin.
funny thing is, is that i know if i did i'd still feel the same.
i think its just all in my head. but it isn't.
its become so mental that i've found it like a physical dirty.
so i'm Rachael. i like tearing myself up. i've noticed i do it a lot.
but that's beside the point.
i know if i tore off my skin i'd still feel dirty.
my insides are dirty.
not my organs.
its deeper than that.
it's like my "soul" is dirty.
<http://weblog.xanga.com/R4cH431/608010456/i-feel-really-dirty-not-in-some-perverted-way-tho.html>

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT MAKE PEOPLE FEEL UGLY AT THE CORE?

hope



[He has sent me to] provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. —Isaiah 61:3

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.
—Ecclesiastes 3:11a

. . . Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He did this to dedicate the church to God by his word, after making it clean by washing it in water, in order to present the church to himself in all its beauty — pure and faultless, without spot or wrinkle or any other imperfection. —Ephesians 5:25-27 (TEV)

Other Scriptures: Rahab story (Joshua 2 and 6); 1 Peter 3:1-6; Ezekiel 16; and Psalm 139

WHAT “ASHES” IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU SEE GOD MAKING BEAUTIFUL (OR DO YOU WISH HE WOULD MAKE BEAUTIFUL)?

WHAT “DESPAIR” IS HE REPLACING WITH PRAISE?



WHAT DO YOU FEAR PEOPLE MIGHT SEE WHEN THEY LOOK IN YOUR EYES?

PUT WORDS TO A PRAYER ASKING JESUS TO CLEANSE SOMETHING PARTICULAR ABOUT YOU, MAKING YOU "PURE AND FAULTLESS, WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY OTHER IMPERFECTION." IF YOU'RE SKEPTICAL ABOUT ALL THIS, TELL HIM THAT, TOO.



unloveable

I may feel unlovable, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM BELOVED BY GOD

not just broken windows

She said she'd forgive me for my past, and a small part of me sometimes believes it's true. But when I'm honest with myself, I can't imagine her being willing to love someone as broken as me. I see all the other guys she could be with, and sometimes I come close to asking her why she's with me. I feel like a window with a bullet through the corner, the broken lines radiating through the whole of me. She can see through me, and I am broken; I can't be what she wants.

self-hatred

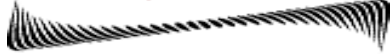
Self-hatred is the enemy of humility. Where there is self-hatred, the addict must live behind a mask or false self, which has been constructed over many years in order to stifle the pain of his self-rejection. . . . The man with self-hatred is turned against himself because he is still in agreement with the negative messages that he received in his youth. He agrees that he is bad and contemptible, unworthy of love. He, therefore, experiences feelings of shame and self-pity that have nothing to do with the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

—Craig Lockwood, *Falling Forward: The Pursuit of Sexual Purity*,
(Anaheim, CA: Desert Stream Press, 2000), p. 100

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE MAKES SOMEONE LOVABLE?

WOULD THEY STILL BE LOVABLE IF THOSE THINGS WERE TAKEN AWAY?

hope



About Benjamin he said: "Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders. –Deuteronomy 33:12

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. –Isaiah 43:1-4 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: Romans 8:35-39 and 1 John 3 and 4

TRY READING ISAIAH 43:1-4 AGAIN—BUT OUT LOUD.

THIS TIME PERSONALIZE GOD'S WORDS BY PUTTING YOUR OWN NAME OR SAYING "ME" OR "MY" WHENEVER YOU SEE AN UNDERLINED WORD.

CONSIDER SAYING IT MORE THAN ONCE—YELL IT, WHISPER IT—AS MANY TIMES AS IT TAKES TO GET INSIDE OF YOU.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNLOVABLE PLACES YOU ARE AFRAID SOMEONE ELSE MIGHT SEE?

DO YOU USUALLY KEEP THESE HIDDEN OR OUT IN THE OPEN? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF OTHERS SAW THEM?

TAKE A MINUTE AND IMAGINE BRINGING YOUR UNLOVABLE PARTS TO JESUS.

SEE YOURSELF "RESTING SECURE BETWEEN HIS SHOULDERS." (DEUTERONOMY 33:12).

TALK WITH HIM FOR A WHILE FROM THAT PLACE.

RECORD WHAT YOU SAY.



disconnected

I may feel disconnected, but by the power of His Spirit
I AM CONNECTED TO THE BODY OF CHRIST

soul cocaine

I felt . . . an anxiety, a loneliness, and a need for connection with someone. If no connection came, I would start to say things like "Life really stinks. Why is it always so hard? It's never going to change . . . Who cares? Life is really a joke." . . .

My "comforter," my abiding place, was cynicism and rebellion. From this abiding place, I would feel free to use some soul cocaine—a violence video with maybe a little sexual titillation thrown in, perhaps having a little more alcohol with a meal than I might normally drink—things that would allow me to feel better for just a little while. I had always thought of these things as just bad habits. I began to see that they were much more; they were spiritual abiding places that were my comforters and friends in a very spiritual way; literally, other lovers.

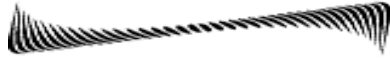
—John Eldredge and Brent Curtis, *The Sacred Romance*,
(Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 165

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.

—Jonathan S. Campbell with Jennifer Campbell,
The Way of Jesus: A Journey of Freedom for Pilgrims and Wanderers

WHAT ARE COMMON REASONS WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE TO DISCONNECT OR JUST SOMEHOW END UP DISCONNECTED FROM OTHERS?

hope



He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

—Ephesians 2:18-22 (MSG)

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me. . . . all being perfected into one."

—John 17: 20-23 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12

EXPLORE THE IDEA OF "BELONGING."

WHEN HAVE YOU LACKED A SENSE OF BELONGING—OR EXPERIENCED TRUE BELONGING—IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?

HOW DID THAT AFFECT YOU?



A FRIEND TELLS YOU, “AFTER MY EXPERIENCE WITH MY LAST CHURCH, I DON’T NEED TO CONNECT WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST. ALL I NEED IS JESUS.”

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO GOD ABOUT HIS PROMISE FOR HEART AND LIFE CONNECTION AMONG HIS PEOPLE?

DO YOU TEND TO FEEL CYNICAL, AFRAID, HUNGRY, ANGRY, OR SOMETHING ELSE ABOUT THAT POSSIBILITY?

EXPLAIN.



powerless

I may feel powerless, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM EMPOWERED

at war with my weakness

Man, why did I do that? That was really stupid. I know better than that. I'm such an idiot! Why can't I just do what I know I should? Every time I get in that situation I mess up. Why do I have to be at war with myself! One part of me wants to do what's right. But the other part of me wants to do what I want, when I want to do it. If only I was stronger! Then I wouldn't be in this situation. I hate being weak! Weakness is like a poison that I can't get rid of. If I just try harder next time, then maybe I can beat this. Maybe I won't be such a fool. This is all my fault! At the end of the day, this falls on my shoulders because I'm not strong enough.

"Our enslavements and indulgences have not only developed into more distasteful appetites; they have also taken from us the power to change. Many confess a craving to change but find themselves helpless and powerless to do so. —Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996), p. 160

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS (BOTH OUTSIDE THEMSELVES AND INSIDE) THAT CAN MAKE PEOPLE FEEL WEAK OR POWERLESS?

hope



. . . there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. –Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need. –2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Instead, God deliberately chose . . . those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. –1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; 2 Peter 1:3,4; Ephesians 3:16

DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT GOD'S POWER CAN CHANGE YOU AND YOUR SITUATION?

WHY OR WHY NOT?



IS POWER GOOD OR BAD TO YOU? EXPLAIN.

HOW CAN YOU RELY ON GOD'S POWER IN YOUR PLACE OF FEELING POWERLESS?



dirty

I may feel dirty, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM CLEANSED

mud-caked

During the summers at my grandparents' farm, my brother and I would play in the mud and we'd end up with more mud showing than skin. Grandma would make us stand on the concrete slab and spray us down with ice-cold hose water. We would laugh and shiver and watch the mud stream off until we were clean. But if Grandma could see me now, she'd cry. How did I get so far from those days? My friends all tell me that everyone hooks up these days. But the next morning in the shower, I can never get clean. If only a garden hose could reach beyond my skin to my soul.

"And I feel so DIRTY. Because it isn't natural to me, and how could I do something so disgusting and what is wrong with me and why am I so weird? And sometimes I feel so dirty. And sometimes I feel so hurt inside and I know that something feels good, but afterwards I feel so dirty. And sometimes I see scenes of others' hurt and lives, and it feels dirty to watch."

<http://weblog.xanga.com/climbingupthemountain/623863355/feelings.html>

Posted: 10/27/2007 1:59 PM

dirty

What are the places of your soul that you would like to have scrubbed clean? What might it take for that to happen?

hope



Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. –Psalm 51:7 (NLT)

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. –Jeremiah 33:8

Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom. A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about for not so long ago you were on that list. Since then, you've been cleaned up and given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and by our God present in us, the Spirit. –1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: Psalm 51

HOW IS BEING FORGIVEN LIKE BEING WASHED CLEAN? HAVE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EVER EXPERIENCED THAT? EXPLAIN.



WHAT "DIRT" IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU LONG TO HAVE CLEANED UP?

(1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11)?

DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH FAITH TO ASK GOD TO CLEAN THAT PART OF YOU UP?

WHY NOT ASK HIM ANYWAY?

WRITE A PRAYER ABOUT BEING CLEAN.



fragmented

I may feel fragmented, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM MADE WHOLE

all my pieces

Who am I, anyway? I love my kids, so why do I yell at them all the time? I'm crazy about my wife, so how come I flirt with waitresses I don't even care about? The guys in my small group like it when I do some teaching, but if they could hear what comes out of my mouth on the basketball court . . . I love watching Monday night football, too. But if people knew what my eyes look at late on Tuesday night . . . I am tired and dizzy. My life has become a piece of shattered glass. Or maybe I'm Humpty Dumpty. Who can put me together again?

"Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before my self a contemptible woebegone weakling? . . .
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!"

—By Dietrich Bonhoeffer (As quoted in Gerald L. Sittser,
A Grace Disguised, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, p. 69)

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS PEOPLE DO THAT THEY REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO? SO WHY DO YOU THINK THEY STILL DO THOSE THINGS?

hope



I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, . . . No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it. –Romans 7:15-20 (NLT)

So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross. You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. –Colossians 1:19-22 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: Psalm 34:18; Psalm 51:17; Psalm 147:3; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

WHAT WRONG THINGS DOES THE SIN IN YOU DO THAT YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO ANY MORE?

SO WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE STILL DOING THOSE THINGS?



HOW HAVE YOU TRIED TO FIND WHOLENESS IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH?

DESCRIBE THAT.

DRAW A PICTURE OR DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE FRAGMENTS YOU STRUGGLE WITH OR HIDE IN EMBARRASSMENT.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT GOD BRINGING YOU "OVER TO HIS SIDE AND PUTTING YOUR LIVES TOGETHER, WHOLE AND HOLY IN HIS PRESENCE" (COLOSSIANS 1:22).

THEN WRITE A PRAYER, INVITING GOD INTO THESE PIECES OF YOUR LIFE.



worthless

I may feel worthless, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM MADE WORTHY

not measuring up

"But I still try to *deserve* Your affection - as though You might change Your mind about loving me if You find out what I'm really like. Human love withdraws when expectations aren't met; perhaps this is what I fear. If I'm not worthy, Your love will be transferred to someone worthier. Someone prettier. Wittier. Smarter. More loving. More patient. More self-sacrificing. It is a terrifying thought, this fear of losing love because I don't measure up."

-Ruth Senter, *Longing for Love*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1991, p. 23

Stop trying to be perfect in order to deserve My love. You will never be 'enough' of anything, anyway. I do not want your worth, your efforts, your gifts and credentials and produce. *I want you simply because you are you.* If tomorrow you should become anything other than what you are today, still I would want you.... My love is for you, not for what you are.

—Ruth Senter, *Longing for Love*, NavPress,
Colorado Springs, 1991, p. 27

THINK BACK TO A TIME YOU FELT UNWORTHY. EXPRESS HOW YOU FELT BY FILLING IN THESE BLANKS:

"THEY/HE/ SHE SHOULD LOOK FOR SOMEONE ELSE BESIDES ME—

SOMEONE MORE _____, SOMEONE _____-IER."

NOW FINISH THE STORY. DID HE/SHE/THEY CHOOSE YOU—OR SOMEONE ELSE? EXPLAIN.

hope



For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him for this purpose long before the world began, but now in these final days, he was sent to the earth for all to see. And he did this for you.

–1 Peter 1:18-20 (NLT)

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

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.

–Luke 15:21-24 (see Luke 15:11-32 for complete story)

Other Scriptures:

Jesus’ family members: Luke 1:46-49, Luke 1:42-45, and Matthew 3:11

Jesus’ close friends and followers: John 13:8-9, 1 Corinthians 15:9

Romans 3:11-12

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WAS THE YOUNG MAN IN JESUS’ PARABLE “WORTHY” TO BE CALLED A SON, OR NOT?

HOW DO YOU THINK HIS FATHER WOULD HAVE ANSWERED THAT QUESTION?



WHAT FEARS GET STIRRED UP IN YOU WHEN YOU CONCLUDE THAT YOU'RE NOT WORTH MUCH?

EVEN JESUS' CLOSEST FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS DIDN'T BELIEVE THEY "DESERVED" A PLACE IN HIS LIFE.

AFTER READING ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS (SEE OTHER SCRIPTURES), DESCRIBE HOW GOD STEPPED INTO THEIR UNWORTHINESS.

NOW PAUSE TO ASK GOD TO STEP INTO YOUR UNWORTHINESS . . . AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.



alone

I may feel alone, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM NEVER ALONE

unseen tears

The kids are gone again this Christmas with their dad & his new wife. I will spend it alone. I tell everyone I'm fine-I'm lying. I'll be alone, crying. No one knows I cry. -www.postsecret.blogspot.com Dec. 23, 2007

Mother Teresa once was asked about the worst disease she had ever seen. Was it leprosy or smallpox? Was it AIDS or Alzheimer's? "No," she said, "the worse disease I've ever seen is loneliness."

-Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question . . . Into the Mystery*

Surely this is the most primal fear of all—that we will end up alone.

-Sheila Walsh. *Living Fearlessly*. p. 137

DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE FEEL MORE ALONE WHEN THEY ARE BY THEMSELVES OR WHEN THEY'RE WITH A GROUP OF STRANGERS OR FRIENDS WITH MASKS? EXPLAIN.

DO YOU FEEL ALONE OR NOT ALONE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD? EXPLAIN.

hope



I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there.

If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night — but
even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.

– Psalm 139:7-12 (NLT)

Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. . . . A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

–Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:39

WHY MIGHT YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO GET AWAY FROM GOD'S PRESENCE?

WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE HE'S EVERYWHERE AND WILL PURSUE YOU WHEREVER YOU HIDE,
WHAT EMOTIONS DOES THAT STIR UP IN YOU?



SOMETIMES BEING ALONE IS REFRESHING AND HEALTHY.

DO YOU OFTEN EXPERIENCE BEING ALONE AND NOT BEING LONELY? EXPLAIN.

WHEN BEING ALONE LEAVES YOU FEELING EMPTY AND LONELY, HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT FILLING THAT VOID?

WHAT'S LIFE GIVING ABOUT IT? WHAT ISN'T?

WHICH OF YOUR FRIENDS HAVE YOU (OR MIGHT YOU) FEEL SAFE ENOUGH TO SHARE YOUR SENSE OF ALONENESS?

HOW MIGHT GOD USE THAT FRIEND OR OTHERS TO MEET YOUR NEED FOR CONNECTION AND COMPANIONSHIP?
(ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12)



numb

I may feel numb, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM REAL

frozen tundra

I wish I could just say that life sucks, but then I would have to feel something. That's the problem. I don't. I watch people laugh, and wonder if I will ever feel that spilling out of my gut like it did back then. Or watch a sad movie and feel the need to even blow my nose. Tissues are only for my sinus problems. Even though today shone through my morning window with all the energy of spring, my soul feels like frozen tundra, buried beneath feet of snow. An eternal permafrost. I wish I could feel something, but then am also afraid of what might come if the dam broke. Where could God be in all of this?

Robert, a twenty-year-old artist who uses cigarettes to burn himself, articulates, "I have a hard time talking about what's going on inside me. When I start talking, all of the crap I'm saying sounds so lame. I like looking at the scars on my arms because I know that they're real. It's like I'm trying to say, I've suffered, man, just look."

—quoted in Jerusha Clark with Dr. Earl Henslin, *Inside a Cutter's Mind*, THINK, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 56

WHEN HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PHYSICALLY SO COLD YOU'VE BECOME NUMB?

HOW DID YOU WARM UP, AND HOW DID THAT FEEL?

HAVE YOU BEEN WITH SOMEONE WHO SEEMED EMOTIONALLY NUMB? WHAT WAS THAT EXPERIENCE LIKE?

hope



For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'
—Acts 28:27

And so I insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can't think straight anymore. Feeling no pain [Having lost all sensitivity—NIV], they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion. But that's no life for you. —Ephesians 4:17-19 (MSG)

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. —Ezekiel 36:26

Other Scriptures: Romans 1; Hebrews 3:13

What are some things that used to touch you but you've become callous to them now?

Can you remember why you might have numbed that part of you?



WHEN YOU FEEL NUMB, WHAT DO YOU DO?

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS OR FEARS YOU ARE TRYING NOT TO FEEL?

WHAT HOPE DO YOU HAVE THAT GOD WILL MEET YOU IN YOUR NUMBNESS AND GIVE YOU A NEW HEART THAT CAN FEEL AGAIN— BOTH PAIN AND PLEASURE? WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY?

HOW MIGHT OTHERS COME ALONGSIDE YOU, TO WARM YOU UP,
TO SURROUND YOU AS YOUR NUMBNESS COMES TO LIFE?



guilty

I may feel guilty, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM FORGIVEN

nibbling at the edges of my heart

One of the curses of living away from the city is the critters. Mice are regular raiders of my pantry, no matter what I do to try to get rid of them. I find nibbled edges everywhere; bags with holes in them; gnawed places. They ruin things not by taking big pieces, but by eating at the edges and contaminating the whole thing. It's like they've taken lessons from my guilt. It has nibbled at the edges of my heart for so many years it feels like it's nearing the center. And I don't know which exterminator to call. Maybe this is the price I'll have to pay for the rest of my life.

forgiveness

"Picture Jesus standing next to that woman caught in adultery, surrounded by men ready to stone her for her guilt. Here Jesus invites anyone who was perfect to throw the first stone. All fell quiet. One by one, every single person dropped their rocks and walked away. Forgiveness stands beside me like that—until all the stones are back where they belong."

—Sara Wevodau

WHAT DOES THE PICTURE OF "FORGIVENESS STANDING BESIDE YOU" STIR UP IN YOU?

hope



God is sheer mercy and grace; not easily angered, he's rich in love. He doesn't endlessly nag and scold, nor hold grudges forever. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, nor pay us back in full for our wrongs. As high as heaven is over the earth, so strong is his love to those who fear him. And as far as sunrise is from sunset, he has separated us from our sins. As parents feel for their children, GOD feels for those who fear him. He knows us inside and out. –Psalm 103:8-14a (MSG)

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." –John 8: 9-11

Other Scriptures: Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13; 1 John 1:9

HOW CAN "SHEER MERCY AND GRACE" (PSALM 103:8) FREE YOU UP FROM A LIFE OF GUILT AND HIDING?



HOW DO PEOPLE IN GENERAL DEAL WITH GUILTY FEELINGS? HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH YOUR OWN GUILT AND GUILTY FEELINGS?

WHEN ARE YOU TEMPTED TO "STONE" YOURSELF WITH WORDS OR THOUGHTS OF SELF-CONDEMNATION?

WHAT DO YOU THINK JESUS WANTS TO SAY TO YOU ABOUT THAT?



meaningless

I may feel meaningless, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM MEANINGFUL

floating

The goldfish died two days ago and I snuck out to buy another one that looked just like it. None of the kids have noticed, and that has gotten me thinking. Would anyone notice if I were gone; if someone went out and replaced me? Sure, I am this house's transportation coordinator, head chief, counselor, lover, nurse...but so what? I don't feel seen, except if I hit a glitch in any of my roles. Like when I was late for carpool twice in a row, and I got cursed out on my voicemail. Or when I burned the roast last night. I am a goldfish, floating randomly in a bowl of menial meaninglessness. Is there anything more?

Humans cannot easily sustain a world that's entirely random and plotless. . . . A French philosopher said, "We are condemned to meaning." There's an almost universal impulse to endow our joys and our sorrows, and our failures and our successes, with meaning. – Martin Marty

meaning

WHY DO YOU THINK SO MANY PEOPLE FEEL THAT LIFE IS MEANINGLESS?

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS PEOPLE TURN TO IN ORDER TO GIVE MEANING TO THEIR LIVES?

hope



For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." –Jeremiah 29:11

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. . . . Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour." –John 12:23-26

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." . . . –Acts 17:26-28

Other Scriptures: Ecclesiastes (especially chapters 1-3); 2 Corinthians 7:10,11; Colossians 1:15-18; 2 Timothy 4:8

WHAT PERSPECTIVE ON MEANING DO YOU THINK MIGHT

HAVE HELPED JESUS FACE SUFFERING AND EVEN HIS OWN DEATH? (JOHN 12)



WHEN IN YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU FELT MEANINGLESS? EXPLAIN WHY.

WHEN YOU'RE FEELING MEANINGLESS, WHAT DO YOU WISH

GOD WOULD SAY TO YOU OR DO FOR YOU?



undesirable

I may feel undesirable, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM DESIRED

another lifetime

I dusted the wedding album today, and then sneezed six times from the cloud that rose around my head. Against my better judgment, I opened it. Those pictures seem a lifetime ago. I thought that marriage would meet all my needs. What was I thinking? That's sure a crock. Things were great when there wasn't any conflict. But every time things got tough, he'd threaten to leave. A couple of times he has, but he has always come back . . . at least so far. The hamster wheel of this repeating cycle keeps getting squeakier and squeakier. His criticisms are different: I'm too fat, not neat enough, talk too much, spend too much money. But the foundation is the same: I know that I don't have what it takes to keep him. Next time he says it will be for good.

Define yourself as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is an illusion. –John Egan

IN WHOSE PRESENCE OR IN WHAT SITUATIONS DO YOU TEND TO FEEL UNDESIRABLE?

hope



You have been set apart as holy to the LORD your God, and he has chosen you to be his own special treasure from all the nations of the earth.

–Deuteronomy 14:2 (NLT)

“When you were born, no one cared about you. . . . No one had the slightest interest in you; no one pitied you or cared for you. On the day you were born, you were dumped in a field and left to die, unwanted. 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. . . . 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.” –Ezekiel 16:4-8 (NLT)

. . . He [the Messiah] had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. –Isaiah 53:2,3

Other Scriptures: Song of Songs; Isaiah 41:8-10; Isaiah 54; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Peter 2:9-10

THERE WASN'T ANYTHING ABOUT JESUS' LOOKS THAT MADE PEOPLE DESIRE HIM.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH HIM IN SOME WAY? DO YOU THINK HE DESIRES YOU?

CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH THE BABY/WOMAN IN EZEKIEL 16 IN ANY WAY? IF SO, HOW?



REFLECT ON A TIME WHEN YOU WERE NOT CHOSEN.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WEREN'T CHOSEN?

DO YOU THINK GOD REJECTS YOU ON THE SAME BASIS? EXPLAIN.

WE ALL LONG TO BE DESIRED BY OTHER PEOPLE.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO YOU (IF ANY) THAT GOD DESIRES YOU FOR HIMSELF?



abandoned

I may feel abandoned, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

the extra

It was eight years ago, on Christmas Eve, that my parents dropped the bomb: they had decided to part ways. They were getting a divorce. I was only 16. When Dad moved out, it left a gaping hole that I didn't know how to fix. I still don't know what I did so bad that he had to go.

Next month Rob and I want to celebrate our first anniversary with a romantic trip. But the closer it gets, the more paralyzed I feel. The pieces of my emotional world keep shifting and I don't know how they fit together any more. I can rationally explain what has happened, but my heart is dying. And if I can't figure things out, I may become a casualty of divorce myself.

ignored

I fear withdrawal – the agony of being ignored – that silent, invisible barrier that makes someone look at me without seeing me, transfer allegiance to one more favored, depart in spirit, as if to a far country. The longest distance is between two hearts.

–Ruth Senter, *Longing for Love*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1991, p. 53

WHAT ARE SEVERAL WAYS PEOPLE ARE ABANDONED OR REJECTED IN OUR SOCIETY?

hope



Yet they say, "My Lord deserted us; he has forgotten us."

"Never! Can a mother forget her little child and not have love for her own son? Yet even if that should be, I will not forget you. See, I have tattooed your name upon my palm. . . ." –Isaiah 49:14-16 (TLB)

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.
–Psalm 27:10

Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure. –Ephesians 1:4,5 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:6-7; 1 John 3:1

WHEN HAVE YOU FELT UNWANTED OR ABANDONED?

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED GOD'S EMBRACE AS HIS ADOPTED CHILD?

EXPLAIN.



BEING ABANDONED OR REJECTED REALLY HURTS.

MAYBE YOU THINK YOU'VE GOTTEN OVER IT.

STILL, PAUSE TO INVITE JESUS TO HOLD YOU IN THIS PLACE OF HURT.

ACCORDING TO EPHESIANS 1:4-5, IT GIVES GOD GREAT PLEASURE TO HAVE YOU IN HIS FAMILY.

HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?



futile

I may feel futile, but by the power of His Spirit
I AM USEFUL IN GOD'S KINGDOM

grayscale

Today I couldn't get out of bed. I woke up at 7:43 and lay there until 11:07. It's Saturday, and I'm just marking time like an inmate scratching lines into his cell wall. Sure my life is full; I have tons of things to do. But why am I doing them? The paycheck never seems big enough, and now, losing her has turned my world into a grayscale. I am too tired, and there is a void I don't want to face. It all feels so pointless. Is this gray all there is?

empty

"... after a while you notice that your life has nothing at its core. It has no center. There is activity. There is opinion. There is busyness. But there's nothing to give real pleasure or deep meaning to the activity, nothing to ground opinions in truth and shape them into convictions, nothing to translate busyness into fruitfulness, nothing to convert selfish ambition into holy purpose. You realize you're stuck slow hearted on borderland. And you start to wonder if this is it, or were you made and called for something else?"

—Mark Buchanan, *Your God Is Too Safe* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2001), p. 105

WHAT GETS YOU OUT OF BED WHEN YOU'RE REALLY TIRED?

DOES IT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MEANING AT YOUR CORE?

hope



For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. –Ephesians 2:10

Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what he's called you to be, pray that he'll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something. –2 Thessalonians 1:11 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: Ecclesiastes (especially chapters 1 and 2); John 15:16

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA OF "WHAT HE'S CALLED YOU TO BE" OR TO DO?

EXPLAIN.



WHAT PARTS OF YOUR LIFE FEEL FUTILE RIGHT NOW?

HOW MIGHT YOU PUT WORDS TO A PRAYER ASKING GOD TO HELP YOU FIND MEANING IN THAT "FUTILE" PLACE?



discontent

I may feel discontent, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM GRATEFUL

something more than more

The credit card bill came today, with an offer to increase my credit limit. I am afraid of what might happen if I do, and of what will happen if I don't. I get so much satisfaction from my new toys at first, from seeing the eBay packages I ordered off the Internet arrive in the mail knowing what a great deal I've gotten. I drag the outstanding balance around like a huge weight . . . yet I want even more. And the thrill of new stuff only lasts a moment. There's got to be something more than more.

Contentment is wanting what we have, not having what we want.

—Kenton Beshore, Jr., Senior Pastor, Mariner's Church, Irvine, CA

It's easy for us to fall into a mindset of viewing "our" world as "the" world, because it's all we generally see. We're constantly bombarded with images of the latest styles and models of everything, and it can easily leave us feeling like what we have isn't enough because we see people that have even more than us. But how does what we have compare to what most people in the world have? Maybe what we have is enough; maybe it's more than enough. Maybe God has blessed us with everything we have so we can bless and give to others.
<http://www.nooma.com>

MOST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD ENJOY ONLY A FRACTION OF WHAT THEY HAVE IN TERMS OF MONEY AND THINGS AND LIVING CONDITIONS.

WHAT MIGHT THEY TEACH US ABOUT TRUE CONTENTMENT?

hope



Yet true religion with contentment is great wealth. After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world, and we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.. —1 Timothy 6:6-9 (NLT)

Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need. —Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: Matthew 6 and Hebrews 13:5-6

WHAT ARE SOME MESSAGES FROM ADVERTISING OR THE CULTURE AROUND US THAT FEED OUR DISCONTENT WITH WHAT WE HAVE—OR DON'T HAVE?



WANTING MORE IS A REAL STRUGGLE.

WHAT ARE YOU PURSUING "MORE" OF?

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE "MORE" WILL PROVIDE OR GIVE YOU?

THE IDEA OF FASTING IS AN AGE-OLD PRACTICE TO HELP US REMEMBER CONTENTMENT.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU FASTED FOR A DAY FROM FOOD OR TECHNOLOGY OR WORK OR SOMETHING ELSE?



inadequate

I may feel inadequate, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM ADEQUATE IN JESUS

echoes

Math was never my thing. Art, on the other hand, is my passion. One night, when I should have been studying for a geometry test, I was drawing. My dad walked into my room, took one look at me and said, "What the hell are you doing that for? You'll never be able to support a family if you don't get a grip and learn some real skills." I barely brushed against him in the hallway as I rushed past him, needing to escape outside. It was dark, and snowing, and my scream echoed off the frozen clouds, and still echoes as I lie awake in the middle of the night. Will I ever have what it takes?

Everything inside me wanted to scream, to punch a wall, to throw something and hear it shatter, see it break. It was all too much. The shame I felt, the anger I could never express. It was like a volcano started to erupt in my mind. Raging thoughts assault me in every imaginable way: *You idiot! You'll never be good enough. Did you really think you could make him happy? You're nothing but a fat, worthless failure.*"

—Jerusha Clark with Dr. Earl Henslin, *Inside a Cutter's Mind*, THINK, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 14

not enough

WHAT MESSAGES ABOUT BEING INADEQUATE OR "NOT ENOUGH" HAVE YOU HEARD FROM THE MEDIA AND ADVERTISING? . . . FROM YOUR OWN HEART?

hope



But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. –1 Corinthians 15:10

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. –2 Corinthians 3:5

Other Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5; Philippians 3; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

HOW DOES GOD'S EVALUATION OF YOUR ADEQUACY DIFFER FROM THE WAY THE WORLD SIZES YOU UP?



HOW CAN YOU HOLD ON TO GOD'S WORDS OF ACCEPTANCE WHEN YOUR OWN OR OTHER'S CRITICISM BLARES IN YOUR MIND?

WHAT ARE 2-3 THINGS YOU FEEL INADEQUATE ABOUT RIGHT NOW? LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE.

WHAT DO YOU HEAR GOD SAYING TO YOU ABOUT THOSE THINGS?



ashamed

I may feel ashamed, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM UNASHAMED IN GOD'S MERCY

playing it safe

I have learned the safe thing is to not want anything from anyone. It's safer that way. The only one I couldn't get past this with is Tre, my big bro. He was always the epitome of cool; all the girls liked him, he got straight A's, and could play any sport he tries. It felt so good when he noticed that I did good on a test, or made the wrestling team. He rarely noticed me most of the time, but on the rare occasion he would want to hang with me, I always felt so honored.

I've never said this to anyone, but I can't pretend anymore. One night it was just the two of us. After hanging out all day together Tre offered to teach me how to masturbate with him. What was I thinking? Since that moment I have felt dirty and desperately confused about what we did to each other. And I have hated both myself, and Tre.

shame

Shame is the raincoat of the soul, repelling the living water that would otherwise establish us as the beloved of God. It prevents us from receiving grace and truth where we need them most. . . . For some, the roots of bad shame go deep. They reach back to early abuse and abandonment, to long-standing tendencies like addiction and homosexuality, even back to centuries-old expressions of cultural and ethnic shame. . . . Bad shame . . . forms a "shame coat" causing us to conclude that we are unworthy of love and honor. The emotion of inferiority, bad shame expresses itself as "an inner torment, a sickness of the soul" that divides us from self, others and God. Bad shame invites the soul to turn on itself rather than to welcome mercy. Bad shame bars us from life. —Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness*

WHICH TYPE OF SHAME DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE EXPERIENCE — SHAME OVER BAD THINGS THEY HAVE DONE,

OR SHAME OVER BAD THINGS OTHERS HAVE DONE TO THEM?

EXPLAIN.

hope



Fear not; you will no longer live in shame. The shame of your youth and the sorrows of widowhood will be remembered no more, for your Creator will be your husband. The LORD Almighty is his name! He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth. –Isaiah 54:4,5 (NLT)

Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us, shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace. –Luke 1:78 (MSG)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. –Hebrews 12:2

Other Scriptures: Ezra 9:6,7; Psalm 44:13-16; Isaiah 50:6-9; Hebrews 11:16

On the cross God in Christ endured the ultimate humiliation. For our weaknesses and shame, God allowed himself to become weak and full of shame. God was strung up naked before a mocking, jeering public. He subjected himself to the worst kind of exposure in order to make a way for us, his creation, who have been subject to the exposure of sin and shame ourselves.

–Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness*

JESUS EXPERIENCED GREAT SHAME THOUGH HE WAS SINLESS, SO HE CAN RELATE TO YOUR SHAME.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THAT MAKE TO YOU?



DEEP DOWN, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ASHAMED OF YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?

AS YOU STOP AND LISTEN TO GOD, WHAT WORDS OF MERCY AND PEACE DOES HE HAVE FOR YOU IN THE MIDST OF YOUR SHAME? (LUKE 1:78)



spiritually oppressed

I may feel spiritually oppressed, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM DELIVERED FROM SATAN'S HOLD

just some game

I can't get the voices out of my head . . . telling me I'll never have what it takes to be a real man. But what the hell does that mean, anyway? I've found things that quiet them for a while, but then they come back with a vengeance. Playing video games makes me feel like one of the guys. But they also make me feel sick—all the killing and all the blood. What a wimp I am. It scares me even more when I start enjoying it. The games with demons are even worse. I tell myself that it's just a game—nothing is real. Recently I've let myself check out some of the porn sites that make me feel excited and sick at the same time. What is happening to me? Sometimes I feel that something dark and evil has its hooks in me. And that it won't ever let go.

I am staggered by the level of naiveté that most people live with regarding evil. They don't take it seriously. They don't live as though the Story has a Villain. Not the devil prancing about in red tights, carrying a pitchfork, but the incarnation of the very worst of every enemy you've met in every other story. Dear God—the Holocaust, child prostitution, terrorist bombings, genocidal governments. What is it going to take for us to take evil seriously? Life is very confusing if you do not take into account that there is a Villain. That you, my friend, have an Enemy.

—John Eldredge, *Epic*

evil

WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE WHEN YOU THINK OF SPIRITUAL OPPRESSION?

hope



For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins. –Colossians 1:13-14 (NLT)

Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly Kingdom. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
–2 Timothy 4:18 (NLT)

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. –1 John 4:4

Other Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 1:10; 1 John 2:14

WHERE ARE YOU IN YOUR AWARENESS OF SATAN IN THE WORLD AND IN YOUR LIFE?



IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU LONG FOR FREEDOM?

WHAT DO YOU LONG TO HAVE JESUS DELIVER YOU FROM?

WHAT MIGHT HIS DELIVERANCE LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

SATAN CAN HAVE A STRONGER INFLUENCE WHEN WE'RE ISOLATED OR ALONE.

WHO CAN YOU INVITE INTO YOUR STRUGGLES WITH PRAYER AND SUPPORT?



bondage

I may feel in bondage, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM FREE IN CHRIST

wasted

These walls are closing in on me. I am suffocating. Last night was one more on a string of nights that have blurred into a permanent twilight. I'm being wasted by the very thing that once made me feel so alive. Each time I fall back into old habits, I hate myself more. And the more I hate myself, the more like a slave I feel. I might as well be wearing leg irons for all the freedom I have found this life to bring.

Sin is ruled by the law of diminishing returns. . . . each time you sin, you receive a decreasing amount of pleasure and fun from the act. So, in order to receive the same amount of fun, you have to escalate the sin or else sin more frequently to achieve the same level of pleasure. . . . In the end, the law of diminishing returns turns what started out as outright fun into outright slavery. —Richard Wagner, *Christianity for Dummies*, Wiley Publishers, p. 68

slavery

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL FREE? HOW DO PEOPLE GENERALLY USE THEIR FREEDOM?

hope



Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone on earth. What do you mean, 'set free'?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free." —John 8:31-36 (NLT)

It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. . . . Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom.

—Galatians 5:13,14 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: Romans 7:7—8:17

IF GOD WERE TO FREE YOU FROM WHATEVER HAS YOU "CHAINED UP,"

WHAT MIGHT HE BE FREEING YOU FOR?



WHAT HAS YOU IN ITS CLUTCHES—A SHAMEFUL HABIT, AN ADDICTION, A FEAR, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

SOMETIMES OUR OWN CHOICES ENSLAVE US.

IS THERE AN AREA IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU THINK YOU'VE TRADED IN YOUR OWN FREEDOM FOR SOME FORM OF BONDAGE?

TALK WITH GOD ABOUT HOW IT FEELS TO BE IN BONDAGE AGAIN.



dishonored

I may feel dishonored, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM HONORED IN HIS EYES

never enough

Just because I'm Asian, my boss expects twice as much from me as he does from my other teammates. He always tells me that I'm so reliable. But when he called me in to work on New Year's Day, I slammed the office door so hard it broke. What's going on inside of me? I can just hear my wife's voice telling me that I've done this to myself by refusing to say no. But I keep hearing my father's voice telling me that it is my job to keep the family's honor. Why do I feel so dishonored when I've worked so hard all my life to maintain and show honor to others? How is it honorable to work twice as much-for half the pay the white guys get? When will I have done enough to satisfy them? To satisfy myself?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HONOR SOMEONE? . . . TO DISHONOR THEM?

WRITE FOR THREE MINUTES ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU FELT MISUNDERSTOOD OR DISHONORED.

WHEN YOU GO BACK AND READ WHAT YOU WROTE, WHAT DO YOU SEE? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOU?

hope



Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he knows and understands My name [has a personal knowledge of My mercy, love, and kindness—trusts and relies on Me, knowing I will never forsake him, no, never]. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. –Psalm 91:11,15 (Ampl)

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us.
–Romans 8:33-34 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: Psalm 8; Isaiah 40; Isaiah 54

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN HONORED OR FELT RESPECTED?

WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE, AND HOW DID IT CHANGE YOU? (IF IT'S EASIER FOR YOU TO REMEMBER BEING DISHONORED, THEN DESCRIBE THAT EXPERIENCE INSTEAD.)



IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE, WHAT KIND OF HONOR DO YOU FIND YOURSELF SEEKING OUT?

WHAT DOES THIS SHOW THAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE SOURCE OF YOUR WORTH?

WHAT MIGHT BE OBSTACLES TO RECEIVING HONOR FROM GOD?

TALK TO GOD ABOUT THEM.

ASK GOD TO REMOVE ANY BARRIERS AND LISTEN TO HIS WORDS OF HONOR FOR YOU?.



unappreciated

I may feel unappreciated, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM DELIGHTED IN BY GOD

lost and losing

I asked for this deployment. What in God's brown desert was I thinking? I remember Grandpa telling stories of being in the war, of guarding prisoners in Africa and the time he got shot in the shoulder by one who died trying to escape. I had already imagined the stories that I would tell my own grandkids, and they were nothing like this: wounded in the third week by my own stupid carelessness, sent to do boring filing in the captain's tent until my foot heals. Captain Grink has wasted no opportunity to remind me of just how useless I am. There will be no glory for this soldier. I am a loser of the first rank. No one seems to appreciate the sacrifices I've made just to be here.

"What would it be like to experience for yourself that the truest thing about his heart toward yours is not disappointment or disapproval but deep, fiery, passionate love?"

—John and Stacy Eldridge, *Captivating*, Nelson Books, Nashville, TN, 2005, p. 113

THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU FELT UNAPPRECIATED. DESCRIBE WHAT THAT FELT LIKE AT THE TIME, AND HOW IT IMPACTED YOU LATER ON.

hope



He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me. –Psalm 18:19

The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. –Psalm 147:11

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

Other Scriptures: Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 36:7,8; John 15

HAVE YOU EVER IMAGINED OR EXPERIENCED GOD DELIGHTING IN YOU? DESCRIBE THAT EXPERIENCE—OR LACK OF IT.

HOW DOES GOD'S DELIGHT IN YOU CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE?



WHO DO YOU DELIGHT IN, AND WHY?

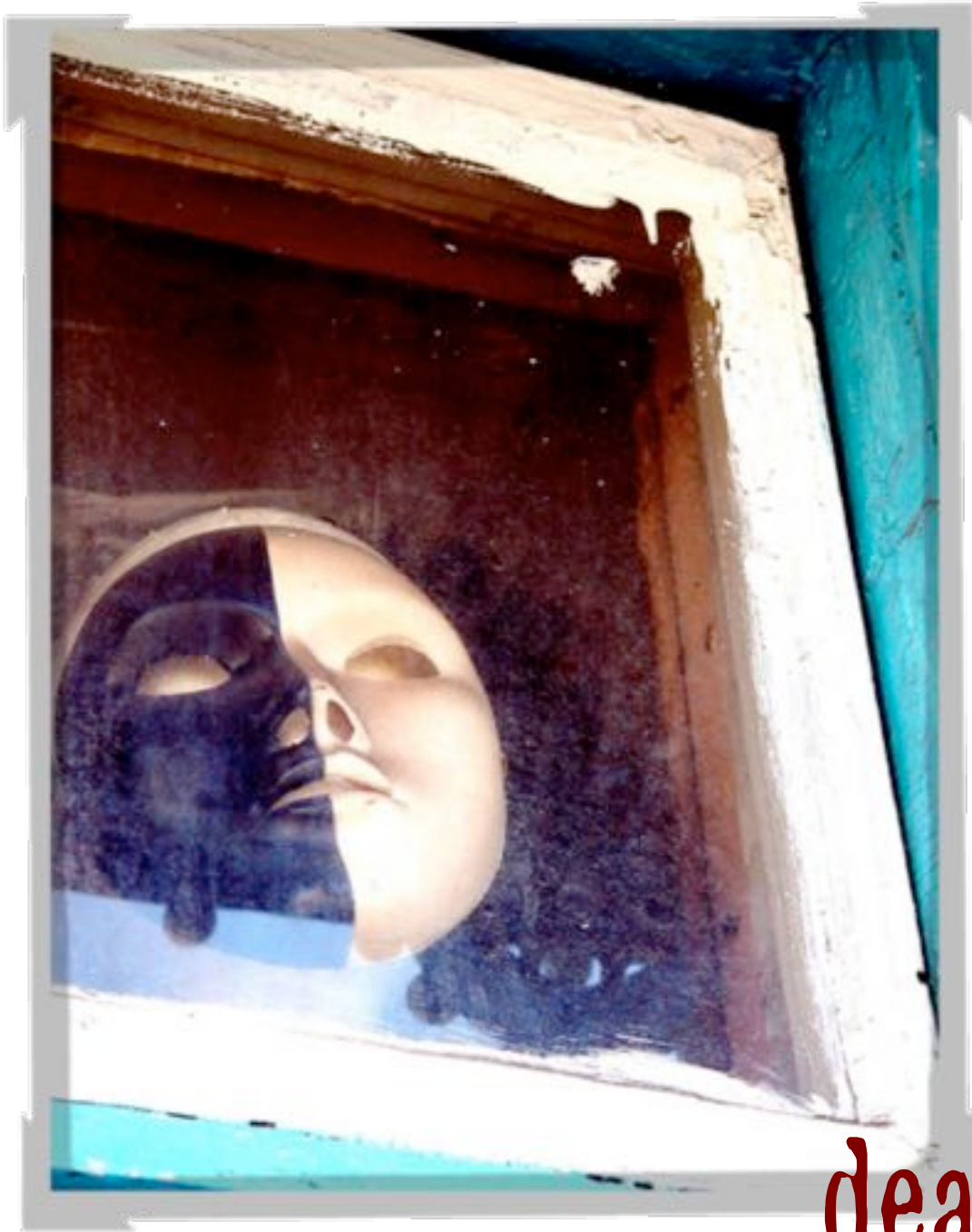
WHAT WORDS DO YOU EXPECT GOD TO HAVE FOR YOU MOST OF THE TIME?

ARE THEY WORDS OF DELIGHT OR DISAPPOINTMENT?

KNOWING THAT GOD SAYS HE DELIGHTS IN YOU,

WHAT DO YOU WISH GOD WOULD SAY TO YOU?

IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE WITH THAT, ASK GOD TO SILENCE THE VOICES OF DISAPPROVAL AND REPLACE THEM WITH WHISPERS OF DELIGHT.



dead

I may feel dead, but by the power of His Spirit
I AM ALIVE NOW AND ETERNALLY

missing in action

Last year offered me more to grieve than I had tears for. A miscarriage, two car accidents, a problematic pap smear, and three funerals. I've gotten really good at smiling at people without realizing it. I wonder if they know. There is something deceptive about going through the motions, about feeling the heavy swing of life move back and forth, letting it carry me with its momentum. I don't know where I've gone, and I don't know when I'll be back.

The greatest loss in life is not death. It's what dies inside while you['re] alive."

—Jerusha Clark, with Dr. Earl Henslin, *Inside a Cutter's Mind*, THINK, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 49

WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE CAN BE DEAD (WHILE STILL LIVING)?

hope



I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life. And I assure you that the time is coming, in fact it is here, when the dead will hear my voice — the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. The Father has life in himself, and he has granted his Son to have life in himself. —John 5:24-26 (NLT)

I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. —John 10:10 (MSG)

“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; He was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. —Luke 15:24

Other Scriptures: 2 Samuel 14:14; John 1:4; Romans 3:12-13; 2 Corinthians 4:10-12; Ephesians 2:4-6

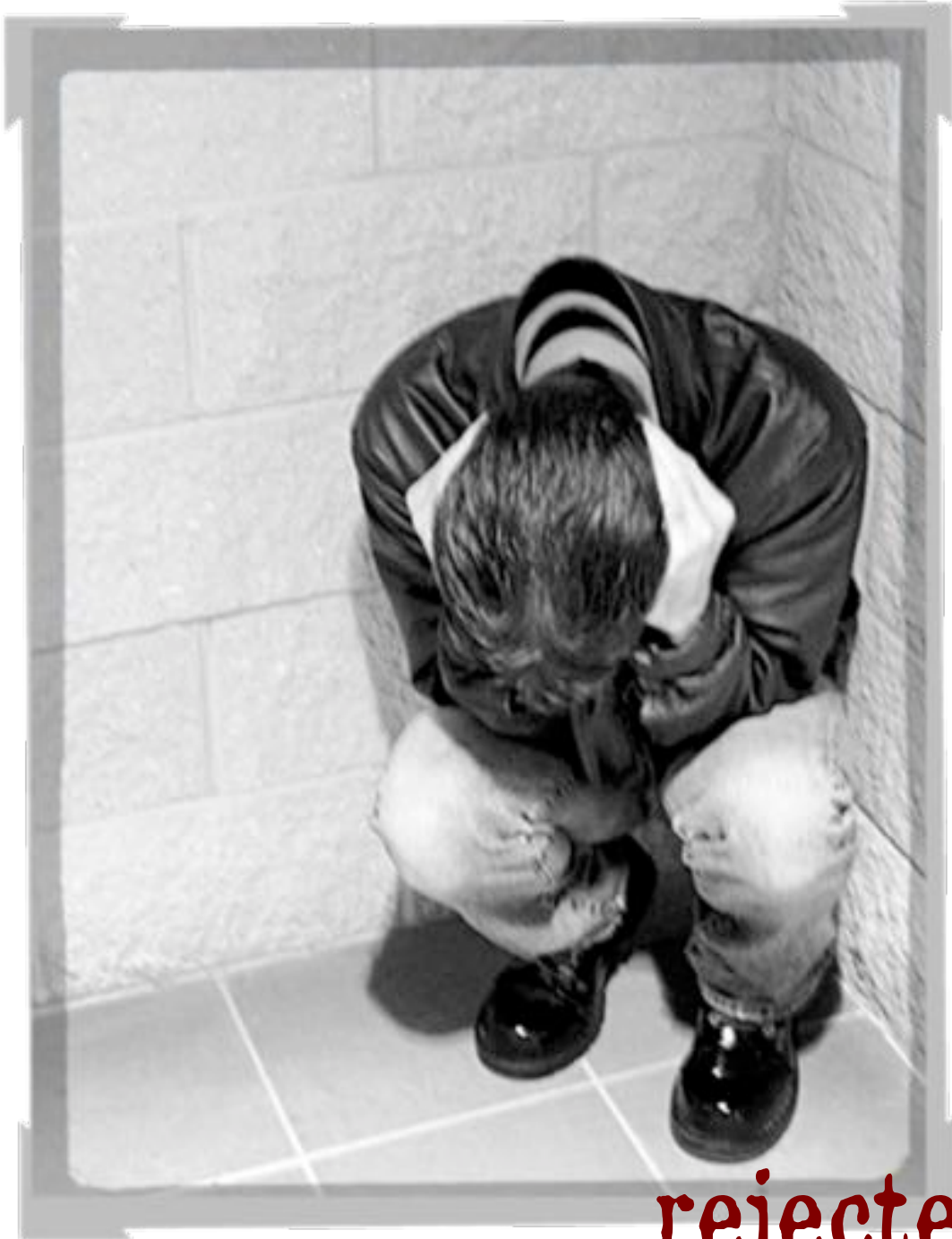
FROM LUKE 15:24, IN WHAT SENSE WAS THE SON “DEAD” BEFORE? HOW IS HE “ALIVE” NOW?



DOES ANYTHING IN YOU FEEL "DEAD"? DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN THE FEELING BEGAN?

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO SIMPLY INVITE GOD TO STIR UP THAT PLACE IN YOU AGAIN?

AS WE LIVE IN THE REALITY OF DEATH ALL AROUND US, WHAT HOPE (IF ANY) DO YOU FIND IN JESUS' PROMISES FOR A FULL LIFE NOW AND FOR ETERNAL LIFE FOREVER?



rejected

I may feel rejected, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM ACCEPTED AS I AM

getting real

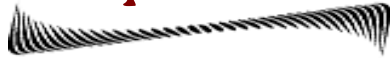
I was never one to need counseling, until I got diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after my second tour. I was afraid that I'd gone soft, and tried to push myself to be more of a man and "tough it out" like my father always used to tell me to do. It didn't work. It started with the panic attacks in the middle of the night, and then one time I woke up with my hands around my wife's throat. She was crying and I was sick that I came so close to hurting her. I agreed to get help. But my buddies say that real men take care of their own problems. So what does that make me?

Acceptance often starts "movement" in someone's spiritual growth. In an environment of no condemnation, people are honest about issues they haven't felt safe to reveal before. When they find that it's okay to confess one problem, they fire up the backhoe and they dig deeper into the dark parts of their souls. As acceptance increases, so does confession, and with confession come intimacy and growth.

—Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *How People Grow*

WHEN IS A TIME YOU EXPERIENCED ACCEPTANCE FROM OTHERS? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE FOR YOU?

hope



Can 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 are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. –Romans 8:35-39 (NLT)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. –Romans 15:7

Other Scriptures: Romans 14:1; Acts 10:34,35; 1 Corinthians 1:30-32; James 5:16; 1 Peter 2:4,5

DO YOU FEEL ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHATEVER THAT MEANS TO YOU?

IF NOT, WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD MAKE YOU ACCEPTABLE? WHAT DOES GOD SAY MAKES YOU ACCEPTABLE?



VERY FEW OF US ESCAPE THE PAIN OF REJECTION OR DISAPPOINTMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD LOVE WITHHELD OR WITHDRAWN?

WHAT IMPACT DID THAT EXPERIENCE HAVE ON YOU?

PEOPLE IN JESUS' DAY REJECTED HIM, AND MILLIONS MORE STILL DO TODAY.

AS YOU STRUGGLE WITH YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES OF REJECTION, WHAT DO YOU THINK JESUS IS SAYING TO YOU ABOUT THAT?

ARE YOU REJECTING SOMEONE ELSE? HOW MIGHT THAT IMPACT YOUR OWN SENSE OF BEING REJECTED?



condemned

I may feel condemned, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM NOT CONDEMNED

desperate

No one knows what has haunted my waking hours every day since it happened: the dancing & the strobe lights, the cool martini glasses, the guy who kept meeting my eyes across the room. How I thought the flirting was harmless, the drinks less potent than they really were. Feeling sick, and trying to find a place to lie down. How he followed me into the room, calling two of his friends to join him. Strong, rough hands that did not hold me like I've always longed to be held. The sound of tearing fabric, the feel of tearing skin. Trying to call out; the smell of cologne on the hand cupped over my mouth. Not remembering exactly when I blacked out; the taste of dried blood when I awoke. Hearing my mother's voice say "I told you so." I wonder if their own voices are condemning them like mine is? So I can't meet anyone's eyes anymore. If they look at me, they'll see what I fight every day to hide.

Jesus caught this woman (see John 8) in the place where everyone else would throw her away—the place of her sin and shame. But he takes her by the hand and leads her to freedom. . . . Jesus does not turn away. He steps right into the mess we have made and offers us not another stone of condemnation but, of all things, MERCY. . . . Out of this place where we have been loved in our shame, we come to know ourselves as women [and men] worthy of love. And this love changes everything.

—Paula Rinehart, *Sex and the Soul of a Woman*

condemned

HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED MERCY OR PARDON WHEN YOU EXPECTED OR DESERVED PUNISHMENT?

OR HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED CONDEMNATION AND BLAME WHEN YOU EXPECTED SYMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING?

WHAT WAS THAT LIKE FOR YOU?

hope



Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . .
–Romans 8:1

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us.
–Romans 8:33,34 (NLT)

This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves. And friends, once that's taken care of and we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God! We're able to stretch our hands out and receive what we asked for because we're doing what he said, doing what pleases him. –1 John 3:19-22 (MSG)

Other Scriptures: John 8:1-11

FROM THESE VERSES, WHAT HAS GOD DONE TO END THE WITHERING PAIN OF CONDEMNATION?

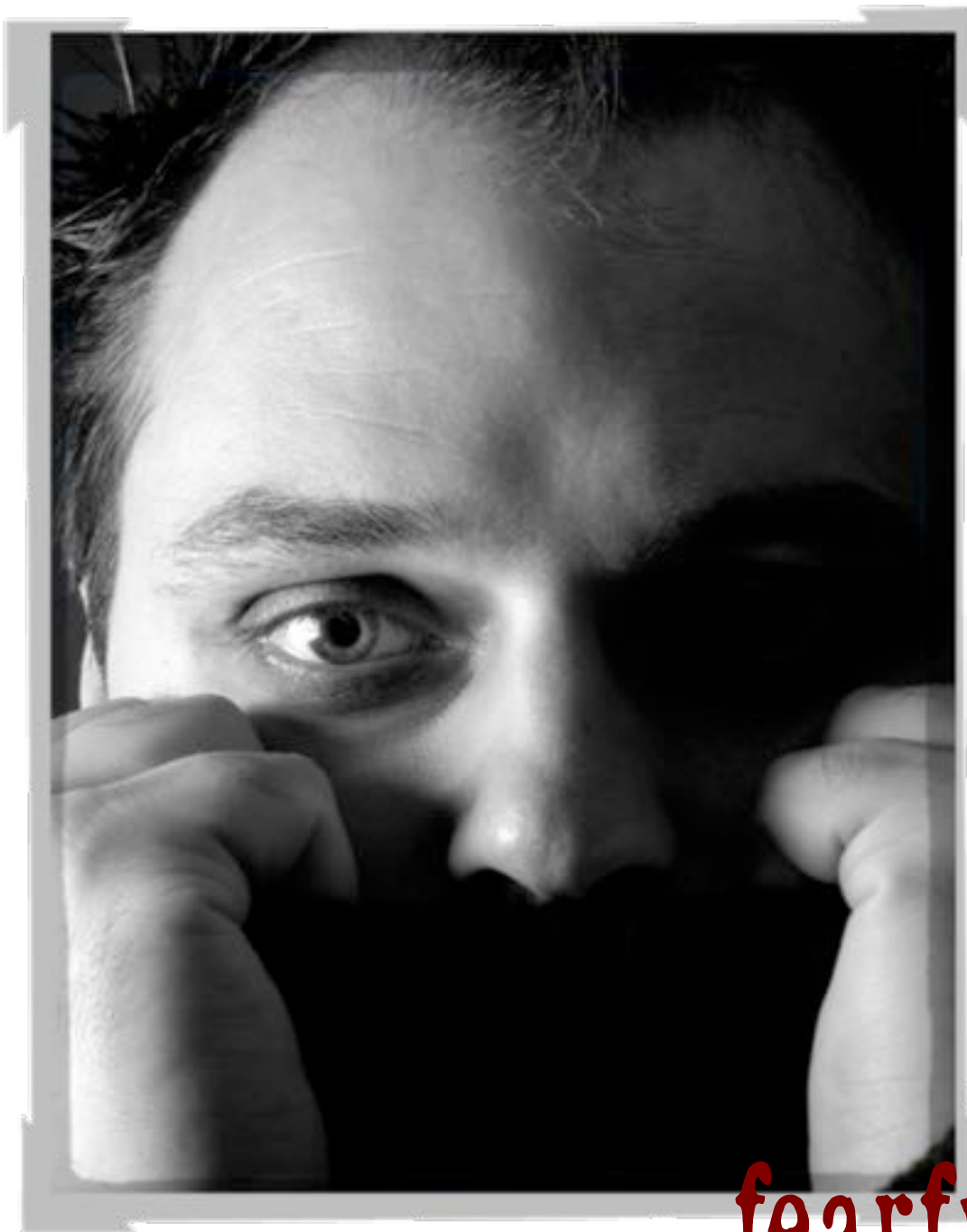


WHOSE VOICES CONDEMN YOU, AND WHAT DO THEY SAY?

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, PEOPLE HAVE STONED THOSE THEY CONDEMNED.

WHAT STONES OF SELF-CONDEMNATION CAN YOU LAY AT THE FEET OF JESUS, WHERE THEY BELONG?

NOW WHAT WORDS OF MERCY AND GRACE CAN YOU REACH OUT TO RECEIVE FROM JESUS?



fearful

I may feel fearful, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM AT PEACE IN GOD'S PRESENCE

forecast uncertain

My boyfriend and I talk about the future all the time. He says he wants to have kids, too. But I'm scared. I mean, who wants to bring kids into a world as messed up as this one? Terrorism, diseases—especially STD's, wars, suicide bombers, global warming, sexual predators . . . it's everywhere and just getting worse. Seriously I worry about this constantly. And then after talking like this, he won't talk about getting married. Maybe I'm most scared that he'll bail out on me and leave me to sort out my life alone. He tells me to just enjoy today. How can I when I don't know what's coming?

terror

It is early in the morning and my joints ache. The bed is damp from fear as I look into my future. My night terror is the looming specter of crippling arthritis. I am forty years old and already my neck cracks with the dead sounds of a dry limb. . . . I am going to be crippled, confined to an earthly hell while my family and friends go skiing, play tennis, or stroll along a well-lit street in downtown Denver on the way to a delicious Italian meal. I am a crustacean, a distant memory that provokes sadness, a burden that engenders pity and labored patience. I feel loneliness, then fury. How can this happen? My fury glides into envy. Then I round the corner into stark, naked terror.

—Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul*,
(NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO, 1994), p. 30

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES PEOPLE REALLY AFRAID? WHAT PUTS PEOPLE AT PEACE?

hope



I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.
–Psalm 4:8

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
–Isaiah 41:10

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” –John 14:27

Other Scriptures: John 16:33; 1 John 4:18; Psalm 4:8

WHY DO YOU THINK GOD REPEATEDLY REMINDS US TO “FEAR NOT”?



WHAT TENDS TO MAKE YOU MOST AFRAID? WHAT OBSTACLES TO PEACE DO YOU ENCOUNTER?

HOW HAS GOD'S PRESENCE BROUGHT YOU PEACE?



failure

I may feel like a failure, but by the power of His Spirit
I AM SIGNIFICANT TO GOD

what it takes

I remember standing in the math hallway, listening to the wrestling coach praise my younger brother for making the team he was taking to state. He went on and on about what an honor that was, and all that needed to be done to be ready. I don't even know if he realized I was there. That was, until he glanced at me and asked, with his forehead wrinkled as if concerned, "Too bad you don't have what it takes to hang with us, big guy." I didn't realize it then, but he was confirming what I had begun to suspect: I don't have what it takes. And what really has changed?

God dreams that you would discover your destiny and walk into the reasons he placed you on this earth. God has a ticket of destiny with your name written on it—no matter how old, how broken, how tired, or how frightened you are. No matter how many times you may have failed, God dearly longs for the day when he gets to hand you that ticket, smile, and whisper into your ear, "You have no idea how long I've waited to hand this to you. Have a blast! I've already seen what you get to do. It's better than you could have dreamed. Now hurry up and get on that train. A whole lot of folk are waiting for you to walk into your destiny and into their lives." —Bill Thrall, et al., *TrueFaced*

destiny

WHEN IS A TIME YOU HAVE FELT LIKE A FAILURE? . . . HAVE FELT SIGNIFICANT?

hope



Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows.

–Matthew 10:29-31 (NLT)

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. –1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 3:7-9; 1 Peter 4:10,11

WHY DO YOU THINK GOD DELIBERATELY CHOOSES THE “FOOLISH . . . POWERLESS . . . DESPISED . . . NOTHINGS”?



HOW MIGHT GOD BE INVITING YOU TO APPRECIATE THE UNIQUE WAY HE HAS DESIGNED YOU?

SIT WITH GOD IN YOUR DISAPPOINTMENT WITH YOURSELF OR WITH YOUR PRIDE OF SELF-ACCOMPLISHMENT.

WHAT DOES HE SAY TO YOU? RECEIVE WHATEVER HE SAYS ABOUT YOUR SIGNIFICANCE TO HIM, AND WRITE IT HERE.



disillusioned

I may feel disillusioned, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM HOPEFUL

as if

So we went to check out another rental house today. I called to make sure it was still available, and when the landlord invited us to come look, my wife came too. We have until Friday to find a new place to live. The landlord looked surprised when he opened the door, and stalled us with small talk in the entryway. Finally I asked to see the house and he said that he had made a mistake, and it was already promised to someone. His smile was so sticky it could have been made of maple syrup. I've heard that before. Translation: the hypocrite just didn't want a black family disrupting their suburban paradise.

. . . hopelessness steals our sense of purpose. Once we lose hope, we lose vision. Our destiny becomes clouded by the events of the past. Our eyes are darkened, and we become blind to our future. We turn a deaf ear to the encouraging words of our friends. Our senses are shadowed by our distorted reasoning's and perceptions. The encouraging words we read in Scripture mean little, if anything to us.

—Mike Fehlauer, *Finding Freedom from the Shame of the Past*, (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1999), p.15

hopeless

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS PEOPLE IN GENERAL FEEL DISILLUSIONED WITH OR CYNICAL ABOUT?

hope



The LORD is the everlasting God; he created all the world. He never grows tired or weary. No one understands his thoughts. He strengthens those who are weak and tired. Even those who are young grow weak; young men can fall exhausted. But those who trust in the LORD for help [who expect, look for, and hope in Him—AMP] will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.

—Isaiah 40:28-31 (TEV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. —Romans 15:13

Other Scriptures: Hebrews 6:18,19; Romans 5:5

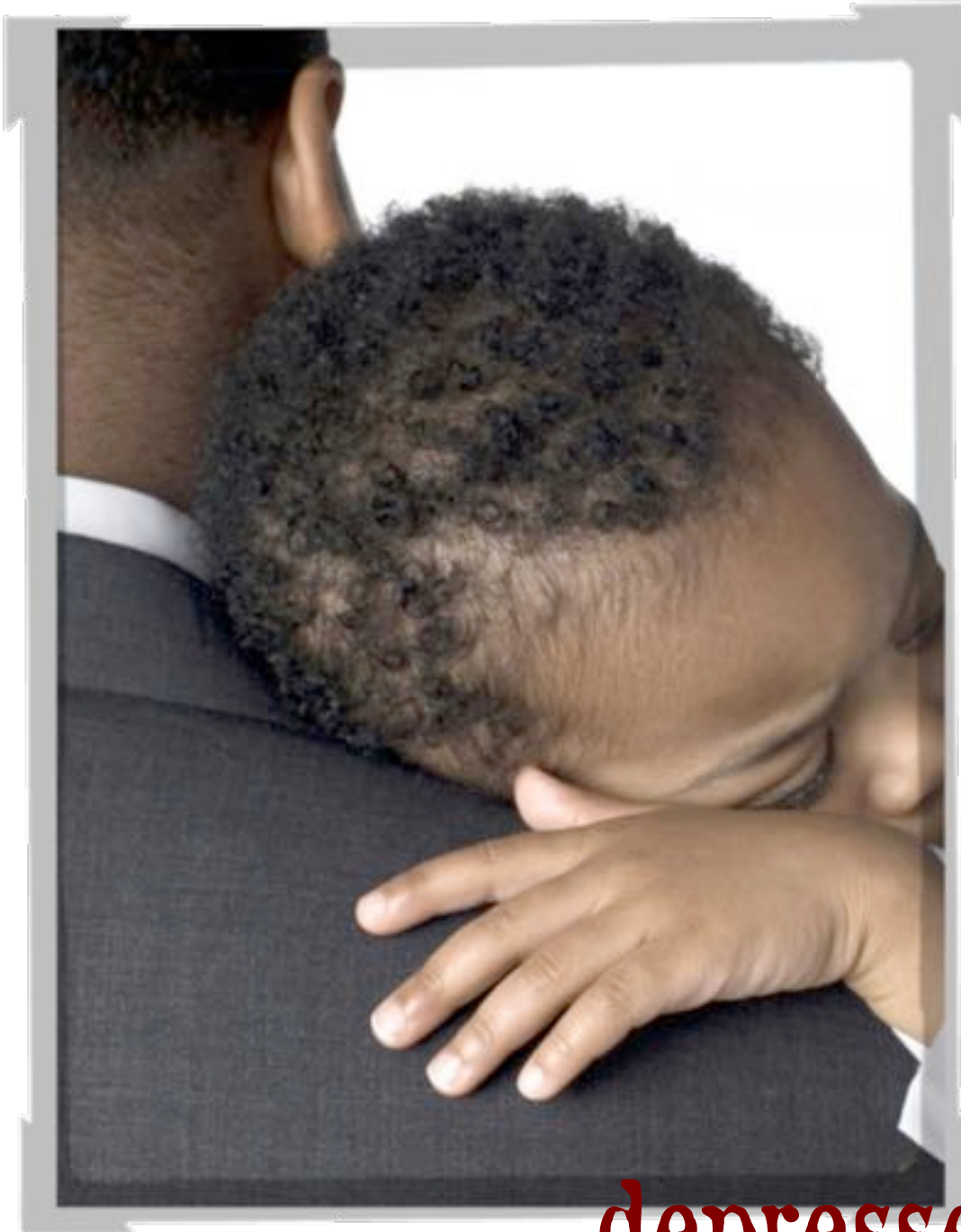
HOW DOES THIS PROCESS OF TRUSTING GOD MOVE US A FEW STEPS FROM DISILLUSIONMENT TOWARD HOPE?



WHAT DOES HOPE FEEL LIKE TO YOU?

DO YOU FEEL HOPEFUL ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?

IF YOU INVITED GOD INTO ANY PART OF YOUR DISILLUSIONMENT, HOW DO YOU THINK HE WOULD MEET YOU THERE?



depressed

I may feel depressed, but by the power of His Spirit

I AM COMFORTED

walking through mud

I am exhausted, and yet I lay here, unable to sleep. I watch the moonlight play shadows across my walls, and think about yesterday, how it feels like I'm walking through a field of knee-high mud, no fences in sight. Nothing is easy anymore. And tomorrow promises to be more of the same. I don't know if others hear it, but when I laugh, it sounds like an echo. My life is like staring into a steamed mirror; nothing is in focus. Nothing is clear.

I wake up in the morning to shades of grey and brown and long lists of things to do and not enough time to do them all and an endless repetition of last week's cycle. Same old news on the radio, just wrapped in a different broadcast set on a different continent. You [God] are here, easing me through it all, but You can be as gray to me as the sky. As brown as the winter grass. As uneventful as the news.

—Ruth Senter, *Longing for Love*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1991, p. 116

WHAT THINGS DO PEOPLE TURN TO FOR COMFORT WHEN THEY ARE SAD OR DEPRESSED?

hope



Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair.
If only one person would show some pity;
if only one would turn and comfort me.
But instead, they give me poison for food;
they offer me sour wine to satisfy my thirst. –Psalm 69:20,21 (NLT)

I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him,
creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and
near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them." –Isaiah 57:18,19

All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every
mercy and the God who comforts us. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we
can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the
same comfort God has given us. You can be sure that the more we suffer for Christ,
the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.
–2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NLT)

Other Scriptures: Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 77; Psalm 88; Psalm 115:49-50; 2
Corinthians 7:5-7

HOW DOES IT FEEL KNOWING THAT JESUS CAN RELATE TO YOUR DEEP SADNESS?

FOR A FEW MINUTES, LISTEN TO JESUS TALK ABOUT HIS EMOTIONAL STRUGGLE (PSALM 69:20). HOW CAN HE
RELATE TO YOU?



WHERE HAVE YOU TURNED FOR COMFORT? HAS IT BEEN GENUINELY HEALING OR JUST DISTRACTING?

EXPLAIN.

HOW HAS GOD USED OTHERS TO COMFORT YOU IN YOUR DEPRESSION?

WHY DO YOU THINK HE CHOOSES TO COMFORT US THROUGH OTHERS?

For Leaders

To help you find the right connections to your ministry or small group, here are some answers to key questions about *The New Me*.

What?

So WHAT are *The New Me* topical mini-studies? They have. . .

- . . . **depth** — short sections yet with richness of Scripture
- . . . **flexibility** — appropriate for a **small group setting** or as a **personal ministry tool** with one or two others
- . . . the feel of a Quiet Time **journal or devotional** — space for writing and personal reflection

Think of it as a **“hybrid” ministry tool**—equally beneficial in several contexts.

Who?

WHO in your ministry context might really get into this tool? Our field testers have told us that resources like this cover a range of needs, for example:

- Mature high school students love the open-ended questions, engaging images, and real-world blogs.
- Adult believers and seekers appreciate a fresh look at the heart and character of God, fleshed out with thought-provoking quotes.
- It helps people who know and love God draw even closer to Him.
- People, believers as well as non-believers who have been disappointed and distant from God feel invited to tell Him so and hear Him out at the same time!
- And don't forget yourself! This might be a fresh wind under your wings along your spiritual journey!

Why?

WHY were these studies created? Here are several reasons:

- First, because the Bible assures us that putting our trust in Jesus makes us new creatures. Yet so much of the “old” still seems to hang on. In one sense, you “already are” and in another sense you “are still” becoming like Jesus. That’s okay. You aren’t asked to have it all together—just be in the process of growing in His grace.
- Second, you may be thinking, “That sounds good, but how I *feel* about who I am now doesn’t always match what I *know* about who I really am in Christ! My head and my heart are out of sync.” Once again, that’s okay. On the journey of spiritual transformation, feelings often lag behind awareness and understanding. So be patient with yourself and know that the journey is as important as the destination, and God is eager to meet you along the way.

- Third, *The New Me* topical mini-studies are a way to get to a real level, first with yourself and then with others. Used on your own, it will help you see and consider honestly where you are struggling and/or growing. Used with others, it will offer a starting point to begin conversations about where you long for change, for new life, for tastes of God.

The New Me invites people to re-discover, or perhaps discover for the first time what appeal there is – what there is to truly like about our Triune God.

How?

Now for some practical leading tips. Here are some ideas on HOW people on the front lines (like you) could use *The New Me* in your ministries.

- **Small (and safe) groups:** A small group of 4-8 adults, college students, or teens is ideal for processing these questions—as long as it’s safe to admit to struggles and misconceptions. With a little preparation beforehand your group could discuss one or even two topics in an hour...three topics in 90 minutes. That makes it an excellent tool if you are on an 8-12 week schedule. If your group isn’t inclined to do preparation, consider allowing the first 15 minutes for quiet preparation, followed by discussion. *When leading this resource, just go through each question in order and allow for discussion. You may need to ask a few guiding questions within the discussion to keep it on track.*
- **One-on-One Discipling or Mentoring:** If you are meeting with someone to help them grow spiritually, this is a great tool to surface unexplored ideas and issues with God. You can use it alone or alongside other discipling resources. Or, go through one topic as a part of worship together.
- **Family Devotions:** Parents who want to find out what their kids *really* think about God could find this to be an eye-opening resource. Very open-ended questions get you and your kids (especially the older ones) thinking and opening up. Key verses help you direct them to foundational Scripture passages. And in the process, they can see God through your eyes and experiences, too.
- **Individually:** For a refreshing change-up to your Quiet Time routine...or to get you started in the habit of spending time with God...just go through this resource by yourself. Or, take it on a day of prayer, personal retreat, or relaxing vacation.

P.S. – and don’t feel obligated to cover every topic and go in order in these situations, however, beginning with the first topic will help get you started. After that, feel free to skip around. Choose those topics that interest you the most. And consider talking with a friend about what you discover along the way.

“THE NEW ME” VIDEOS:

To enhance and complement the *The New Me* studies we have developed two short videos. These videos reference the same topics you find here. They can be used as an introduction to these studies and for group or personal meditation times. These videos are downloadable from YouTube at “navpressvideo.” They come in both Quicktime and WindowsMedia versions.

While *The New Me* might look a little different from the resources or studies you’re used to, it’s really not difficult or complicated. If you can do 3 simple things, you’ll be amazed at how people can open up, so:

- 1) Just be a brother/sister on the same journey (not a teacher—trainer—expert), willing to learn and set the pace in vulnerability and authenticity.

- 2) Create a relaxed, conversational atmosphere of grace where it's okay to discover, doubt, differ, and diverge. Creating a process that accepts people who are "on the way" and welcoming and creating space for doubts as a normal part of the growth, can really help your group make significant progress!
- 3) Soak your own preparation in prayer so you can simply facilitate and enjoy seeing God reveal Himself to each of you.

WELCOME TO THE ADVENTURE AHEAD!