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## What This Is ?

Most people say that they want to grow in their faith. We know that discontentment, anxiety, fears, and stress are results of years of just letting life happen to us. There is a better way. Jesus promised us that he had come to give us abundant life. He said that if we were connected (He called it “abiding”) that we would grow and produce fruit. Most Christians have made many attempts at growing. We set out at the first of year to read the entire Bible and get as far as Leviticus before we get discouraged and quit. We make plans to pray and meditate but don’t exactly know how. We want to volunteer, but our Saturdays are already full. In short – we say we want to grow, but most of us settle for attending worship services and that is it.

Growth and change are not individual efforts. Studies show that people who try to diet, exercise, or stop a habit by themselves almost always fail. But, when we are in a community and have at least one person to encourage and challenge us, the success rate goes up. 1 On One will use that truth to make our growth a reality. Someone will be walking the path with you and if you want to quit, you will have to explain why to that person.

Individuals will prayerfully complete the 1 on One Covenant that will last for twelve weeks. Choices will be made as to a Bible reading plan, study, serving, prayer, and relationship issues. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings in pairs will give time to share life and encourage one another concerning their spiritual growth. At the end of the twelve weeks there will be a Saturday morning mini-retreat where all who are in the 1 on One will gather for a presentation of some aspect of the walk with Christ as well as some worship, ministry time, and consideration of the next covenant period. 1 on One pairs can self-select (same gender and no close friends) or you can ask to have a person suggested to you.

To say that this agent of familiarity breeds contempt is to let him off easy. Contempt is just one of his offspring. He also sires broken hearts, wasted hours, and an insatiable desire for more.... He won't take your children, he'll just make you too busy to notice them. His whispers to procrastinate are seductive. There is always next summer to coach the team, next month to go to the lake, and next week to teach Johnny how to pray. He'll make you forget that the faces around your table will soon be at tables of their own. Hence, books will go unread, games will go unplayed, hearts will go unnurtured, and opportunities will go ignored. All because the poison of the ordinary has deadened your senses to the magic of the moment....

On a shelf above my desk is a picture of two little girls. They're holding hands and standing in front of a swimming pool, the same pool from which the younger of the two had been pulled only minutes before. I put the picture where I would see it daily so I would remember what God doesn't want me to forget.

And you can bet this time I'm going to remember. I don't want any more hangin'. Not even a little bit.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. How does familiarity divert our focus from life's most important things?
2. What happens when we neglect the important things in life?
3. What does this psalm remind you to do?

## Steps

1. Read through the 1 On One Guide Book to get a feel for what this is.
2. Prayerfully consider if you are ready to "count the cost" for spiritual growth.
3. Prayerfully consider a partner who might be a good match for you. You are strongly urged to not select a best friend.
  - Use these guidelines:
    - a) same gender
    - b) not a close friend
    - c) capable of meeting my logistical and time format
    - d) a person I think I could talk to
4. Contact the person.
5. If you do not have anyone in mind, or if you are not able to find a partner, contact your coach to ask for some suggestions.
6. With the 1 On One Covenant in hand, go through pages 7-11 and prayerfully consider each section. Remember – BALANCE! If you have never done these things, don't expect to become a disciplined achiever just because you think you should.
7. Fill in the covenant page in your book and fill in the loose covenant page and give to your coach.
8. Select and obtain any resources that you need to fulfill your covenant. Check the website for resources. All books are available to use and are at the 1 On One table each week at worship.
9. Schedule you first meeting with your partner.
10. Fill in the meeting reports as they are sent to you via email or in person at the 1 On One Resource Table if you do not have email.

## Warning!

Growing in your faith will be met with resistance. God has an enemy who will oppose your growth efforts. You are a dangerous person when you seek God. Expect there to be opposition to your plans. There will be good reasons as to why you do not have the time or why you should cancel your meeting with your partner. You must resolve to go forward. Part of your battle is not against your own will and your own laziness, but against an enemy who wants you to stay the same. Let Paul's words to the Ephesians give you confidence that if you persist, God's will in your life will be realized.

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.  
<sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-12 (NIV)

works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD,  
 O my soul.

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Abraham Lincoln once listened to the pleas of the mother of a soldier who'd been sentenced to hang for treason. She begged the President to grant a pardon. Lincoln agreed. Yet, he's reported to have left the lady with the following words: "Still, I wish we could teach him a lesson. I wish we could give him just a little bit of a hangin'."

I think I know what the old rail-splitter had in mind. Yesterday, I got a little bit of hangin'.

We were having Sunday lunch at the home of a fellow missionary family. It was after the meal.... Their three-year-old daughter Beth Ann was playing with our two-year-old Jenna in the front yard. All of a sudden Beth Ann rushed in with a look of panic on her face. "Jenna is in the pool!"

Paul was the first to arrive at the poolside ... and lifted her up out of the water to the extended hands of her mother. Jenna was simultaneously choking, crying, and coughing. She vomited a bellyful of water. I held her as she cried. Denalyn began to weep. I began to sweat.

For the rest of the day I couldn't hold her enough, nor could we thank Beth Ann enough.... I still can't thank God enough.

It was a little bit of hangin'.

The stool was kicked out from under my feet and the rope jerked around my neck just long enough to remind me of what really matters. It was a divine slap, a gracious knock on the head, a severe mercy. Because of it, I came face to face with one of the underground's slyest agents—the agent of familiarity....

## Week 10

### Remembering The Important Things

Begin by reading Psalm 103 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Of David. Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits— <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. <sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: <sup>8</sup> The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. <sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; <sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. <sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children— <sup>18</sup> with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. <sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. <sup>20</sup> Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. <sup>21</sup> Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. <sup>22</sup> Praise the LORD, all his

## Covenant

*For the next twelve weeks, I promise to God, my 1 On One coach, and my 1 On One partner to seek God with all my heart and to engage and finish these growth activities with the intention of becoming a more fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. I will be honest in my self-examination and in my conversations with my partner. I will respect his/her privacy and keep our conversations confidential. I accept the role of supporter and friend and will encourage my partner.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

Note: Remember – BALANCE. Count the cost. It is better to finish what you start than to drop out because you over-committed.

### Meet

- I will meet with my partner every week.
- I will meet with my partner bi-weekly.
- I will attend the Mini-retreat on Sat., April 10, 9:00-12:00.

### Study

- I will take Bible 101
- Join a Bible study group: Bible Study Fellowship or other group at other church.
- I will read the Bible for five minutes, five days each week. (download the 5x5x5 plan)
- I will read the Bible for twenty minutes each day. (download a plan that covers the whole Bible)
- I will read *The Life You Always Wanted* by John Ortberg. Available at the 1 On One Resource Table for \$5.00.
- I will read \_\_\_ other books selected from the reading list and available at the resource table.
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Pray & Reflect**

- Keep a personal prayer time each day.
- Use a daily meditation book.
- Keep a prayer journal.
- Keep \_\_\_ day(s) of prayer and fasting.
- Keep \_\_\_ four-hour technology fasts.
- Join a prayer group at work, church, neighborhood, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Serve**

- Give \_\_\_ hours of my time away helping someone who cannot repay me.
- Help with a mission project at the Gathering.
- Help with a mission project at another church, work, or community event.

say he knew about the blahs. Same terrain, same scenes, same route, same ornery people, same negative outlook, same complaints, same miserable weather, same everything! The prayer he wrote could have been his means of maintaining sanity!...

Frequently, our problem with boredom begins when we fall under monotony's "spell." ... How to cope? We must direct our attention (as Moses does) to (a) the right object and (b) the right perspective....

As I probe my soul during times of such wrestling, almost without exception, I find three thoughts washing around in my head. First, I think: Life is so short.... Look again at Moses' prayer. He brings a second thought that plagues me when the blahs come: My sins are so obvious....

Yes, life is short. Yes, our sins are obvious.... And if those thoughts aren't hard enough to handle, there is a third feeling: My days are so empty.... After the satisfaction that comes from fresh joy in the morning, there is restoration.... God has a way of balancing out the good with the bad.

(From *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* by Charles Swindoll)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. What steps can you take that will refresh you when you grow discouraged?
2. Why should we be honest with ourselves and God about our failures?
3. What causes you to worry about your future?

## Week 9

### A Fresh Perspective

Begin by reading Psalm 90:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> A prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. <sup>3</sup> You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." <sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup> You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning— <sup>6</sup> though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. <sup>7</sup> We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. <sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. <sup>9</sup> All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. <sup>10</sup> The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. <sup>11</sup> Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. <sup>12</sup> Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

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Psalm 90 is the only psalm specifically attributed to Moses. He may have written others, but we know for sure he wrote this one. Remember Moses? Most think of him as a man of action, an aggressive leader, point man in the exodus, outspoken giver of the law. But it is easy to overlook the repetitious, monotonous routine he endured. Between ages forty and eighty, Moses led his father-in-law's flock of sheep in the desert. Following the exodus, he led the Hebrews for another forty years as they wandered across and around the wilderness. I'd

## Study

- I will take Bible 101

Bible 101 is an introduction to the Bible and assumes that you don't know anything. The weekly commitment is three hours of study and class time. Unit #1 (beginning of Old Testament) begins Wed. Jan 20, 6:30-7:45 at ACE library. There is more info online at [www.gatheringlex.org](http://www.gatheringlex.org).

- Join a Bible study group: Bible Study Fellowship or other group at other church.

Bible Study Fellowship is a solid and thorough study of the Bible without denomination or doctrinal emphasis. Go to their website ([www.bsfinternational.org](http://www.bsfinternational.org)) to locate the classes in Lexington.

- I will read the Bible for five minutes, five days each week. (download the 5x5x5 plan)

This is a good place to start if you have never attempted reading the Bible every day. You read only from the New Testament. The plans are at the resource table or can be downloaded at [www.gatheringlex.org](http://www.gatheringlex.org)

- I will read the Bible for twenty minutes each day. (download a plan that covers the whole Bible)

This will take you about twenty minutes a day and you will read the entire Bible in one year. There are numerous plans to guide you. Go to Bible Reading Plans on the website. There are also some podcast audio programs that are great ([www.dailyaudiobible.com](http://www.dailyaudiobible.com)) and if you have a commute, CD's or MP3 is a great way to get the Bible in every day.

- ❑ I will read *The Life You Always Wanted* by John Ortberg. Available at the 1 On One table for \$5.00.

This is the book that we are encouraging all participants to read together. Ortberg introduces us to the spiritual disciplines in a very readable and understandable way. Copies of the book are at the resource table for \$5.00.

- ❑ I will read \_\_\_ other books selected from the reading list and available at the resource table.

The Suggested Reading list is divided into Milk, White Meat, and Red Meat. All of the books are at the resource table to be checked out. Many of these are classics and have been an aid to millions of Christians as they sought the Lord. If you need suggestions, ask your coach.

- ❑ \_\_\_\_\_

You may have a Christian book gathering dust that you have intended to read. Include that book.

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are “like foreigners and strangers in this world” (1 Pet. 2:11).

Take a fish and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a *Playfish* magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double breasted fins and people-skinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach.

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

(From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. Where do people look for satisfaction?
2. What happens to us when we depend on people or objects to make us happy?
3. When are you most likely to feel “at home” on earth?
4. How is the happiness that God gives different from what the world offers?

## Week 8

### True Happiness

Begin by reading Psalm 62:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. <sup>2</sup> He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. <sup>3</sup> How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down— this leaning wall, this tottering fence? <sup>4</sup> They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. <sup>5</sup> Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. <sup>6</sup> He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. <sup>7</sup> My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. <sup>8</sup> Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. <sup>9</sup> Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath. <sup>10</sup> Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. <sup>11</sup> One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, <sup>12</sup> and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

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The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be home on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland.

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land....

## Pray & Reflect

- Keep a personal prayer time each day.

This does not have to be lengthy. In fact, if you have not had a habit of this, it is better to be short and regular than long one day and miss two weeks. The morning is the best, but anytime is good. Often people find that a quiet lunch with a reading and a time to pray really helps them be more focused and productive for God in the afternoon.

- Use a daily meditation book.

The bookstores have plenty of these. We suggest some classics like Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* or Max Lucado, *Grace For the Moment*. There are also some great ones for free online and many will send you an email or RSS feed everyday to make things easy. Look online at the Resource page of 1 On One to get the links.

- Keep a prayer journal.

This is not a diary. It is a written prayer to God of your reflections about yourself and your requests of God, as well as your adoration of God. For starters with this, go to the resource page and read the article entitle Prayer Journal.

- Keep \_\_\_ day(s) of prayer and fasting.

Fasting is not a diet, but an effort to bring your flesh into submission for the purpose of prayer. If you have never done this, you are in for an opening to a powerful avenue of prayer. There are resources of articles and links to aid you in this online at [www.gatheringlex.org](http://www.gatheringlex.org) on the 1 On One resource page.

- Keep \_\_\_ four-hour technology fasts.

Simplicity and solitude are important ingredients for growth of our souls. In our fast world, taking a break from your phone, your computer, and your TV can be liberating and sharpen your ears for God. Suggested instructions are on the resource page.

- Join a prayer group at work, church, neighborhood, etc.

Don't limit your life to the Gathering. Do you have friends or work associates who have prayer together? Or maybe you know someone who might want to start.

- \_\_\_\_\_

This is for you to write in any prayer activity not mentioned above that you want to do.

bowls three hundred. No one. Not you, not me, not anyone....

Listen. Quit trying to quench your own guilt. You can't do it. There is no way. Not with a bottle of whiskey or perfect Sunday School attendance. Sorry. I don't care how bad you are. You can't be bad enough to forget it. And I don't care how good you are. You can't be good enough to overcome it.

You need a Savior.

(From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. How does God convict us of sin?
2. How do people try to cope with guilt?
3. What does this psalm say about dealing with guilt?
4. How can you become free of guilt?

## Week 7

### Dealing With Guilt

Begin by reading Psalm 51:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. <sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. <sup>7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

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Man by himself cannot deal with his own guilt. He must have help from the outside. In order to forgive himself, he must have forgiveness from the one he has offended. Yet man is unworthy to ask God for forgiveness....

You can't do that by yourself. I don't care how many worship services you attend or good deeds you do, your goodness is insufficient. You *can't* be good enough to deserve forgiveness. No one bats a thousand. No one

## Serve

Note: Serving is the giving of time and effort. Financial donations, although crucial, do not qualify.

- Give \_\_\_\_ hours of my time away helping someone who cannot repay me.

Developing a servant's heart happens as we give our time and effort away to people who cannot pay us back. Look for ways to serve where you get nothing. Maybe you are not even noticed. In what ways can you serve Christ without getting credit?

- Help with a mission project at the Gathering.

There are mission efforts each month through the Gathering. It may be helping the Hope Center, the Lexington Rescue Mission, or picking up trash. Go to the website under Servolution for a list of upcoming projects.

- Help with a mission project at another church, work, or community event.

Does your neighborhood association, school, or workplace need help?

## Meeting Suggestions

- Choose a location where you can have a private conversation. Lunch at a busy restaurant may sound good to your stomach, but it may not give you the freedom to really talk. Try to choose a place where you can have some space.
- Bi-weekly meetings are the minimum. Weekly meetings are preferred, but may not be realistic.
- Bring your 1 On One Guide Book to the meeting as well as your Bible or book that you are reading if you have things to share.

## Meeting Template

The only mandatory element of each meeting is a review of your learning covenant (item #3 below.) You are responsible to your partner to initiate a reporting of how you are doing on the goals and activities that you choose for the twelve weeks. Everything else in the meeting is up to you. You have the freedom as partners to shape your meetings the way you want, but here are some suggestions to get your started.

1. Reconnect. Take some time to talk about everyday life, work, family, issues, etc.
2. Do a 1 On One Meditation found on pages 14-33.
3. Each person takes a turn and go through your covenant on page 5 point-by-point, and do self-examination as to your progress.
  - a. In what area are you having biggest challenge?
  - b. What have you learned this week about God or following Christ?
  - c. What have you learned about yourself?
4. Share with each other a personal prayer request about yourself.
5. Share with each other a prayer request for someone else.

does that make? Why sit at the piano and pause when you can pound?

“Because,” my teacher patiently explained, “music is always sweeter after a rest.”

It didn’t make sense to me at age ten. But now, a few decades later, the words ring with wisdom—divine wisdom.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. What happens when we don’t take time to be quiet before God?
2. What keeps you from spending time with God?
3. What fears do you have?
4. What advice would you offer a friend who is overwhelmed by fear or anxiety?

## Week 6

### Resting In God

Begin by reading Psalm 46:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, <sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Selah* <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. <sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. <sup>7</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah* <sup>8</sup> Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." <sup>11</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

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When I was ten years old, my mother enrolled me in piano lessons. Now, many youngsters excel at the keyboard. Not me. Spending thirty minutes every afternoon tethered to a piano bench was a torture just one level away from swallowing broken glass. The metronome inspected each second with glacial slowness before it was allowed to pass.

Some of the music, though, I learned to enjoy. I hammered the staccatos. I belabored the crescendos.... But there was one instruction in the music I could never obey to my teacher's satisfaction. The rest. The zigzagged command to do nothing. Nothing! What sense

## Weekly Meditations

### Week 1

#### A Heart Condition

Begin by reading Psalm 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:1-6 (NIV)

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The heart is the center of the spiritual life. If the fruit of a tree is bad, you don't try to fix the fruit; you treat the roots. And if a person's actions are evil, it's not enough to change habits; you have to go deeper. You have to go to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart.

That is why the state of the heart is so critical. What is the state of yours?... The state of your heart dictates whether you harbor a grudge or give grace, seek self-pity or seek Christ, drink human misery or taste God's mercy. No wonder, then, the wise man begs, "Above all else, guard your heart."

David's prayer should be ours: "Create in me a pure heart, O God."

And Jesus' statement rings true: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Note the order of this beatitude: first purify the heart, then you will see God. Clean the refinery, and the result will be a pure product.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. Why is it important for us to guard our hearts?
2. How can we evaluate the condition of our hearts?
3. What selfish habits or actions do you want to work on eliminating from your life?
4. What fruit would you like God to produce in your life?

come to define yourself in the same way that Jesus defines you. You will begin to think of yourself as He thinks of you. And Here is more good news: Jesus thinks you're great! He thinks you're terrific. He really does.

You say, "Not me, Tony. You don't know me or the sin in my life. There are things that I can never tell you. If you knew them it would cause you to view me with contempt."

We could compare horror stories. You could tell me how rotten you are and I could tell you how rotten I am and we could try to see which of us is worse. Both of us would end up in despair. But that's not what Jesus wants us to do. He wants us to realize that once we accept Him as our Savior and Lord, we stand before Him as perfect people. That's right! When Jesus looks at me, He doesn't see anything wrong with me at all. In the words of Scripture, "I'm clothed in His righteousness." The Bible says that my sin is blotted out. It is buried in the deepest sea; it is remembered no more.

(*It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'* by Tony Campolo)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. What keeps people from accepting God's forgiveness?
2. When have you experienced God's forgiveness?
3. In what ways should this affect your relationships with others?
4. How has your relationship with Jesus changed the way you view yourself?

## Week 5

### Forgiveness

Begin by reading Psalm 32:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. <sup>3</sup> When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah* <sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah* <sup>6</sup> Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. <sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah* <sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. <sup>9</sup> Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. <sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. <sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

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To say “I believe in Jesus” is not enough. You must be willing to acknowledge Him as the most important person in your life. You must be willing to say, “I will do what He wants me to do above all else and above any demands that others may place upon me.” If you will make that decision, I have great news for you—I can promise you a very positive self-image. When Jesus is the most important person in your life, you will soon

## Week 2

### Trusting God

Begin by reading Psalm 16:1-11 (NIV)

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. <sup>2</sup> I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” <sup>3</sup> As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. <sup>4</sup> The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. <sup>5</sup> LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. <sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. <sup>7</sup> I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. <sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, <sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. <sup>11</sup> You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

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Two-year-old Sara sits on my lap. We are watching a comedy on television about a guy who has a mouse in his room. He is asleep. He opens one eye and finds himself peering into the face of the rodent. The camera gets eye-level with the mouse, and suddenly the screen is filled with two eyes, whiskers, and a twitching nose.

I laugh, but Sara panics. She turns away from the screen and buries her face in my shoulder. Her arms encircle my neck and clamp like a vise. Her little body grows rigid. She thinks the mouse is going to get her.

"It's ok, Sara," I assure her.

She won't let go. "It's only a picture."

She peers up at me with one eye and then burrows her nose back into my shirt.

"Mouse get me," she whimpers.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," I say. "It's only a pretend mouse."

I speak with confidence because I am confident. There is really nothing to fear. I know. I've seen big mice on picture screens before. I know they go away.

Sara doesn't. Two-year-olds don't understand the concept of television. As far as she knows, the rodent on the screen is about to bound out of the box and gobble her up. As far as she knows, the mouse will be there every time she comes into this room. As far as she knows, television sets are nothing more than glass cages that house giant mice. There *is* reason to be afraid.

So she is afraid.

But with time, I convince her.... Sara has gone from white-faced fear to peaceful chuckles in a few moments. Why? Because her father spoke and she believed.

Would that we would do the same. Got any giant mice on your screen? Got any fears that won't go away? Got any whiskered monsters staring at you?

I wish the fears were just television images. They aren't. They lurk in hospital rooms and funeral homes. They stare at us from divorce papers and eviction notices. They glare through the eyes of cruel parents or an abusive mate.

of their existence and he gave them, not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest.

As a result, they called him Lord.

As a result, they called him Savior.

Not so much because of what he said, but because of what he did.

What he did on the cross during six hours, one Friday....

Jesus was the only man to walk God's earth who claimed to have an answer for man's burdens. "Come to me," he invited them.

My prayer is that you, too, will find rest. And that you will sleep like a baby.

(From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. How is Jesus' offer of rest relevant today?
2. In what ways have you already experienced God's rest?
3. In what area of your life do you need God's guidance?

## Week 4

### Finding Comfort And Rest

Begin by Reading Psalm 23:1-6 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is ... weariness that makes the words of the carpenter so compelling. Listen to them. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

*Come to me.* ... The invitation is to come to him. Why him?

He offers the invitation as a penniless rabbi in an oppressed nation. He has no political office, no connections with the authorities in Rome. He hasn't written a best-seller or earned a diploma.

Yet, he dares to look into the leathery faces of farmers and tired faces of housewives and offer rest. He looks into the disillusioned eyes of a preacher or two from Jerusalem. He gazes into the cynical stare of a banker and the hungry eyes of a bartender and makes this paradoxical promise: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

The people came. They came out of the cul-de-sacs and office complexes of their day. They brought him the burdens

And we, like Sara, get frightened. But we, unlike Sara, don't know where to turn. Why did Sara turn to her dad for comfort? Simple. She knows me....

And because she knows me, she trusts me. Instinctively, she is aware that I know more than she. So when I tell her not to worry, she doesn't worry.

Instinctively, we should know that God knows more than we do. Common sense would tell us that He isn't afraid of the mice that roar in our world....

He's been there before. He knows how these shows end. He knows that the worst fear the foe can throw is only a mirage. And He wants us to listen to His voice and trust Him—as Sara trusted me....

There are times when mice roar. There are times when we need a strong pair of arms. You need to know that the arms of God are there.

(From *Tell Me the Story* by Max Lucado)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. Think of a time when you felt overwhelmed by fear. How did you cope?
2. What keeps us from turning to God with our fears?
3. How does fear affect your relationship with God?

## Week 3

### God's Law

Begin by Reading Psalm 19:7-14 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. <sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. <sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. <sup>11</sup> By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. <sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. <sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. <sup>14</sup> May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

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The Ten Commandments tell us not to covet or lust. However, all moral law is more than a test; it's for our own good. Every law which God has given has been for our benefit. If a person breaks it, he is not only rebelling against God, he is hurting himself. God gave "the law" because he loves man. It is for man's benefit. God's commandments were given to protect and promote man's happiness, not to restrict it. God wants the best for man. To ask God to revise his commandments would be to ask him to stop loving man....

In our universe, we live under God's law. In the physical realm, the planets move in split-second precision. There is no guesswork in the galaxies. We see in nature that everything is part of a plan which is harmonious, orderly,

and obedient. Could a God who made the physical universe be any less exacting in the higher spiritual and moral order? God loves us with an infinite love, but he cannot and will not approve of disorder. Consequently, he has laid down spiritual laws which, if obeyed, bring harmony and fulfillment, but, if disobeyed, bring discord and disorder.

(From *How to Be Born Again* by Billy Graham)

Use these questions to share more deeply with each other.

1. How does God's teaching demonstrate God's love for us?
2. What blessings have you enjoyed as a result of obeying God's Word?
3. How can you gain strength from God's Word to overcome temptation?