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THE WEeping, THE WINDOW, THE WAY:  
WILL SUFFERING MAKE YOU BITTER OR BETTER?

IN COMMUNITY

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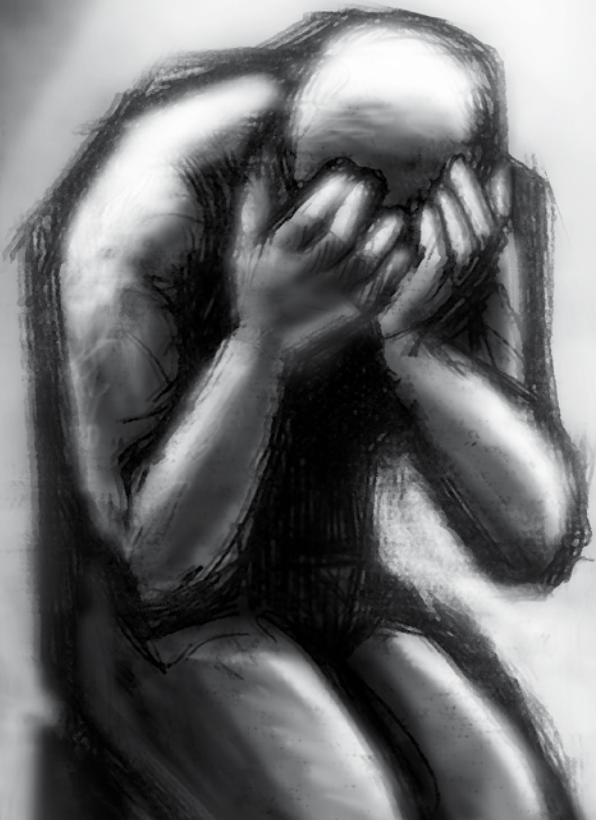
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JOHN O. DOZIER, JR.

THE WEEPING

THE WINDOW

THE WAY



WILL  
SUFFERING  
MAKE YOU  
BITTER OR  
BETTER?

IN COMMUNITY

*The Weeping, the Window, the Way: Will Suffering Make You Bitter or Better? In Community*  
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## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

### THE RIPPLES OF GOD'S REDEEMING GRACE EXTEND OUTWARD

Within moments of the time I fell to my knees next to my mortally wounded father lying in the snow on Christmas night 2002, God's redeeming love and truth began to "ripple out" from that place to transform one tragedy after another into a triumph of some kind! In both little and big ways, the ripples of God's redeeming persons, power, and redemptive process began to inexorably move out into the world. Some "ripples" observed and obvious, other unseen as yet except by God Himself.

The "ripples" began with my father himself, who, even though he lay dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, I believe was brought into a saving relationship with God Himself *that very Christmas night*—of all nights as we celebrate a major milestone in God's redemptive plan. God's mercy is wide and deep.

Various law enforcement personnel who gathered at the scene were reminded that night that life is short and unpredictable and "God so loves the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16). Specifically, the police officer who drove me to the hospital to be with my dad and other members of the family was reminded how life can be fleeting, conversations sometimes difficult, how we should not presume upon God's mercy for family members' salvation, and that he

would talk to his own parents that very evening! And the "ripples" continued in many directions...

Since that Christmas night, hundreds upon hundreds of conversations I have had with others about God's redeeming love transforming all forms of suffering began in the garden as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit worked in unity to transform death into life, darkness into light, and tears of sorrow into those of great joy!

Books sold, signing and discussion groups formed, hurting individuals counseled from principles of the book, a song written, a video produced, trials of many kinds transformed, and lives changed for time and entirety..."ripples extending out."

*The Weeping, the Window, the Way in Community* represents "the latest ripple" extending out to those who wish to include a most vital component of God's redemptive plan and process in their treatment of suffering: *community*.

This community group study of my book may be one of the most important "ripples": suffering, experienced and redeemed within and through a community, second to the power of the Holy Spirit and "being born again from above" (John 3:1–8), is the most powerful and effective force for promoting maturity and effectiveness in the church (Psalm 55:22; Romans 5:3–5; James 1:1–

2; Hebrews 5:8; Galatians 5; Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter; Revelations 21:4; many more).

Is it any wonder why the world, the flesh, and the devil have been so focused and effective at promoting a wholly individualistic, isolationist, and secretive culture? Our createdness in the Trinity has hard-wired us for community.

And, as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sovereignly ordain how each of us are impacted by the unavoidable trials of this broken world, “the mystery, plainness, and process of community” should be brought to bear in any and all situations!

Jeremy Bedenbaugh is a 2005 graduate of Covenant Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity Degree) and presently the Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Greentree Community Church in St Louis, Missouri, where he leads the Small (or “Community”) Group Ministry. Combined, Jeremy’s degree, position at Greentree Community Church, success in helping form and shape hundreds small groups, and passion for Christian community, makes him the perfect person to help create this community group study of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way*.

John Dozier is the author of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* and president of Feast of the Heart, LLC. Feast of the Heart exists to help bring about Christ-centered reformation, revival, and constructive revolution so that God will be glorified and people blessed.

The Feast of the Heart priorities are:

1. Publishing
2. The Training Table—weekly inspirational e-mail for running the good race.
3. Speaking Engagements
4. Spiritual Coaching

## 5. Fellowship: Feast of the Heart Adventure Retreats

Since the Feast of the Heart mission is based upon a Francis Schaeffer quote from *Death in the City*, and since the writing and fulfillment of my book is aimed at helping the Feast of the Heart mission and the Francis Schaeffer quote come to fruition, it bears repeating:

The church in our generation needs reformation, revival, and constructive revolution ...

At times men think of the two words reformation and revival as standing in contrast to one another; but this is a mistake. Both words are related to the word restore. The great moments of church history have come when these two restorations have simultaneously come into action so that the church has returned to a pure doctrine and the lives of Christians in the church have known the power of the Holy Spirit. There cannot be true revival unless there has been reformation; and reformation is not complete without revival. Such a combination of reformation and revival should be revolutionary in our day, revolutionary in our individual lives as Christians. May we be those who know the reality of both reformation and revival, so that this poor, dark world may have an exhibition of a portion of the church returned to both pure doctrine and the Spirit-filled life.

Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*

Christian suffering, well used and allowed to be properly redeemed by God, promotes *reformation*, *revival*, and *constructive revolution* within the individual heart first and culture-wide as well!

Bless you and thank you,  
John O. Dozier, Jr.

# PREFACE

## A DREADFUL CHRISTMAS

**T***he Weeping, the Window, the Way* was born on a dreadful Christmas night when John Dozier was called to his father's home. His father had just committed suicide and lay dying in the garden when John arrived upon the scene. Though filled with extreme tragedy, God provided a space in that moment for John to connect to both his earthly father and his heavenly Father. Despite the heartbreak, the Holy Spirit used that time to impress upon John God's desire and method for redeeming suffering in our lives, thereby shaping us into co-redeemers on mission with Him. John's journey involved *weeping* over his father, which opened a massive *window* into his own as well as God's heart, and finally led to the *way* forward, a life lived in devotion to God and the blessing of others. As you will see God's method of redeeming John's suffering is also His method of redeeming yours.

### WHY THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN

John wrote *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* not only to capture his story but to use his story to communicate God's wonderful protocol for redeeming our suffering. If there was something that John knew from the start, it was that Christmas night was not merely for him. Because we live in a culture of comfort that seeks to anesthetize our pain, this protocol was largely

unknown, and where it was known, it was largely unused. So the book takes the reader on a personal journey through his/her suffering into the heart of God and back out into a world that continues to desperately need this message.

If you are reading *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* and working through this study guide, chances are that you have encountered the pain and suffering of this broken world. *The Weeping, the Window, the Way*, along with this companion guide for community, were written to encourage, instruct, and minister to you during and after times of struggle and suffering in your life. At the heart of these writings is a God who has Himself felt the pain of His broken creation, a God who subjected Himself to pain, suffering, temptation, and ultimately the cross (Hebrews 4:15, Phil. 2:1–11). At the heart of this book is a God who longs to redeem your suffering, a God who promises to make all things new and to wipe away every tear from the eyes of His people (Rev. 21:1–5). Therefore, as you read the book and work through the study guide, remember to keep this God rather than your struggles at the forefront of your affections—the God who suffered and died for you, the God who can transform the worst disaster into the greatest redemption, the God who will restore everything lost and more. This book is an invitation, an invitation to come

and meet this God deeply and truly, to experience His mercy, compassion, grace, and renewal for the most desperate places in life.

## THE CHARACTER OF GOD

In a famous scene from C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, the children are told by Mr. And Mrs. Beaver that they will be going to meet Aslan, the great lion and Christ-figure. The children are, of course, frightened at the prospect of meeting a powerful lion and ask, "Is He safe." In a chuckle, Mr. Beaver responds, "Safe? Of course He isn't safe. But He's good." Like the children, if we are courageous enough to meet the real Jesus, we will discover that He is emphatically *not* safe—He will challenge us, uproot our idols, and transform us to His image through sometimes difficult and painful ways, but He is good. He can be trusted through every circumstance, through every situation, and through every moment of pain and weeping that He allows to help achieve His glory and our blessings.

As you read *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* and work through this journaling small group study guide, you will begin a personal journey where you will see that God has great purposes in your suffering. It is in the context and through the circumstances of your suffering that God is working to make you like His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28–29) and then to send you back into the world as a wounded healer, a comforter to the comfortless, a testimony to those without a witness, a companion to those in a free fall of confusion and despair. What you will find on this journey is that God has ordained a specific protocol that allows you to take your suffering and pain seriously, mourn over it desperately, and yet see God work through it powerfully. That protocol

is summarized simply and forcefully in the book's title and demonstrated again and again throughout the pages of Scripture. What you see in the Bible is that God uses the *weeping* of His people to open a *window* into their hearts, exposing their idolatry and sin, and then providing a *way* of reentering a broken world with more purpose and joy. Consider two primary examples (which you will encounter again later) as you take this important journey: David and Jesus. Psalm 51 is laid out below and broken down so that you can see the nature and depth of the protocol.

The Weeping—unavoidable yet "orchestrated" by God, resulting in a free fall in search of a foundation:

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

The Window—opened to reveal the reality of sin:

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

<sup>6</sup> Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

The Window—opened to reveal the reality of salvation:

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

The Way—moving back into the chaos of the world as a witness and co-redeemer:

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

<sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;

<sup>19</sup> then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Reflect on the same biblical pattern in the experience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Read Matthew 26:36–46, 52–54 along with Hebrews 5:7–9 and see if you can identify the pattern on your own (if you need help, see pages 271–72 of the book). If even our Lord Himself was not exempt from this heart-renovating protocol, you cannot afford to ignore it.

## WHY THIS JOURNALING AND STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS?

This study guide exists for the purpose of maximizing the spiritual benefits of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way*—and in particular our suffering. God’s answer to the book’s subtitle should be obvious, but this study helps pay it off, “Will suffering make you bitter or better?” “Community and betterness” go hand in hand, just as “isolation and bitterness” do as well.

What Scripture teaches is that there are three essential ingredients to our growth as a disciple: the Bible (truth), suffering (trial), and community (togetherness). *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* takes truth to our trials, but this companion study guide for small groups takes *truth* and *trial* into the redeeming influence of Christian *togetherness*. The combination of *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness* will produce an impact in your suffering far beyond what could be achieved outside the community of fellow believers. In fact, using the book with this guide in the context of community will offer the greatest opportunity for God to use your *weeping* to open a *window* in your heart and show you the *way* forward in the world, as an increasingly purposeful and powerful agent of Jesus’s redemptive plan. Devoid of community, *bitterness* is the only outcome to the unavoidable trials of life.



The power of Christian community or *togetherness* is a thread that runs through the whole of Scripture. Of course, this is not the place for a complete theology of biblical community, but a few key points are worth noting. As mentioned above, first and foremost, God has revealed Himself to us as a community that we call Trinity. Therefore, the very fabric of the universe is community-centered and such *togetherness* is intrinsic to our very existence—whether we acknowledge it and practice it or not. As people, made in God’s own image (Gen. 1:26–27), we are built for community and connection. We are built to work in harmony to glorify God and bless His people.

Second, God calls people to Himself as a community, not just as individuals. When God created humanity, He proclaimed that it was “not good for man to be alone.” As Dan Allender and Tremper Longman write in their book *Intimate Allies*,

God does not exclusively fill the human heart. He made mankind to need more than himself. The staggering humility of God to make something that was not to be fully satisfied with the Creator and the creation is incomprehensible.

Similarly, when God called Abraham, he did it to create an entire people and bless all the nations (Gen. 12:1–3), and Jesus repeats this pattern by calling twelve disciples, a clear reconstitution of the community of Israel. Furthermore, the admonitions of the New Testament usually address the community of believers rather than individuals within that community (Romans 12:1 for just one example—most of the time you see the word *you* in Paul’s letters, it is plural like *y’all*, addressing the entire community rather than an

individual). In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul argues that those who believe in Jesus are like parts joined together in one body, each one indispensable to the other. Thus, anything that leads to our isolation from community works against the purposes of God and is ultimately destructive to us.

Third, the Christian life can only be fully realized as we are called *together* as Christians. The very meaning of the Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) is the “called together ones.” In Scripture, God calls us to the Christian life with “one another” to serve one another (Gal. 5:13), not to provoke one another (Gal. 5:26), to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), to learn humility and patience by being with one another (Eph. 4:2), to speak the truth to one another (Eph. 4:25), to be kind to one another and address each other with singing (Eph. 4:32, 5:19), and to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), just to name a few examples. These examples all show that our suffering or our weeping cannot be fully redeemed outside the *togetherness* of Christian community.

Therefore, we need biblical *togetherness* in order to reflect the image of God; to grow in grace, maturity, and effectiveness; to hear and speak the truth about our sin; to learn godly virtue; and to maximize the spiritual growth that comes through suffering. The kind of community offered by this study will call you to be open, vulnerable, humble, and truth telling. To simply know the truth about ourselves, we need people we trust on the outside looking in with a willingness to speak the truth to us in love. When we are not willing to speak hard truths to one another with grace, we dishonor our calling and fail to truly love at a depth that produces change. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once aptly wrote that “there is no kindness more cruel than the kindness which consigns another person to

their sin.” The glory of the gospel is that we can admit our messiness and trust one another with the gory details of our lives because God’s grace is real. C.S. Lewis comments further on the power of *togetherness* to transform us:

God works on us in all sorts of ways. But above all, He works on us through each other. Men are mirrors, or “carriers” of Christ to other men... That is why the church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another, is so important. It is so easy to think that the church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, services... The church exists for no other purpose but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.

This study is personal, somewhat intensive, and the work will, at times, be difficult. In order to mature you and compel you to serve a fast-dying world as Jesus would, it will require you to think, to listen, to pray, to write, and to expose your heart and the sin therein. It will be difficult sledding at times, but the payoff for those who remain steadfast will be “one hundred fold” their upfront investment. This study requires great personal risk, but the reward is far greater still, for it is the reward of Christlikeness in an understanding community of faith and Christ-centered impact in a world more in need of Him than ever before. This study will cause you to die to yourself, but to the diligent, it will grant abundant life to you and all who you providentially influence. So when pride sets in, when fear takes hold, when laziness speaks loudly, remember the words of Jesus from John 12:24–25:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

If you will take the risk, God will supply the reward.

## A WORD ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

This study guide is designed to be used in an eight-lesson group study that uses John Dozier’s book *The Weeping, the Window, the Way*. At the beginning of each lesson, you will find that particular lesson’s objectives along with the pages in the book that correspond. Each lesson is divided into five days of personal study and one day of group engagement. Each daily lesson is broken into four distinct sessions intended to walk you through the material and help you apply it to your life. The four sections are:



1. **REACT.** In the *React* section, you will consider the plain truths presented and offer your initial, honest, simple reactions to the material in the book. The questions here should not only open your heart and mind to hear and apply the content of the book but also act as a catalyst to help others in the group get to know and love you more and more over time.



2. **REFORM.** In the *Reform* section, you will answer questions intended to begin the heart reform, which is the purpose of the book.

“Reformation” refers to the restoration of pure doctrine, true truth, God’s truth, which is the centerpiece of “heart reform.” These questions will explore content from the book as well as relevant Scripture passages.



3. **REVIVE.** In the *Revive* section, you will aim at full revival of the heart through real-life application of the truths gleaned in the previous two sections.

You will learn how the Holy Spirit convicts, confronts, encourages, and comforts you and others in your community group.



4. **RISK.** In the *Risk* section, you will be invited to risk your deeply held beliefs, expectations, and “oughts of life” as well as your loves and idols that

keep you from God by taking them to God in

prayer and to your small group for transparency, trust, and accountability. The time of prayer as well as the details of your pledges to be accountable is never generic but will always drive you to specifically apply the content of the book before the Lord and in community. Risk involves dependent and supernatural prayer and natural life change transformation. The “risk” is great and can seem daunting, but please remember that the reward that God will bring far outweighs any sense of loss.

Following the five days of personal study, you will find an outline for your group time, also containing four distinct sections:

- **Engage.** This section provides an opening and hopefully engaging discussion for the group to begin their time together.
- **Study.** The study portion sends you back to the most relevant and powerful questions from the daily study to discuss as a group.
- **Live it out.** This section offers a real-life, practical example of how to begin to live out these truths in the context of community.
- **Prayer.** Just as in the daily study, the prayer will never be generic but will focus specifically on the biblical passages and book content that drove the study during that particular week.

As you begin this important study, we join in prayer for you with the apostle Paul praying:

That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in

love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16–19

Please note some key verses and emphasis to help propel us into the study:

- strengthened with power ...
- through his Spirit ...
- in your inner being ...
- so that ...
- Christ ...
- may dwell in your hearts ...
- through faith ...

Important Note: Your group should meet prior to beginning the personal study time. This will be considered Group Meeting #1. Plan on meeting in a comfortable home where you can share time and food. Use this meeting to have everyone introduce themselves if they don't already know one another as well as decide upon logistics such as meeting time, place, and childcare if appropriate. As an ice-breaker, each person should tell the group about one person who has impacted his or her life and why. After a time of fellowship and introductions, pass out *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* as well as this study guide. Give the group five to ten minutes to look through the material and ask any questions. Finally, explain that each week will consist of five days of personal study as well as one day for the group to meet. Encourage each person to engage the study and come prepared to meet with the group on the agreed meeting day. End with prayer and the *expectation of God working in each life*.

# THE WEEPING, THE WINDOW, THE WAY IN COMMUNITY

## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE WEEPING, THE WINDOW, THE WAY

Objectives: In this week's lesson, you will:

1. Hear about John Dozier's personal tragedy that became the basis for the book
2. Explore your own story and how it has shaped you
3. Reflect on how God uses tragedy and suffering in your life
4. Understand the place of community is the best context for redeeming suffering

#### *Day 1—Suffering That Shapes*

Before you begin reading *The Weeping, the Window, the Way*, reflect on the following:



#### **React—Consider the Truth**

Read the Tim Keller quote below from page 13 in the book.

There are only two kinds of people in the world. Both are sufferers. There are the people who build their trust on things beside God so that when suffering comes it takes away the sources of their joy so they become sadder and sadder, and madder and madder, and worse. And then there are the people who suffer, but who seek to build their

trust on God, on the basis of his infinite suffering for us on the cross, so that God becomes the source of their joy. When suffering comes in their lives, it drives them into deeper joy. It drives them more into God. And so suffering makes them better and better and more like Jesus.

There are only two kinds of people in the world! They're both going to suffer. There's the kind of person that suffering makes worse, because the source of their joy is being taken away. And there's the kind of person who suffering makes better because the suffering is pushing them toward the one source of joy that is not subject to circumstances. Jesus Christ suffered not so that we might not suffer, but rather when we suffer, we could become more like Him!

\*Question 1—What struck you about the quote above? Is there something about Tim's being so black and white about suffering that's surprising or off-putting for you? Which kind of person do you consider yourself to be, or are you both kinds? Had you ever before considered that God could use your suffering as a powerful force for good in your life?


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## Reform—Change the Heart

 Question 2—Name some instances of suffering in your life. Are you in a season of trial right now? Describe how those seasons of life marked you, changed you, and/or taught you. You should feel comfortable to say, “I never gave it much thought.”

Question 3—How is your belief in or trust in God threatened, undermined, or challenged when you see or experience pain, tragedy, suffering, and/or evil?



## Revive—Drive It Home

 Read and memorize 2 Corinthians 12:9 below. Write down specific cases where you have seen this as a reality. Thank God for His past work and prepare to trust Him for what He will do in the future through your suffering.

But he [Jesus] 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.



## Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** Since you have read and memorized 2 Corinthians 12:9, turn it into a prayer back to God, asking that in Christ, God will show you His grace during times of weakness and suffering. Pray further that God will demonstrate His power and glory through your pain so that He becomes seen and known in the world.

## Day 2—Stories That Shape

Read from page 1 to the middle of page 21 of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* and answer the following questions



### React—Consider the Truth

\*Question 1—In his book *To Be Told*, Dan Allender states that God is not only the Authority in

our lives but the Author of our lives, namely that God works like a master Creator to craft a story that will reveal the glory of Jesus in all its details. Have you ever thought of your life as a story that is being written by God Himself? Why or why not? What parts of your story do you think have been most important in making you into the person you are today?



### Reform—Change the Heart

On pages 15–16, John Dozier says:

No one has a perfect childhood. All families are flawed in one way or another. “Hurting people hurt people” as the saying goes. It doesn’t do anyone any good to deny this. It only avoids or postpones the hope of healing or lasting happiness. The greatest challenge in facing the increasingly pervasive spiritual-

emotional wounds that are passed down from generation to generation is that we now have a tendency to *harden* and *hide* our hearts.

Question 2—Do you believe that what John says is true? Have you ever come to terms with your own imperfect childhood? How would you depict your parents/guardians? What flaws, sins, and distortions occurred in your family and home growing up? What blessings occurred?

Question 3—What were some of the marks John mentions regarding his parents and childhood home (pgs. 18–21)? Did you relate to his story in any way? Thinking again about your own early home life, would you describe it as a place of shame or sharing, disappointment or celebration, fear or security, secrets or openness, hiding or happiness, pain or joy, hardening or acceptance (chances are we all experienced some of each, but which were dominant?)?



## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

It is important to know and understand the important characters in your story if you are to grasp the fullness of what God wants to reveal in your heart. Take a few minutes to sketch out a brief family tree that includes generations as far as you can remember or have heard stories about. Be sure to include the emotional/spiritual traits that each person possesses. For instance, you might write beside Grandpa Jones, “Angry—screamed and yelled when authority was threatened” or beside your mother, “Idolized and adored me. I was her life.” Take note of any patterns or traits that occur in more than one generation. How do you see those patterns and traits either in or affecting your own life? Patterns of hope? Love? Despair? Addiction? Redemption?



## RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Because all humans are sinners, even the best mothers and fathers “forsake” their children in some ways. Today, pray for the Lord to reveal more about your family and more of Himself in your story. Use Psalm 27:10: “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.”

If you were parented by loving and godly parents, take time to praise God for this unique blessing.

### Day 3—*Knowing and Using Your Story*

Read from the middle of page 21 to the middle of page 28 and answer the following.



## REACT

### React—Consider the Truth

On page 22 John Dozier says,

What’s more, I write to assure readers that God intends to use *you* as a unique, powerful, and revitalizing force in a broken and desperate world.

\*Question 1—Do you believe that God cannot only allow and use suffering in your life but also your life of redeemed suffering for the good of others? Have you ever seen this happen? If you could dream, how do you envision the wounds and trials of your life being used to benefit others? Please be specific.



## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 2—What were some of the patterns created in John’s life? What is the storyline(s) of your own life? What is most threatening and/or freeing about knowing and telling your story? As one person has said (anon-



ymously), “Adversity introduces us to ourselves.” Therefore, take particular note of difficulties and disasters; of hopes and dreams that have been fulfilled, faded, or extinguished; and of risks that you took or were too afraid to take. Is this important for you to do? Why or why not?

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As central as we are to our own story, we are not the main character. God is the main character (and hero!) of your story and of every story. On pages 21–22, John quotes 2 Corinthians 1:3–5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, *so that* we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

\*Question 3—How is God’s character and action described here? Is that how *you* see God? How have you been comforted at a meaningful level during periods of affliction?

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Question 4—Continuing to look at the verses above (2 Cor. 1:3–5), how does Paul name the purpose of the comfort we receive from God (hint: it comes after the “so that” in v.4)? According to these verses, can our affliction and suffering be understood, borne, or alleviated apart from sharing it and processing it *in community*? As you anticipate your upcoming small group gathering, are you willing to openly share some of pieces of your story with the group? What fears might prohibit you? What joys or freedoms might excite you?

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### *Revive—Drive It Home*

Think about at least one person in your life that you can comfort “with the comfort with which you are comforted by God.” Write his/her name below along with specific ways you will be a “unique, powerful, and revitalizing force” in his or her life. Release it into your community group for prayer and support, and then go do it!

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Pray specifically for the person/people listed above in the *Revive* section, and ask God to reveal others around you who you can comfort with His comfort. Pray also that comforting one another with God's comfort will become the dynamic of your small group community.

#### Day 4—Growing from Your Story

Read from the middle of page 28 to the top of page 32.



### React—Consider the Truth

On page 29, John Dozier writes,

Trials of any kind offer us an array of benefits that, if shunned, condemn each one of us to a living hell.

Question 1—It sounds counterintuitive that suffering would offer us “benefits.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? When you reflect over some of the trials, wounds, difficulties, and suffering you have personally endured in your life, can you see any “benefit”? Or have you experienced the “living hell” to which John refers?



### Reform—Change the Heart

\*Question 2—The bottom of page 29 begins a list of twelve biblical benefits that come from suffering. Which one(s) have you seen occur in your own life? As you think about exploring these issues further, think about and list the top two or three benefits you are most excited about seeing God bring about in your life. Why? (It's perfectly okay to admit you haven't ever gone into such detail about these things.)

Question 3—For each benefit on pages 29–30, there are supporting Scriptures in parenthesis. Take a look at the two or three top benefits you listed above in question 2 and spend time studying and reflecting on those passages offered in the book. What surprised you in those verses? What did you learn about God? Did it increase your passion for the Lord to bestow those “benefits” in your life? How could “shunning” these benefits “condemn us to a living hell?” (Hint: see the top of page 31 and Deuteronomy 30:11–30.)

On page 30, John Dozier quotes 2 Corinthians 4:17–18:

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

\*Question 4—How does Paul compare and contrast our present suffering and our future in v. 17 above? (Hint: take special note of the adjectives.) How does Paul envision our present suffering working in us or “preparing” us? Have you ever pondered the sad truth that we can waste our suffering by avoiding, distracting, denying, numbing, escaping, and hiding? What does Paul say we lose in such a scenario?



#### **Revive—Drive It Home**

One way we avoid dealing with our hearts and with God Himself during suffering is by distraction and numbing. Often we do this through food, drink, entertainment, or any array of “noise” to drown out the pain or voice of God. Take a full day and commit to fasting from entertainment and technology (all the better to do this in the natural beauty of God’s creation if at all possible). Don’t watch TV, surf the net, use your phone, listen to your iPod, etc. Spend the

time instead reflecting on current or past trials and seeking to discern how God might be dealing with you and working in your life. Be sure to journal about and throughout your experience.



#### **Risk—Take It to God and Group**

On your fast day (see above section), spend some of your reflection time praying and planning ways to change the habits of the heart and life. Use 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 and the passages you identified as important in question 3 as a guide. Repent over “wasted suffering” in the past and ask God to redeem and use current and future suffering to bear new and amazing fruit in your life and the opportunities to use it in the lives of others too.

#### **Day 5—Review and Prepare for Small Group**

Read pages 32–34 and answer the following:



#### **React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—The stories of both John and his family situation reflect the strange truth that we can be wounded by “inflicting pleasure” and ruined by “what we love.” Has this been true in your own life? How has what some have called “man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions”

impaired you from engaging God and your heart as it relates to your own suffering?



### Reform—Change the Heart

**REFORM** Question 2—Think about the power of God’s Spirit working by and with His Word (Isaiah 55:11, 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Do you believe the promises of God, namely that He will transform you as you work through this John’s book, this study guide, the Word of God, and through your suffering?

\*Question 3—In his book *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, Larry Crabb defines a spiritual community as “a safe place to hit bottom.” What do you think of this definition? How important do you believe your small group community will be as you work through this book? Are you prepared to be open, vulnerable, and honest as you dive into spiritual community? How do you think the group would function if everyone truly perceived it as a “safe place to hit bottom?”



### Revive—Drive It Home

**REVIVE** Sketch out a brief timeline of your life in the space below. Place every major or memorable event on the timeline. Look for patterns, unresolved conflict, important relationships, and other things that have shaped or currently shape your life. Are you willing to share this timeline with the group when you meet?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** True biblical community can only develop as a work of the Spirit. Therefore, each person should pray to ask God to build a community of people, guided by the Spirit where it is safe to be genuine, and where one is encouraged to be bold. As you prepare for your first group meeting, you should also spend some time in open prayer, confessing to God any apprehension or fear you might have in being so personal in a group setting. Ask God to

give your courage and strength as you embark on this journey.

Record any “aha moments” from the week or things you want to share with the group:

## GROUP MEETING #2

This is the first time the group meets for study but the second meeting of the group in general (see Important Note at the bottom of the preface). If at all possible, build some time at the beginning of the group for fellowship and food. Make sure each person gets the opportunity to state at least one thing they hope to gain by being part of the group and the study.

### ENGAGE

Begin with a brief time of prayer to open your time together. Ask everyone to reflect generally on their time in study over the past week. Ask each participant to share either their family tree from *Revive, Day 2* (page 16) or their life timeline from *Revive, Day 5* (page 20).

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20).

### LIVE IT OUT

Ask the group to give each person one spiritual encouragement as it relates to how they see God moving or working in their lives (from what has been said in discussion).

### PRAYER

Use 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 and 4:17–18 as a basis for prayer. Pray also for the forming of real spiritual friendship within the group, especially that the group can, over time, become a “safe place to hit bottom” as well as feel open to spiritual accountability and direction over time.

### WEEK 2: LIFE CONFRONTED AT TERMINAL VELOCITY

Objectives: In this week’s lesson, you will:

1. Reflect on John’s story of his father’s suicide on Christmas night
2. Begin to grapple with why a good God allows suffering
3. Understand the foundation on which you are building your life
4. Think about your past and understand how to deal with past regret and guilt through the gospel (Rom. 8:1)
5. Understand the place of *community* is the best context for redeeming suffering

### ***Day 1—World Shaking***

Read from page 39 to the bottom of page 47 in *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* and answer the following:



## REACT

### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Describe your thoughts and feelings as you read deeper into the suicide of John's father. Did John's emotions and thoughts as he drove to his father's side bring to mind any of your own emotions in the midst of tragedy? Did you respond positively, negatively, or ambivalently to John's open, raw emotion as expressed in the story of Christmas night?

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## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 2—Have you ever experienced unexpected tragedy or loss? How about times of heightened trials and suffering? List such times below. What did it feel like? How did you react? What emotions surged and/or receded?

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On page 46–47, John describes the scene where he approaches his father's body.

With each successive cry, I felt myself plum-

meting deeper and deeper. I was falling ... and falling ... and falling. Downward I fell with an ever-increasing sense of panic, a sense my free fall might never stop. I rocked, fell, and wept. Nearly nauseous, I looked around me, desperate to find something solid, something on which to steady myself.

Question 3—Have you ever felt like you were simply in a free fall, that your world was being shaken, that the rug had been pulled from beneath you, similar to John's description above? What was that time like? How did you "land"?

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\*Question 4—Psalm 34:18 states: "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart; and saves such as have a contrite spirit." How does this verse affect your view of God? What does it say about His presence in your pain? Does God feel real or more abstract?

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## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Memorize Psalm 34:18, and then think about situations where your heart is currently

breaking, even if just slightly. Speak these words of truth over your pain. Please make some notes and be as specific as possible. If you have trouble, spend time thinking through family relationships, finances, personal dreams and disappointments, and losses to jump start your thinking.



### **Risk—Take It to God and Group**

Take the exercise you have just done in the *Revive* section and focus it into a prayer as well as a plan for the ways you hope to change. Ask the Lord to be near to you in any place of pain or sorrow. Ask the group to be there for you in concrete ways—list any needs below.

## **Day 2—Finding the Bottom**

Read from the bottom of page 47 through page 55 and answer the following:



### **React—Consider the Truth**

On page 48, John describes his feelings as he knelt over his dying father.

The darkness grew more real to me than I could ever have imagined. It was a darkness of my deepest fears and loneliness and added sadness for my dad flung into an entirely new realm of desperation. Nothing would come to my rescue! Then, just as I felt I would completely lose myself in despair, I squeezed out a small cry from the very center of my heart: “Lord Jesus, please help me in this. Please help, Lord. Please.”

\*Question 1—John’s prayer is neither articulate nor profound, yet God responded and answered that prayer in the midst of John’s free fall and desperation. Why do you think God would answer such a simple and desperate plea? Of what do you think you need more in order to enhance your prayer life: self-discipline, more worthiness, or a desperate poverty of spirit?



On page 50, John makes a controversial statement:

The Word who was there “in the beginning,” the Savior of the world, the God of those magnificent “beginnings,” held even Dad’s choice this Christmas night within his perfect and providential purpose. I knew, at the core of my being, yet without being able to explain it, that God’s plan was perfect and rooted in something solid, deep, and abiding.

\*Question 2—Did God know from the beginning that John’s dad would make this tragic choice? If so, why wouldn’t an all-loving, all-powerful God move to stop such an event? Is it possible that God’s plan is “perfect” even when we experience severe trial, difficulty, and suffering? What is your “typical” reaction to your own experiences of pain? How do you find peace in the answers God gives *and* the mysteries when He doesn’t seem to answer at all?



**Reform—Change the Heart**

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S.

Lewis writes:

Our deepest pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain: it is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Question 3—How do you react to this quote? What does it say about God and the way in which He speaks? Have you known God to shout to you in your pain? If this is true, how harmful is it when we ignore our pain or distract and numb ourselves in the midst of our pain? On what are we missing out?

On pages 48–49, John lists three *scriptures* that came immediately to mind in response to his desperate prayer for help:

In the beginning ... God said (Genesis 1:1)

In the beginning was the Word ... (John 1:1)

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread ... for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

\*Question 4—How did these verses speak to John in this moment? How did God use His Word to stop John’s free fall? Can you personally recount a time when God has been there so *infinitely* and yet so *intimately* for you? What makes it easy or difficult to accept God’s care of this kind?


On page 50–54, John demonstrates how the verses above provided a biblical pattern of *creation, Christ, covenant*, which ultimately became the unshakeable foundation on which he landed.

It was as though God had said, “John, dear one, remember I spoke it all in the beginning for my pleasure and your blessing; I sent my son to redeem it when it all went wrong. Surely, beloved son of mine, you can trust in the fact that I am not only aware of your deep hurts and needs, but I am right with you now and will never ever leave or forsake you in any way, as we move through this *together*.”

Question 5—How well would you say you know God? Can you think of times you may have substituted other foundations such as wealth, approval, relationships, or performance? Do you trust God with your pain? Do you understand that in Scripture God is speaking directly to you with this level of intimacy? What do you consider to be your bottom level, rock solid, unshakeable foundation? How does the biblical pattern of *creation...Christ...covenant* create an immovable foundation for Christians in general and for you in particular?

[illegible]

## Revive—Drive It Home

 Using your memory, an online search (you can access the ESV and NIV translations online), and/or a concordance, search the Scriptures for other passages that speak to the foundational pattern of *creation ... Christ ... covenant*. List them below or some favorites along with brief personal application.

[illegible]

## Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** Use Psalm 38 as a guide to your prayer. Especially use it to relate your relationship with the Jesus Christ to any current or past times of suffering. What part of your prayer and your application from above are you willing to share, plan, and process when you meet as a group?

[illegible]

### Day 3—*The Stain of True and False Guilt*

Read from page 56 through page 60 and answer the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

On page 56, John writes:

#### REACT

By now, in the pain of everything that had happened, the *weeping* had flung the *window* of my heart open wide. Through that window I could now see previously hidden parts of myself far more clearly than ever before, especially as I considered my relationship with my dad. Certainly in such a time feelings of false guilt would likely arise, and they did... Wave after wave of regret and guilt, both true and false, pounded down upon me.

Question 1—How does “weeping” open a “window” in your heart? What things does your pain have the power to reveal that would be impossible if there were no pain? What areas or aspects of your life do you hope to see into as you walk through this book, e.g. unknown hurts of childhood, unrelinquished controls I have on God, why I avoid certain people or things, etc.?

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\*Question 2—What is the distinction between “true and false” guilt? Why is understanding the difference a crucial aspect of what the Bible refers to as “wisdom” (James 1)? List times when you

have dealt with false guilt? What should our response to each be?

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#### REFORM

#### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 3—List some of the guilty feelings that John had as he dealt with his dad’s suicide.

Were they the result of true or false guilt? Why do you think it is difficult to perfectly distinguish between true and false guilt?

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Question 4—Review the list of motives that can keep us from speaking the truth in love on page 60. It’s likely that many of these will be extremely personal. Which of these describe your own motives as you deal with others in your family and other circles?

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**REVIVE****Revive—Drive It Home**

Take the list you made in question 4 above and place a journaling list beside it of important people in your life, e.g. mother, father, siblings, spouse, children, close friends, etc. Then draw lines from each person to the motives that might inhibit you from loving others truthfully to that particular person.

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**RISK****Risk—Take It to God and Group**

This is a very complicated area of our hearts (our core beliefs) and emotions (our known and unknown reactions, affections in response to our core beliefs). Give yourself some grace as you seek to work things out. It's good for the heart! Consider spending time in repentance over any true guilt that you have from succumbing to motives of fear that have kept you from speaking the truth in love to the loved ones in your life (as well as repenting for ways in which you have been unapproachable to others who need to speak the truth in love to you!). End by asking for the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of the fellowship in your community group to wisely follow Christ in these relationships. Record any ideas you wish to below.

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**Day 4—Overcoming Past Guilt**

Read from the top of page 61 to the bottom of page 65 and answer the following:

**REACT****React—Consider the Truth**

On the bottom of page 61,

John says:

As the Holy Spirit held me close to Himself, He helped me weep hot tears—tears of authentic repentance that He Himself had worked in my heart. . . . I owned what I knew and sought to see what I didn't know before the window was blown open. I had seen my sin for what it was.

Question 1—John wept tears of repentance as his sin was exposed. Is being unmasked in your sin a mercy or a terror or both? Why or why not? Do you believe there is currently sin in your life that simply has not yet been exposed? If true, what would that mean?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

#### REFORM

As John openly repented (see page 62–63) and asked God to forgive him, two powerful verses came from God flooding into his mind:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18)

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

\*Question 2—How does each verse speak to our guilt? What if Romans 1:18 were the end of the story? What is the blessing of having your sin exposed before God? If you thought of sin as a growing cancer inside you, would that analogy help you to understand how exposing it can be a mercy of life-and-death proportions? How does Romans 8:1 definitively deal with your guilt and with your past skeletons in the closet?

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Jack Miller's famous definition of the gospel is mentioned on the bottom of page 63:

You are more sinful than you could ever imagine; and yet you are more loved than you ever dared hope for!

Question 3—What is the *bad* news and the *good* news of that statement? How does the good

news increase in power and beauty as the bad news is more fully embraced?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

#### REVIVE

Take Romans 8:1, John 3:16, and Jack Miller's *gospel* definition above and put your *name*

personally into each verse, e.g. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for *John* in Christ." Then list any issues, sins, regrets, or *would-a, could-a, should-a's* beneath them and use them in the quote as well, e.g. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for *John's people pleasing* in Christ." Read them aloud several times, letting the truth wash over you. Consider how sharing these truths with your group might also be helpful. Record any ways below.

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

#### RISK

Now turn the *Revive* exercise into a prayer, *repenting* over

your offense before God and also *rejoicing* over the depth of His love for you in spite of your sin.

### Day 5—the Power of the Holy Spirit

Read from the bottom of page 65 to page 69 and answer the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

On page 66, John writes:

#### REACT

Seeing the two sides of my true nature through the window into my heart (being more sinful and yet more loved) was a view of reality that would have been impossible to fully accept if it weren't for two main facts: first, I was on the foundation of creation, Christ, and covenant promise; and second, being very close to the person of the Holy Spirit placed me in a sacred place. I felt a strong sense that I should take full advantage of this rare and rich time to be with the loving guide, counselor, and pointer to Jesus Christ: the Holy Spirit—to see my heart more and more as God sees it.

Question 1—Have you been able to see in a real, personal way the two sides of the gospel (that you are more sinful yet more loved) in your own life? How would seeing your heart and your life in this light bring you closer to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, a counselor devoted to showing you Jesus?

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On page 67, John says:

Time spent at the window blown open by life's many travails is a trial and a treasure. The treasure *far* exceeded the trial, but the trial had to occur for the power of catharsis to promote the kind of change offered as my heart was crushed and re-created by the Holy Spirit. This is, in fact, the "sanctified suffering" God desires.... Don't waste the *cutting* in the curse of suffering, by avoiding the power and process of the *cure* offered at the window.

\*Question 2—How can suffering possibly be a treasure? How do you think God uses trials to expose us, which will hurt, and to bless us, which will heal? Where have you seen this trial and treasure paradox in your own life? Where in your life do you need to believe and claim the promise that all trials allowed by God can be transformed into a treasure? How does the Holy Spirit work in these circumstances to grow and transform us? Consider ideas like "refining fire," "buried and resurrected," and "bittersweet."

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#### REFORM

#### Reform—Change the Heart

Take a moment to read and reflect on Psalm 46, written out for you below:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

He burns the chariots with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Question 3—Go back and circle the word *God* and any descriptors written by the psalmist. How is God described in this psalm? How does He use trials to minister to us and grow us in our suffering? How is our experience of Him enhanced when we run to Him in suffering rather than running from Him and community by avoiding suffering?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

Take a moment to ponder. Is growth in the Christian life really possible without *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness*—in other words the *Bible*, *suffering*, and *community*? Summarize in your own words how they work together. How do you think each of these elements will be used in this study for God's glory, your good, and the blessing of many others?

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Pray and plan now for the members in your small group as you prepare to meet together. Pray that God would guide you by His Holy Spirit into a true spiritual community and that your maturing process would be immense as God uses *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness* in your lives. Pray and plan also that God, through concrete desires, would give you the humility to ask your group to keep you accountable to the change that God is currently directing in your life through this study.

Record any “aha moments” from the week or  
things you want to share with the group:



## GROUP MEETING #3

**A**ny time of fellowship you can share prior to meeting will continue to build the group's internal dynamic, friendship, safety, and trust. Try to set aside about thirty minutes before the group meeting for the group to mingle, interact, and talk—this works best over food!

### ENGAGE

Each person in the group should share a time where he/she was in “free fall” during a period of difficulty, suffering, and/or trial. Relate any feeling of true and false guilt associated with that experience as well as how you saw God at work during or after that time in your life.

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages 23, 24, 25[2], 27, 29, 30).

### LIVE IT OUT

Take a 3-x-5 index card or some other small piece of paper, and have each person in the group write down sins and issues of the past for which they feel guilt, condemnation, or regret. Take about five minutes to do this, and then fold the cards in half. The group leader will read Romans 8:1 and Zephaniah 3:17 aloud to the group, letting the truth hit each of them personally. After

the verses are read, have the members tear their cards into tiny shreds and throw them to the floor, the trash, or some bowl provided in the center of the room. This is a demonstration that in Christ our sins have been forgiven, washed away, and we have been made sons and daughters of the King.

### PRAYER

Take prayer requests but only those related to the study this week. Then pray Zephaniah 3:17 for one another:

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

## WEEK 3: REDEEMED TO REDEEM AND FOUR MIRACULOUS MESSENGERS

Objectives: In this week's lesson, you will:

1. Reflect on God's intention for our pain/struggles/suffering
2. Study Ezekiel 11, Romans 8, and 2 Corinthians 1, 4 as well as other indicated passages
3. Understand and apply the “Four Miraculous Messengers” in a personal way: Messenger of Truth, Messenger of Grace,

Messenger of God's Supernatural Power,  
and Messenger of Prayer

4. Continue to grapple with why a good God allows suffering

### Day 1—*Redeemed to Redeem*

Read pages 70–83 and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—On pages 71–72, John discusses four verses that came to him as his time with

his father in the garden was ending and he realized that the chaos of the world would soon come crashing in on the sacred space and time God had created in the garden (Ezekiel 11:19, Romans 8:28, Romans 12:2, Job 19:25). In general, what did the verses communicate to John? To you?

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#### Reform—Change the Heart

On page 75, John, reflecting on Ezekiel 11:18–20, says:

In the garden that night, God reminded me that real change begins supernaturally, and in the heart, changing a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. I was not *saved* again but rather “saved from more and more worldliness” and *sanctified for service*.

\*Question 2—Have you experienced heart change like this? If so, in what ways? In an earlier study, we have heard how God uses *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness* to promote true spiritual change of heart. In what ways have those three things combined in partnership to produce change in your own life? How do you envision God using this study and your group to *produce radical change*, e.g. enhanced Bible knowledge, small group dynamics, more self-awareness, etc?

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\*Question 3—On page 77, John says, “When any heart breaks, there is a choice for change.” What does this mean, and do you agree? Read Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. How can you not only “not lose your heart” but also “receive a changed heart” in times of suffering, i.e. how does God work on the heart and life through suffering?

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Question 4—As John spoke to the police officer driving him to the hospital, God offered John an initial, small glimpse into the redemptive work He was already doing through this tragedy. What was it? Have you had similar experiences? What doubts do you have that God can actually do this?

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Name two or three specific ways God may be calling you to use your suffering to “redeem

[illegible]

Look at your response in the *Revive* section above, and spend

[illegible]

*Day 2—It's True!*

In chapter 4, John describes four miraculous messengers of God that came to him in Scripture and through his father's tragedy. For the next four days, you will study one of these messengers each day. Read pages 84–87 and work through the following:



**React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—Reread the story of John and Laurie on page 85. Why was this message a significant one?

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Question 2—What is “true truth?” Is the answer to that question merely a philosophical exercise, or does the way you personally answer it have specific implications in your life? Do you or others you know challenge the idea of “true truth”? Why is this such a touchy issue today, e.g. all truth is relative, your truth is your truth, you’re okay/I’m okay, etc?

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**Reform—Change the Heart**

\*Question 3—We typically think of “truth” as a concept, philosophy, or set of abstract principles to which we have to believe or conform. In Christianity, however, we have Jesus saying, “I am the truth” (John 14:6). In essence, truth is not an impersonal body of knowledge; truth is a person. In Jesus Christ, truth has become personal! How is this unique to all other religions, and why is it important for you?

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Question 4—In 1 Corinthians 13:6, Paul says, “Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.” In other words, true love is not only to believe in the truth but to revel in it, to pursue and enjoy it. How is it loving and truthful for you to reshape your life around God’s truth and to call others to do the same? How will you passionately pursue the truth in loving ways while together in small group this week? How can you love each other by rejoicing together in the truth?

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Question 5—After his father’s suicide, John was reminded of the true truth, that “It’s true!” an ever so brief yet utterly robust proclamation, both within the church and from his spiritual community. Why is it that others can often see our need to be conformed to God’s truth better than we can? Are you humble and ready to have others in your group lovingly point you toward the truth? Why or why not? Is real growth possible without a community of faith, an outside perspective?



### Revive—Drive It Home

Do you need to repent in any way for not pursuing or suppressing the truth of Scripture?

If so, write that down here. Also, ask yourself who among your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors need to hear you share the truth with them? What is keeping you from doing that? Are you loving them well by withholding the truth? A good way to start this conversation is to share experientially how God’s truth and love has buoyed you during periods of suffering. Practice with your community group.



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Use this excerpt of an old Puritan prayer to close and seal your time today. Consider how or if the prayer can help you to bring a further commitment to being vulnerable and growing in your group.

May the truth that is in Jesus eliminate in me all that is dark; establish in me all that is wavering; comfort in me all that is wretched; accomplish in me all that is of thy goodness; and glorify in me the name of Jesus. I pass through a veil of tears but bless Thee for the opening of glory at its end.

Make note of any important insights.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

### Day 3—Messenger of Miraculous Mercy

Read pages 88–92 and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—On page 88, John recounts how his friend reminded him of the depth of God’s mercy. How did you react to the possibility that God might have shown mercy and salvation to John’s dad in spite of his suicide? Do you believe God really could be that gracious and forgiving? If not, what is your hope of God’s work

in your life, especially during seasons of suffering, trial, or despair? If so, describe how God has revealed such supernatural and real energy toward you and/or others?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 2—James 2:13 says

“mercy triumphs over judgment.”

What limitations do you place on God’s mercy? In what ways has God’s mercy triumphed in your life? Is the unfettered mercy of God taught in Christianity different from other religions? In what areas of your life do you need to reflect God’s character by letting mercy triumph over your anger and judgmentalism?

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\* Question 3—In the midst of the most intense suffering of his life (the destruction of his home, his city, his people, and his way of life), Jeremiah penned Lamentations 3:22–24:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end; they are  
new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”

How is it possible for God to be merciful in suffering? After all, isn’t God simply allowing suffering to occur unmerciful? Recount one or two specific times in your life where you can see God’s mercy, presence, or compassion in times of intense pain. How does the truth of God’s mercy allow you to endure and not waste your suffering?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

The ultimate display of God’s mercy was the giving of His own Son to die on the cross for His enemies (Col. 1:21–22). In the most horrific example in history of unjust suffering, God’s mercy was on display, working redemptively to save His people. God mercifully chose not to exact His perfect right to punish mankind but rather placed His only Son in our place as the atoning sacrifice for sin. In what tough areas of your life do you need to reflect on the gospel and how God’s unfettered mercy might still be operating behind the scenes? In what specific ways are you committed to showing God’s mercy to others in your life? Or in what specific ways do you aspire to show this kind of mercy? Think of one person who you think doesn’t deserve mercy, write down your rationale, and find some small way to show them mercy.

**Day 4—Supernatural Power**

Read pages 93–96 and work through the following:

**Risk—Take It to God and Group**

Take Lamentations 3:22–24, memorize it and form it into a personal prayer to include repentance, thankfulness, and action. For example, when you pray “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,” add “even in the midst of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert example(s) from your personal life. Risk asking God to use His mercy to make you merciful. Or when you thank God that His mercies are new every morning, ask your mercy to be renewed daily for \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of person or challenging issue to whom you need to show mercy).

**React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—On pages 93–94, John tells two miraculous stories of God’s supernatural power. How did you respond to the stories as presented? Skepticism? Jaded? Amazed? Hopeful? Excited? What is your conception of God’s supernatural power, i.e. His ability to do anything that will glorify Himself and bless His people? Is God merely up in heaven somewhere watching, or is He intimately involved in sustaining His creation and your life?

**Reform—Change the Heart**

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:33–36

\*Question 2—Read Romans 11:33–36. Of what would you say God is capable? How likely is it that in any given situation God is at work supernaturally doing ten thousand things that we do not have the capacity to see or comprehend? How does it comfort you in suffering to know that God’s purposes are both deeply mysterious and yet decidedly good? In the last line, what is Paul’s response to the magnitude of God? What is yours, and how do you hope it impacts your life?

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Question 3—What are your general beliefs about the “supernatural”? Are they influenced by science, family, peer influence, culture, Scripture, or some combination of all? Compare and contrast the ideas of coincidence, fate, karma, chance, and luck with the biblical notion of God’s providence (look again at Romans 11:33–36).

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\*Question 4—Read the two Scriptures below and answer the question that follows:

Hebrews 1.3: [God] upholds the universe by the word of His power.

Matthew 10.29–31: Are not two sparrows

sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

How are the two passages similar and different? What perspectives on God’s sovereign control over all things does each offer? How does each speak to you differently as you lay suffering and pain over the top of these biblical truths?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

Write down one specific area where you need to trust God’s providence in your life. This answer can typically be revealed by contemplating what causes you severe stress, anxiety, and/or fear. Spend time picturing a powerful God upholding the entire universe every second by the “word of His power” while simultaneously holding the image of the Lord intimately caring for sparrows and counting the hairs on your head (review Psalm 139 and Matthew 6 in your Bible).

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Based on your answer in the *Revive* section, spend time now repenting of that area where your lack of trust in God's supernatural power and providence is evident. Offer up a thanksgiving for how trustworthy God is. Ask the Lord to reveal Himself as a powerful worker in the world and in your life. Make some notes, and take the risk to share this area of weakness with someone in your small group or with the group as a whole.

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### Day 5—Prayer and Trust

Read pages 97–104 and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—On page 98, John sheepishly admits his lack of faith and trust regarding his prayers before God. How would you describe your prayer life? Is prayer more like covering your bases, for use only in emergency, and hedging your bets, or is it the honest revelation of your heart before God? Why do some prayers seemingly go unanswered?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

On page 97, John quotes Romans 9–10, which shows us the nature of Paul's prayers for his non-Christian friends and fellow Jews.

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh ... Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

\*Question 2—Describe the tone, emotions, attitude, qualities, and characteristics of Paul's prayer. Can you think of a time when you have prayed with "sorrow," "unceasing anguish," and with the love that would rather see yourself accursed than another? How does the way Paul prays reveal both the priorities and passions of his heart? What does your prayer life reveal about your priorities, passion, and level of trust?

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**REVIVE**

## Revive and Risk (Combined Today)



**RISK**

Take the Lord's Prayer and divide it up into its six petitions as outlined below. Take time to write personal prayer requests under each petition that reflect each particular section. A general example will be in parenthesis below, but personalize this for you.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by your name" (Pray that God's name would be glorified in the way you do your job).

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"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Pray for Satan's kingdom to be destroyed and for mercy and truthfulness to characterize your life and your family. Pray for submission to God's will rather than His submission to your agenda).

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"Give us this day our daily bread" (Pray for daily dependence on God's provision).

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"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Repent of specific sins, especially the way you have treated those who have sinned against you).

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"Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil [one]" (Pray for recognition of sin, resistance of sin, recoiling at sin, and desire for godliness).

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Record any “aha moments” from the week or  
things you want to share with the group:

## GROUP MEETING #4

Any time of fellowship you can share prior to meeting will continue to build the group's internal dynamic, friendship, safety, and trust. Try to set aside about thirty minutes before the group meeting for the group to mingle, interact, and talk—this works best over food!

### ENGAGE

Read the following quote aloud together from Eugene Peterson about true spiritual community:

Americans are good at forming clubs and gathering crowds. But clubs and crowds, even when—especially when—they are religious clubs and crowds, are not communities. The formation of community is the intricate, patient, painful work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot buy or make community; we can only offer ourselves to become community.

Spend time as a group reflecting aloud about the quote above. How does real spiritual community form? What is each person's hope and dream for this particular small group? How can it become a reality?

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### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages 34[2], 36, 38, 40[2], 41).

### LIVE IT OUT

Have each group member look back over his/her *Revive* and *Risk* sections for the past week. Ask each member to share at least one of the things he/she committed to offer to the group. Discuss them as a group, and write down the ways in which the group will offer spiritual accountability where necessary.

### PRAYER

Take the prayer exercise from day five on the Lord's Prayer and use it as a group. Have someone volunteer to lead the prayer by calling out the first petition (Hallowed be your name), and then give silent space for others to pray as they are led either out loud or silently as it relates to the specific petition. So, in that category you would spend time praising God and seeking His honor in every aspect of life. Move through the other petitions in the same way, leaving time for anyone who wants to pray. Then close with conclusion of

the Lord's Prayer: "For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

## WEEK 4: GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Objectives: In this week's lesson, you will:

1. Learn how God created the human heart originally
2. Reflect on the biblical teaching regarding the human heart
3. Deal with your own heart and face the reality of sin
4. Understand that God exposes the sin in our hearts not to wound us but to heal us
5. Find rest and repentance in Christ

### Day 1—*The Beginning of the Heart*

Read pages 105 to the bottom of 113 and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—When you consider the culmination of God's creation of Adam and Eve and

His creation of you, what comes to mind? What do you think life was like for Adam and Eve in "paradise"? Try and imagine. How did they function in relation to (a) God, (b) one another, and (c) creation?



#### Reform—Change the Heart

Read the compilation of the creation verses from Genesis below (1:26–27, 2:7, 1:31):

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them ... the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature ... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

\*Question 2—What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Can you imagine what it would be like to have hearts unblemished by sin? In light of the goodness of the original creation, describe the painful reality of all that has now been lost by sin's entrance into the world (maybe your top five).

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## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

By creating a beautiful and perfect world and by creating a perfect man and woman with the capability of falling into sin, God did something very strange to our ears: He exposed Himself to the risk of pain. In other words, God intentionally built a world He knew would bring Him pain when Adam and Eve plunged themselves into the abyss of sin. In what situations have you loved or been deeply committed that it exposed you to the risk of heartbreak? Do those wounds make you afraid that moving really close to God and to others might expose you to the risk of pain and disappointment? How does it encourage and compel you to know that God does not ask you first to risk and come to Him; rather, He risks, exposes Himself, and comes to you in the person of Jesus Christ? How do you need to risk moving toward greater dependence on God?

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## RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Pray about specific areas where you need to “risk” deeper relationship with God. Pray that God would mold you more and more, especially through areas of pain, into His original image of beauty, holiness, and wonder. Try and be ready to express

what these complicated ideas and changes feel like to you or for your group. Record any reminders, requests, or notes below.

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### Day 2—*A Change of Heart*

Read from the bottom of page 113 to the end of 117 and work through the following:

Question 1—Christianity teaches that all the suffering, pain, decay, and evil that fills our world originates not in the character of God but in the rebellion of man. When you think of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, do you see your heart right there with them, or do you think you would have never done what they did? What makes it so hard or so easy to embrace the reality of sin’s impact on the world or on you? How does the Bible describe the state of the human heart (see page 115-116)?

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Read Genesis 3:1–7 in the shaded box below that describes the moment Adam and Eve first sinned:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God

actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

\*Question 2—In what specific ways were Adam and Eve tempted? How did Satan attack them? Satan tempted them in at least two ways: 1) By making a joke or a sneer of God’s command (*would God actually say ...* with the implication that surely God wouldn’t say something so arbitrary and uneducated) and 2) By attacking God’s goodness/character (*God doesn’t want your eyes to be opened. ...* with the implication that God doesn’t really have your best in mind). Rather than expelling the serpent from the sanctuary of God’s garden, Adam and Eve were overwhelmingly attracted to the idea that they could be God. How are we subject to the same attacks, especially when we are experiencing pain and suffering?

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Question 3—Read again the description of the human heart along with the Scripture references on the bottom of page 115. Do you see this as an accurate description of your own heart without Jesus and ways you can sin even *with* Jesus? Are you a sinner because you sin or do you sin because you are a sinner? What is the difference, why is it important, and why would Jesus care one way or another?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

Write down two or three situations in your world that are obviously broken and not the way they are supposed to be (i.e. don’t live up to the standard of the original creation that lives as an innate benchmark in every human heart, e.g. an aging parent who is afraid, weeds in your garden, a child filled with anxiety, poverty, frustration with your boss at work, etc.). Since God is at work redeeming every part of His creation and will one day bring it to pass, dream about the way God might fully restore those situations in His providence. Write down specific, concrete, and personal ways such restoration would change your own heart.

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Risk the cost of change by praying that God would already begin to change your heart and actions in the way(s) you described in the section above. Pray for the restoration of broken relationships, shattered institutions, and broken hearts, but pray even more for that brokenness to drive the change that God wants in your own heart. Be prepared to share with your group two to three things that you prayed for here.

### Day 3—*Flee from Idolatry*

Read from the top of page 118 to the middle of page 121 and work through the following:

Once we have removed God as the centerpiece of our heart's origin, duty, and desire, lesser gods (idols) of all sorts rush into the vacuum created by the void. Idols destroy the heart. "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14), "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Question 1—Reading the quote above from page 117, how would you define *idolatry*? How does the *Lord of the Rings* illustration from page 118 demonstrate the way that idols derive power? What are some of the "idols" of our modern culture? Remember one very insightful way to define "sin," as we will see on the next page, is "making a *good* thing that God made, the *ultimate* thing."

Question 2—Read the following Scripture verses and answer the question that follows:

2 Cor. 5:17: If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come.

John 3:3: Jesus answered him, "Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

How does the Bible describe the radical nature of conversion, i.e. of what is needed in order to redeem and renew the human heart? Why must it be so radical? Why not just new teaching or new life goals or new morality—why does it require me to become a "new creation" or to be "born again"? Have you personally experienced this?

\*Question 3—We usually see sins only in the external sense, meaning only recognize the "bad thing" or bad behavior we did, such as tell a lie. But idolatry means that another "god" is living in God's rightful place and we are serving it rather than God. For instance, if you tell a lie, you might simply see the lie as the sin, confess it, and move about your day. If you stop there, your heart will



not have changed. The question really is, What is the sin beneath the sin, or what idol/lesser god am I serving with my lie? One person might lie because he is a people pleaser and he believes the idol on the throne of his heart that tells him he gets his worth and significance from other people's approval. That god has to be fed so that if continuing to please others requires lying, that is what you do. Another person might lie because he loves money and the truth threatens the loss of that god. This person may cheat on his taxes because he believes that life will be better and he will be happier with more money. In that case, he is serving the god of money or earthly security rather than the Lord and "no man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). The thing that is most deceptive about this is that we can idolize good things like family, money, relationships, etc. As Tim Keller notes, idolatry is when we take a good thing and make it the *ultimate* thing, the thing we worship, the thing we cannot live without. How does this change your view of sin? Repentance?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

Think of two to four external sins you have committed in the past month. Write them down, and then spend some time tracing back from the external to the internal, to the sin beneath the sin. Idols are complicated and destructive; therefore,

it is important to spend all the time needed identifying and uprooting the idols that have taken root in your heart. This is akin to a farmer who wakes one day to discover his fields of corn have been overtaken by one-hundred-foot-tall oak trees—it will take some work and numerous seasons to be fruitful as a farmer again. Write down your findings.



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Use Psalm 51 and/or Psalm 32 (psalms of confession) to confess the idols above to God. This requires great faith and risk because when we offer our idols to God, we offer the things we love to be crushed and removed from the ultimate place in our heart. Talk to someone in your group about what you discovered in your heart and ask for prayer, encouragement, and accountability.

### Day 4—Finding Freedom

This section is intent on making a distinction about the heart and the emotions and focuses on guarding and understanding the heart.

Read from the middle of page 121 to the middle of page 125 and work through the following:



## REACT

### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—What do you think of when you hear the word *freedom*? Can you think about a time when you tried to seek some sort of freedom but ended up enslaved or trapped instead? Would you say that a relationship with Jesus brings freedom? If so, in what sense? Can you think of ways that people might misinterpret the freedom of Jesus as extremely limiting in some ways?



## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 2—Consider the Scriptures listed for you on page 123 (Ezek. 11:19, John 3:16, 2 Cor. 5:17, Rev. 21:5, and John 8:32). How would you describe Jesus's care for our hearts? How does Jesus bring freedom? Why do we have to face the brutal facts about what lives in our heart for Jesus to do this?

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Read Matthew 6:19–24 below and answer question 3.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is,

there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

\*Question 3—How does Jesus distinguish between the benefits of having Him as your God versus having an idol like the love of money as your god? What will your idols require of you and give you in return? Jesus? See also Matthew 11:28–30 to answer this question. How do we begin to uproot idols like this in our lives? To what does Jesus appeal to make this happen?

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## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Take the idols you listed in Day 3 (question 1), and now write out the "payoff" for each one—list what that idol will require of you to love and serve it and what reward it will give in return. What will it take to get there? For instance, Nelson Rockefeller, the richest man on earth at the time, was asked, "How much money is enough?" His famous response, "One more dollar." In other words, he had given his life to the

pursuit of money—he had spent himself to get it—and now that he had it, it still was not enough. Instead of freedom, his worship of money made him enslaved to needing more and more of it to be satisfied. Jesus is the opposite. Instead of requiring your blood, sweat, and toil to get Him, He gives His own blood, sweat, and toil to get you. How does this compel you to “flee idolatry” and worship Christ alone?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Today use Psalm 103 to pray, which catalogues and rejoices in the benefits of worshipping and following God rather than idols. Personalize the psalm and make it specific to the exercise in the *Revive* section above.

### Day 5—A Sufficient Answer

Read from the middle of page 125 to the end of page 132 and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Just as a surgeon must wound with his knife in order to heal, so the Holy Spirit must often wound us with the pain of our pride, idolatry, and suffering in order to bring about healing. This process is painful but

good. Are you willing to invite God to do heart surgery in the deepest parts of your life? Do you trust that Jesus will be sufficient when the idols are removed? Why or why not?

Read Romans 1:18–32 as well as the quote in the box from pages 126–27 in the book.

Verse 18 says: *My sin suppresses the truth of who God is. In pride, I demand the right to control my life in every way. At the end of the day, in the very heart of my heart, I hate God.* That truth was not easy to take, but it was the medicine for my heart for which I had prayed. That’s what Adam did. That is what I do. That’s what all of humankind does as a direct result of our sinful hearts. That’s the condition from which Christ came to redeem us.

\*Question 2—If the above quote is true, we must confess that education, political ideology, self-improvement, social engineering, and family values cannot save us. Only a new center, a new God—Jesus—can actually save us, satisfy us, and free us to live the way we were intended. When we see the true depth of our sin, how does that magnify the grace of God who sees all our idols, warts, and skeletons yet loves us deeply in spite of those things? How does this reality open your heart to God even in suffering?



### Revive—Drive It Home

Read the extended Peter Kreeft quote on page 128.

Write out some ways in which Jesus is sufficient even in the most broken of circumstances.

Record any “aha moments” from the week or things you want to share with the group:



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Turn the above notes on the sufficiency of Christ in your life into a prayer of adoration. Just spend time praising God rather than with confession or requests. Be sure to make some notes about what you could bring to the group in this exercise.

## GROUP MEETING #5

As the group arrives and grabs dessert or food (depending on how the group is organized and the time they meet), pair off with a non-spouse and ask each other the question, “What is the greatest place to visit on earth (that you have actually been) and why?” Follow-up questions encouraged! This will give you the opportunity to get to know one another more deeply.

### ENGAGE

As the group gathers formally, read the following quote aloud from C.S. Lewis about the nature of spiritual growth:

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The Christian life is different: harder and easier. Christ says, “Give me all. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself; my own will shall become yours.”  
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Spend time as a group reflecting aloud about the quote above. How can this small group pro-

vide the type of spiritual friendship and direction that will make this type of growth a reality?

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages: 45, 47, 48, 50, 51).

### LIVE IT OUT

Take time for each group member to offer one idol/false god discovered this week, and describe the process of identifying it and how he/she already sees God at work there. As idols are named, other group members should offer relevant Scripture passages to encourage the sharer. One example would be to offer Hebrews 13:5 for the idolatry of money/earthly security.

### PRAYER

As the group sits in a circle, and remembering what was just shared, have each person pray for the person to his or her right until everyone has been prayed for. If anyone wants to opt out of prayer, let the group know and assign another person to pray in their place.

## WEEK 5: RECONCILING AND RECOILING (CHAPTERS 6 AND 7)

Objectives: In this lesson, you will:

1. Study the process and purpose of sanctification
2. Reflect on how “our greatest breakdowns can become our greatest breakthroughs.”
3. Apply Hebrews 12 to the suffering and pain in your life
4. Understand that God exposes the sin in our hearts not to wound us but to heal us
5. Deal with the idol of comfort in the culture and in your life
6. Discuss the “normal Christian life” through passages like Romans 5:1–5, 1 Peter 1:3–7, 1 Peter 4:12–13, John 15:19, 1 Cor. 2:12–13
7. Discover the fears you have related to God’s work in your life, especially the pain of having God “tease the sin out of our hearts.”

### Day 1—*The Beginning of the Heart*

Read from page 133 to the bottom of page 142 and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Having read the story about Dr. Mac and Joe (pgs 133–136), what was your initial reaction? Are you more like Dr. Mac or more like Joe in your outlook on life? As Joe’s process of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* unfold (pgs. 135–36), how do you see that as the

paradigm or model of how God desires to use the suffering and pain in your life?

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On page 139, John writes:

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The new life we receive from him [God] represents not the end but the *beginning*. He invites us to continually glorify him and bless others, not merely *regardless* of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but rather in and through them (Psalm 126:6, Romans 8:17). Our greatest breakdowns are meant to be our greatest breakthroughs. Sanctification is not some sort of end to itself. It is not God’s remedy for the anxiety we feel because we live in tough times. It is not part of a self-help program. Rather, it is the means God has designed to magnify Christ both within our hearts and by its outworking in our lives.

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\*Question 2—How have you typically looked at salvation and sanctification? How does this God-centered approach strike you? What difference does it make in your suffering?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

Read Hebrews 12:9–13 in the shaded box below:

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

\*Question 3—According to this passage, how are we to consider suffering and pain in our lives? To what does the author liken God in His discipline? What is the result of such discipline? Can you think of past pain in your life that yielded the “peaceful fruit of righteousness”?

Question 4—Read the Scriptures listed for you on page 141–42 in the book. Can we refuse the design of sanctification? What are the motives for your refusals? What will we lose in the process?



### Revive—Drive It Home

Think about specific areas of trials, suffering, and brokenness in your life right now (relational, medical, grief, loss, death, illness, etc). The man-centered approach to sanctification says that the process is designed to make you feel better, to get back on track, when things go wrong. The God-centered approach says God intends to be glorified and bless others through every word, deed, difficulty, and circumstance of your life. By which approach are you living? How is that working? Where is God calling you to apply Hebrews 12 to your life?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Turn Hebrews 12 into a personal prayer for the pain and brokenness in your life. Are you ready to pray and ask God to radically do whatever it takes to make you like Jesus and to glorify His name? If so, pray

that way, and, if not, express those desires and difficulties to the Lord. In what one or two ways can the group support you in this?

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### *Day 2—Righting the Ship*

Read from the bottom of page 142 to the end of page 148 and work through the following:



#### **React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—Yesterday, you learned (or were reminded) that the process of sanctification is more about God’s agenda than your agenda, more about God’s glory than your glory. If that is true, does that frighten you or encourage you? How has God wed or prioritized His glory together with our enjoyment and satisfaction?

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#### **Reform—Change the Heart**

\* Question 2—Read the following Scriptures listed below for you:

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Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)

Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. (Psalm 119:36)

Do not let my heart incline to any evil. (Psalm 141:4)

What do these verses imply about both the state and the need of the human heart? How does this shape your prayers? How does God’s design and desire to use our/your suffering and pain bring this about naturally?

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Question 3—Read the Beatitudes, which are listed on page 144 and can be found in Matthew 5:1–12. The word *blessed* in Scripture means “happy.” If that is the case, how does this draw your heart (incline, unite) toward God? What is He promising that life with Him is like?

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## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Think particularly about your own life. Where is God creating weakness, trials, breaking down walls, etc. to show His strength? In what ways does your heart need to be inclined and united to the Lord and conformed to the description in the Beatitudes? Describe how God may be using suffering and pain to reshape your heart and refocus your purposes behind His mission?

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## RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Pray personally and individually through each of the Beatitudes. For example, “Father, please incline my heart toward poverty of spirit, i.e. explicit need (list specific areas where you need poverty of spirit like with your spouse, children, work), and help me to trust that the happy or blessed life is with You. Unite my heart to Jesus’s, who came to earth humbly and poor in spirit.” Continue in similar fashion through all the Beatitudes.

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### Day 3—*Battling Comfort*

Read from the beginning of page 149 to the top of page 158 and work through the following:



## REACT

### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—What comforts do you enjoy as a Westerner (meaning from the global West, North America and Western Europe) that most others in the world do not enjoy? Are these comforts good or bad? Is avoiding discomfort a biblical idea?

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## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Read carefully through the Scripture passages given to you on page 151. Then read the quote from page 152 below.

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God uses the weeping and the heartbreak we experience to protect us from the dangers of a culture that opposes the salvation he has begun in us. God uses our suffering to refine our hearts, to temper them so that we adopt the temperament of Jesus Himself, who “suffered not so that we would not suffer, but that we would become more like Him.”

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Question 2—Are the admonitions found in these passages countercultural (the charge to *rejoice* in suffering)? While many faiths pretend that suffering isn't so bad after all, Christianity embraces a full-orbed suffering in all its pain and all its loss. Do you find it encouraging to know that the Bible does not beat around the bush but faces the problem of evil and suffering head on? What do these passages suggest God's purpose is in our suffering?

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Page 152 contains a quote from John Calvin (below) and is followed by an extensive list of the dangers of our "culture of comfort." (pages 152-155) Read the quote and the list.

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Because we are so inclined to put our own comfort and advantage first and avoid adversity ... Our most merciful Father comforts us by this teaching: that he promotes our salvation (and sanctification) by inflicting the cross upon us.

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\*Question 3—Are there certain traits and characteristics of being a human being or Christian that can *only* be produced in the fires of adversity? If so, is it gracious for God to allow suffering in our world and in our lives? With which of the listed danger(s) do you most identify? Is comfort attainable, or is full comfort an illusion?

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### \*Revive—Drive It Home

John Stott once said,

I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the Cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? Do you see what this means? Yes, we don't know the reason God allows evil and suffering to continue, but we know what the reason isn't, what it can't be. It can't be that he doesn't love us! It can't be that he doesn't care. God so loved us and hates suffering that he was willing to come down and get involved in it.

Spend a few moments reflecting on the fact that unlike every other religion, Christianity has a God who does not avoid suffering but takes it most fully upon Himself and invites us to trust Him as One who has walked the path of suffering first and to the uttermost. How does this truth revive your own heart in the midst of your own brokenness?

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Take time right now to pray against distancing ourselves from God, and against bitterness or hardness that can arise in the human heart as a result of suffering. Instead focus your prayer time on adoration of Christ who did not remain in an ivory tower but came down to suffer with us and for us. Rejoice!

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### Day 4—The Cure

Read from the top of page 158 to the top of page 164 and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—On page 158, John recounts a long and excruciating experience where his mother had to tease burrs out of his hair—something that had to be done. He compares this to the necessity of God to “tease the sin out of my heart.” Do you find the analogy helpful? Why or why not? What are the dangers of resisting?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

Matthew 18:7–9 is quoted in the box below. Read it carefully and answer the question below.

Because we are so inclined to put our own comfort and advantage first and avoid adversity ... Our most merciful Father comforts us by this teaching: that he promotes our salvation (and sanctification) by inflicting the cross upon us.

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

\*Question 2—How seriously does Jesus take sin? Is it difficult or counterintuitive to recall Jesus in this role? How seriously do you take sin? If sin is this serious/dangerous, isn't it worth anything to be rid of it (Jesus says it is worth losing life and limb for—literally)?

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Question 3—Looking at the bullet-point list on pages 161–62, to which point(s) do you need

to give attention in your own life? Choose the two or three most important to you and spend time studying the Scripture references that go with it.



## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Think again on the protocol developed in this book—our *weeping* opens a *window* into our heart and God's and shows the *way* forward to which God is calling/shaping us. It's easy to hold back the tears or stop with the weeping and just rush back to normal or stop at the window, be thankful for God's presence, and never see the way forward. In what ways have you taken a shortcut on this process in the past? How are you planning to avoid the shortcut method from now on?



## RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

How is being in a safe, loving, and Bible-based community essential to the personal process of the weeping,

the window, and the way? In what ways would you be short-changing the process if you tried to do the whole thing individually and without your group?

### Day 5—Review

Read from the top of page 164 to the end of page 172.

Instead of the normal protocol, today will consist of scriptural reflection and review. Take ten to fifteen minutes to read back through your work in the previous four days. What stands out? What has God been teaching you? How do you need to apply the three aspects of *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness* to your life in order to become more like Christ and to be on mission for Christ?

Consider the following Scripture passages. Read them several times. What do they mean? How is God personally addressing you through His Word today? How is He calling you to take the comfort He has given to you and engage with a suffering world? Conclude with prayer.

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads 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 mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the  
house of the LORD forever.

## Psalm 23

<sup>9</sup> Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vine of Sibmah; I drench you with my tears, O Heshbon and Elealeh; for over your summer fruit and your harvest the shout has ceased.

<sup>10</sup> And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards no songs are sung, no cheers are raised; no treader treads out wine in the presses; I have put an end to the shouting.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab, and my inmost self for Kir-hareseth.

Isaiah 16:9–11

Jesus wept.

John 11:35

Comments:

Record any “aha moments” from the week or things you want to share with the group:

## GROUP MEETING #6

As the group arrives and grabs dessert or food (depending on how the group is organized and the time they meet), pair off with someone and ask each other the question (the question can be handed out on an index card or written on a board so all can see), “If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?” A second question would be, “If you were stuck on a remote island, would you rather have with you your favorite book, your favorite CD, or your favorite movie and why?” Follow-up questions encouraged! This will give you the opportunity to get to know one another more deeply.

### ENGAGE

As the group gathers formally, read the following quote aloud from Jean Vanier about the nature of true spiritual community.

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Community is a place of pain, of the death of ego. In community, we are sacrificing independence and the pseudo-security of being closed up. We can only live this pain if we are certain that for us being in community is our response to a call from God. If we do not have this certitude, then we won't be able to stay in community.  
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Spend time as a group reflecting aloud about the quote above. What words or ideas are most impactful? List at least three things. What does it mean for our group in particular? Are we willing to sacrifice our independence and security?

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### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages: 54, 55, 56, 58, 59).

### LIVE IT OUT

Take time for each person in the group to share a particular area of struggle or suffering he/she is dealing with at the present time. Discuss aloud what a common thread might be with which everyone in the group can identify. For instance, most of the members might be struggling with issues with their children or with the loss jobs or financial resources. As one way of moving out into the world with God's purpose, use that common strain to identify one work of mercy in which the

group can participate together. If the common thread was children, the group might adopt a child from *Compassion International* together.

## PRAYER

Take the prayer exercise from Day 2 (page 57, “Risk”) and make it a group exercise. Spend time praying through each Beatitude and asking God for the “blessed” life.

## WEEK 6: WEeping AND THE WORK OF GOD

Objectives: In this week’s lesson, you will:

1. Work through the reality of sin and its effect on us and our communities
2. Learn Jesus’s teaching about suffering/persecution, how to prepare for it, and how to suffer well in its midst
3. Think about how pain shapes your calling to minister and serve
4. Engage in the fruit of weeping over suffering
5. Needing and knowing Jesus more deeply
6. Growth in grace
7. Using our circumstances to help and comfort others
8. Purging sin from us, breaking of the hard heart
9. Discuss and study the true foundations of *Christ, covenant, and creation*

### Day 1—All Weeping

Read from pages 173–178 as an introduction to the third and final major section of the book. Then read from page 179–192 and work through the following:



## REACT

### React—Consider the Truth

\*Question 1—Page 179

recounts a story of a pastor who told his people after the 9/11 tragedy that God was just as surprised as they were. Do you believe that God is surprised when tragedy strikes? Read Psalm 139, Isaiah 48:3–5, and Matthew 10:29–31. Can anything surprise a sovereign God? Are we surprised when sin and suffering disturb our fragile peace? Should we be? How might being continually *surprised* by the brokenness of the world act as a *deterrent* to our being a help in the brokenness?



## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Read the following quote that is combined with 1 Peter 4:12 and 1 John 3:13

Christians are not surprised by suffering; we anticipate it. And as we grow in grace, we are more fully prepared to run toward it, not away from it.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:13)

Question 2—What is your typical response when suffering enters your life, evil enters your community, or people you know are revealed as blatant sinners? As you have grown in faith, have you noticed that you are more and more compelled to run, not walk, to the needs of others whose weeping has opened a window into their heart where you might be able to comfort, encourage, and help them see the way? How are you seeking to grow in this area?

On page 184, John says:

Weeping initiates the process God uses to transform our trials into triumph and our tears into the means by which our hearts are ultimately transfixed upon Jesus Christ ... Until we realize this and keep on reminding ourselves of it, God appears detached, indifferent to our pain. If we love God only for the ways he can help us advance our own agenda and enhance our own comfort, we miss what he wants to do both in and through us. If that is our objective, then achieving our own agenda has manifestly become our god. When our plans for life go south, we will find ourselves bewildered and then blame God as our faith falters.

\*Question 3—How do you respond to the quote above? Give serious consideration to your heart—Is Jesus the goal or a way to the real goal? Is Jesus the end or just the means to the real end you are seeking? What thing(s) or person do you love more than Jesus?

Read the quote below from page 186 combined with 2 Corinthians 1:3–4:

Weeping is the doorway to a form of ministry that is uniquely ordained by God for the offering of his comfort in the flesh—meaning you and me ... Our Redeemer-God intends that we walk through the doors the Holy Spirit opens, speaking truth, love, and peace to any hurting (weeping) heart.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Question 4—When you have the wisdom and fully embrace God's agenda for your suffering, how are you able to bless others in their suffering? Do you consider this optional as a call upon your life or as something so scary and yet so exciting you can't wait to be used by God this way? Are



you now less *surprised* by suffering and more *energized* to be a redeeming force within it?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

Take a look at the three bullet-pointed paragraphs that run from the bottom of page 187 to 188, and do a bit of self-evaluation. How would you rate yourself in each of the three areas of know, sow, and grow? How is the Lord challenging you to grow? Write down specific ways.

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

As you pray today, spend time repenting of any ways that you have seen or used Jesus as a means rather than as the end. Then turn 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 into a positive prayer that you will follow Jesus allowing your weeping to send you into the world so that you can comfort others who weep.

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## Day 2—Free Falls and Foundations

Read pages 193–199, and work through the following. You will notice that the book itself has several questions listed that help work through the material. We will select some of those as well as create new ones that foster the processing of this material within the context of community. Feel free to answer questions in the book that are left out of this guide if you so desire.



### React—Consider the Truth

\*Question 1—We have all heard certain platitudes when we have been in times of pain and emotional free fall: “Time heals all wounds,” “You still have so much to be thankful for,” “Whatever doesn’t kill you will make you stronger,” “Pain is just weakness leaving the body,” “Everything happens for a reason,” or, “Somehow it was for the best.” Consider each of these as well as any others you may have heard (or used yourself!). Are they helpful? Are they biblical? In what ways could those platitudes be construed as “healing people lightly (Jer. 6:14, 8:11)”?

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Question 2—How does it make you feel to be in the presence of someone else who is in free fall, in suffering, in pain, and/or weeping? Are you uncomfortable? Silent? Chatty? Nervous? Engaged? Searching for words? Why do you react the way you do? Have you grown over time in

your ability to be with, weep with, and engage those who are weeping, in a free fall?



### Reform—Change the Heart

**REFORM** Question 3—Record any experiences in your life where you were in an emotional, psychological, or spiritual free fall. Be as detailed and concrete as possible. What caused it? What eventually stopped the free fall, or are you still in free fall?



### Revive—Drive It Home

**REVIVE** In Romans 12:15, Paul commands us to “weep with those who weep.” The verse assumes that you will engage those in “free fall,” be with them, and weep with them as you encourage them toward a firm foundation. What work has to take place in your heart before you are not only able to but excited about opportunities to weep with those who weep?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** Spend some time in prayer and in writing reflecting on your own free falls. Were they papered over, or have they been dealt with in a redemptive manner? Pray that God would use your free falls (please be specific) to give you joy, perseverance, and courage in walking with others in their free falls.

Question 4—Read Genesis 1:1, John 1:1, and Deuteronomy 31:6. Do you recall how those verses provided a foundation for John’s free fall while in the garden with his father? How can they become your foundation?

**Day 3—Foundational Truth 1: Creation**

Read from the top of page 200 to the middle of page 209 and work through the following:

**React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—In the children’s version of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the second foundational truth taught is: Q: What else did God make? A: All things. Why is this such a pivotal truth? How is the foundation of creation so important in times of free fall?

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**Reform—Change the Heart**

Read Genesis 1:1–5 again, and then read and study the Scripture passages listed for you from the bottom of page 201 to the end of page 202. Next, consider the following quote from Tim Keller:

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If you came from nothing, and you end in nothing, at least have the intellectual integrity to admit that your life “in between two nothings” cannot possibly amount to anything.  
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\*Question 2—Do you believe these passages are true? How important is this to you? Are you building your life upon them? Do you believe this

is negotiable in light of more important issues? If God is the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of all things, how does that provide a foundation for you in your suffering? What encouragement can you take?

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Question 3—One of the most common cultural perceptions of “God” in our culture today is deistic, meaning that many folks believe that some type of powerful being created the known universe, created its governing laws, set it all in motion, and then stepped back to watch the show. Therefore, it is possible to believe in a Creator God who is not a Sustainer God. What do you believe? How do you believe God is involved in His creation? What sorts of difference does it make in our suffering?

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Read the Scripture passages that run from the bottom of page 205 to the end of page 207. Then read the quote in the shaded box below from page 205:

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Not only did God create a magnificent universe for us, beautiful beyond our wildest dreams, He also sustains that universe in an

even more magnificent fashion...He rules it, directing events in it for the good of His people. Because He does, we can trust Him, even when we weep in frustration, loss, pain, and suffering.

Question 4—Does the Bible leave open the possibility for a deistic God? When you combine the truth of God’s creating power with the truth of His intimate, sustaining care, how does that transform your suffering, your awe of God, your thankfulness, your humility, your stewardship of creation?



#### Revive—Drive It Home

You will encounter many people in our culture who do not believe in God at all (therefore reject Him as Creator) or who only believe in the deistic version of “God.” How will you answer people like this who God providentially places in your life? How do you need to prepare for those encounters (1 Peter 3:15)?



#### Risk—Take It to God and Group

When we are in free fall, we absolutely need the time, insight, encouragement, and love of others to love us just where we are and remind us of our true foundation. Community or *togetherness* is one of the essential components to our growth and full redemption in Christ. Are you closed to those relationships? Do you have them? Are you willing to commit to trust those in your group with your free falls? If not, why? What are you risking by trusting them? By not trusting them?

#### Day 4—Foundation 2: Christ

Read from the bottom of page 209 to the top of page 217 and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—What is your initial reaction to this section? Which parts really stand out to you? Describe who Jesus is to you in your own words. Take a moment to recall the story of how you came to this conclusion? What verses or passages about Jesus have been most instrumental in shaping these views? How did the passages presented in this section challenge or change your views?



### Reform—Change the Heart

Read John 1:1–5 in the box below, noting that John is calling Jesus the “Word.”

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Question 2—Why do you think John calls Jesus the “Word”? According to this passage, who is Jesus and what has He done? What does it mean to you personally that He came to earth and “in Him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness.” Please be specific.

Read the passages written out for you from the middle of page 212 to the top of page 213,

and consider the following famous C.S. Lewis quote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

\*Question 3—Why would it be better to call Jesus a liar or lunatic rather than a good moral teacher? How is Jesus uniquely qualified, powerful, merciful, and beautiful to complete the full work of salvation in your heart and life? How do we know He can be trusted in our suffering and free falls? Is Jesus more of a life insurance policy in your life (you believe you have it and that it will pay out upon death), or is He the magnificent Shepherd (John 10), the light of the world (John 1), the bread of life (John 6), and living water (John 4, 7)? Do you believe in a “market share” Jesus, a Jesus who gets only a certain percentage or “share” of your life, or a “hub Jesus,” the Jesus

who stands as the reigning Lord in the center of every part of your life? Please explain.

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### Revive—Drive It Home

In what ways do your heart, your words, your daily decisions, relationships, and your life “bear witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 1:15)? Can you give at least five examples? What areas of your life do you need to reevaluate because you are keeping them off limits to Jesus, e.g. my marriage, my children, my work, etc? How will this affect the way in which Jesus serves as your foundation in times of suffering?

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Think again about your answers and reflections on question three. What will you have to risk, or what will it cost you to serve Jesus as Lord rather than as lifeguard (insurance policy)? Spend time in repentance over ways you have relegated Jesus to

only a market share in your life instead of Him being the hub of your existence. Pray specifically through some of the verses in the section today. What ways will you share with your community group?

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### Day 5—*Foundation 3: Covenant*

Read from the top of page 217 to the end of page 225 and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—On page 217, John describes the Bible as a banquet laid out for our enjoyment. Is this how you see Scripture and the promises of God contained therein? How does your intake of the Bible compare with your intake of TV, movies, music, Internet, smart phone, and other media? Do you see any correlation between the things you take in and the person you become?

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\*Question 2—The word *covenant* is somewhat strange to us in our contemporary world, but a

covenant is basically a binding promise or commitment that is sealed or confirmed in blood and cannot be broken. When God makes a covenant or promise, it will stand no matter the assault, the fear, the sin, the rage, the suffering, or anything else that might come. Such commitment is foreign in our culture where commitments are broken at apparently no cost for convenience on a regular basis, but God is true and His promises cannot be broken. How does a covenant-making God offer comfort, security, and stability in the free falls of suffering and weeping? Consider the bullet points on pages 221–222.



### Reform—Change the Heart

Read Deuteronomy 31:3–6 in the box below and then answer the following questions:

The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for

it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Question 3—What does God promise in this passage to the Israelites? To you? What does it mean that God will never ever leave nor forsake you (Jesus gives us the same promise in Matthew 28:20)? How have you known the ministry and presence of God in times of suffering? Does it ever *feel* like God is absent when you are in free fall? Can you think of a real-world example where something is undeniably true despite *feelings* to the contrary?

Read Romans 8:32 in the box below and answer the question that follows:

He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him [Jesus], graciously give us all things?

\*Question 4—We often think that we know God is with us or that He loves us if he will only give us \_\_\_\_\_ or do for us \_\_\_\_\_. But this is not the confirmation of God's covenant promise to always love and never leave you—these are circumstances that can come or go. We need something more solid from God, a more secure foundation and guarantee of His promise. Anything else is conditional or arbitrary. To what length was God willing to go

to confirm the veracity of His covenant promise? How does the very giving of His own Son prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have the love, care, promise, and purpose of God? What does this mean or feel like in suffering?



### Revive and Risk (Combined Today)



Think about each person in your group. Have you given them permission to really speak into your life with both encouragement and challenge, friendship and direction, truth and

love, etc? Have they given you permission to do the same? Are you fostering the development of spiritual community by offering yourself vulnerably and openly? If not, commit to this biblical vision of community as a place of mutual vulnerability, friendship, care, and accountability. Take time now to pray for each person in your group by name and current life circumstance.

Record any “aha moments” from the week or things you want to share with the group:



## GROUP MEETING #7

As the group arrives and grabs dessert or food (depending on how the group is organized and the time they meet), pair off with another person and ask each other the question (the question can be handed out on an index card or written on a board so all can see), “If you had to describe yourself using only three words, what would they be?” Follow-up questions encouraged! This will give you the opportunity to get to know one another more deeply.

### ENGAGE

As the group gathers formally, each group member should take about five minutes to silently read the story of Charlie’s mom on pages 189–191.

Spend time as a group reflecting aloud about this painful story of free fall, foundations, and faith. How was the protocol of *weeping*, *window*, and *way* in full effect in this story? How do you see *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness* coming together to heal and produce fruit? Have at least one person share how the WWW protocol is operating in their life personally.

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages: 63, 64, 65, 67, 69, 70, 71).

### LIVE IT OUT

By asking your pastor or researching (or you may already personally know someone), find a missionary or missionary family who is living out the gospel in a different place that requires suffering and great discomfort to do so. Attain their address and have either the group write a letter or each family in the group write a letter to encourage them in their suffering and possible free falls. Be sure to include Scriptures in the letter(s).

### PRAYER

Give a pack of Post-it notes to each person in the group. Have each person share one or two ways he/she desires God to work in his/her heart as it relates to finding a firm foundation in the truths of creation, Christ, and covenant. Using your Post-it notes, write the one or two requests down on two different notes, and pass one note to the person on your left and one to the person on your right. By the end, each person should have two Post-it notes (one from each of the people beside you). Have the group pray immediately for the requests but also commit to keeping the notes where you will see them for some predetermined period of time to continue prayer for one another in the weeks that follow.

## WEEK 7: WINDOWS OF THE HEART

Objectives: In this week's lesson, you will:

1. Distinguish between how trials are used for *purification* but not *punishment*
2. Interact with and study the way in which God opens windows to His heart, your heart, and the heart of others through our weeping
3. Carefully consider what keeping the windows closed will cost in the long run
4. Deal with past shame, guilt, and regrets
5. Understand the work of the Holy Spirit and how He changes us and leads us by pointing us to the freedom that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ

### Day 1—All Windows

Read from pages 226–234 and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Having read the fictitious but biblically based “letter” on pages 227–230, give your initial reaction to the letter. What in the words of the Holy Spirit as imagined by John do you agree and disagree with? Is this how you see God addressing you? What windows in your life have you allowed your suffering to slam shut? In what areas of your past do you still find shame, guilt, and regret?

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#### Reform—Change the Heart

Read James 1:2–4 in the box below, and answer the question which follows:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

\*Question 2—What makes the teaching in this passage so fundamentally countercultural in our day? How can we have joy in the midst of weeping? What major losses are you risking by shutting the window(s)?

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On pages 231–32, John says,

Just imagine how deeply the Holy Spirit yearns to help you discern your biases, blind spots, denials, and the untruths you believe. Just imagine how much He wants to show you his own perspective on the “truths” you hold so dear, the ones you refuse to scrutinize yourself and protect from the scrutiny of others. Imagine how deep His desire is to open the window into your heart so that He can make the invisible visible as He talks to you about

His love for you, His purposes for your life!  
Do you imagine He intends to shame you?  
Far from it. He wants to begin in you a personal revival.

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\*Question 3—If this is God’s desire for us in our weeping, why do we shun it so vehemently, e.g. ignorance, arrogance, insolence, etc? Discuss specific ways in which you close the windows that are opened by your suffering? Do you numb or avoid the pain with alcohol, meds, or drugs? Do you distract yourself from the pain with TV and media? Do you *compartmentalize* and *relegate* the pain by pouring yourself into activity like work? Do you harden yourself against the pain by refusing to acknowledge or pay attention to it?

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### Revive—Drive It Home

**REVIVE** Take a few minutes to write your own version of the letter in this chapter. Use all the principles you have been learning and using from the book to develop the content. How would God speak to you, communicate to you? What desires does He have for you? To what or whom would He point you in your suffering? How would He comfort you, and how would He commission you?

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Continue to commit to the principles and practices of community by showing your letter to at least one person in your group. Ask them for feedback, especially as it relates to how biblical your concept of God and His purposes in your suffering is.

### Day 2—The Spirit’s Work

Read from page 235 to the middle of page 240, and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Do you believe that God punishes Christians? Is it possible that our weeping/suffering could be a sign of God’s displeasure with us? Does suffering come to punish, discipline, purify, or both? Does it matter?

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### Reform—Change the Heart

#### REFORM

\*Question 2—Do you see the Holy Spirit as “supernatural heart changer”? Explain. Have you seen Him change your own heart? How did the Holy Spirit abide with John at the window of time while in the garden with his dying father? How might you inviting the Spirit in to “search me and know me ... and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139.23–24)?

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Read the Scripture about the Holy Spirit in the box below and answer the question below:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go

away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 14–16, compiled)

Question 3—How is the Holy Spirit an awesome gift in our lives? How might the person of the Holy Spirit step into the moment of weeping and open a window of our hearts? What kind of renovation and healing does He intend? To what wrong places do you run to avoid the loving yet truthful surgical knife of the healing Spirit?

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#### REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Because we are prone to run to other places instead of scheduling elective surgery from the Spirit, commit to another day of fasting, not just from food but from entertainment, media, and distraction. Prepare to bring weeping, both past and present, before the Lord. Use the removal of distraction to be sure that you sit with the Holy Spirit at the window of your heart. Write down your reflections during and after the day.



#### RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Pray for the motivation and commitment to follow through on the *Revive* exercise above. Pray the compiled Scripture above from John 14–16, and personal-

ize the prayer by inserting your name wherever the pronoun “you” occurs.

### Day 3—Community

Read from the middle of page 240 to the top of page 244, and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

Question 1—Think about your small group with whom you are taking this journey. Do you consider them your spiritual community? In what three ways is it working well? How have they and others been pivotal in your sanctification, e.g. self-awareness, growth, witness, contentment, etc? Considering the three components of growth we have considered throughout of *truth*, *trial*, and *togetherness*, how do you believe God has intended the *togetherness* of community to function in each Christian’s life?



#### Reform—Change the Heart

Carefully consider John 17:20–23 in the box below:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you

have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

\*Question 2—Jesus prays this prayer just before He is crucified and resurrected, expressing His greatest desires for His disciples, whom He was leaving behind in a world of danger, persecution, and suffering. Knowing that context, why do you think Jesus prayed so fervently for Christians to be a unified community, living and sharing life together? What is at stake in the quality of our community (hint: verse 23)? Are you as committed to community as a vital part of your Christian walk? Can you show your commitment by being an advocate of community to others?

Question 3—On pages 240–241, John identifies three key areas in which our community can challenge us to grow. Identify each one, attach a supporting Scripture verse, and jot down one way you are committing to live this out.

1. Gospel F \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gospel F \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gospel F \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIVE****Revive—Drive It Home**

Get creative and draw a picture that captures how you see God working through community to help you see through and into the window of your own heart. Don't worry if your drawing skills leave something to be desired. Just try it. Stick symbols and simple symbols are just fine.

**RISK****Risk—Take It to God and Group**

Take John 17:20–23 and use it as a template to pray for your small group. Pray for unity that reflects Trinitarian unity (v. 21); pray that you would all function as a community of faith, that you would push each other toward the heart of God (v. 21), that you would remain committed to each other despite trials or conflict, and that the world would know Jesus through you (v. 23). This is a bold and risky prayer, but go for it!

**Day 4—What's on the Other Side of the Window?**

Read from the top of page 244 to the bottom of page 250, and work through today's exercises.

**REACT****React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—When you hear the claim that you are a sinner, what's your immediate reaction? What does that mean to you? Does it mean that you have done some bad things in life or that every part of you is broken and in rebellion against God? Looking at the bullet-pointed platitudes on page 244, do any of them resonate as familiar self-descriptions? What's the difference between them and your impressions of your own self-description?

**REFORM****Reform—Change the Heart**

Question 2—Read the brief story of Yehiel Dinur and Adholf Eichmann that begins on the bottom of page 248 and runs to page 249. Have you ever come to a place of such blistering self-awareness? Have you ever been able to truly see into the window of your heart so deeply? If not, why not? If so, what were the circumstances/outcomes?

Now read 1 John 1:9, 2:1b-2a and James 5:16 in the box below and answer the journaling question:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness ... My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

\*Question 4—What (or who!) is the only remedy for our sin? How can we consider confession and repentance as gracious? Is confession of sin a regular practice for you personally? Why do you think James commands us to confess our sins *to one another and pray for one another*? How does the community of togetherness reveal the sin in our lives as well as expose us to the grace of God? Are you sharing life in this way with your small group and others? Why or why not?

Romans 1:18 and 1 John 1:8, 10 are in the box below. Read them and answer the following:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and the truth is not in us.

\*Question 3—According to these verses, sin makes you suppress the truth and deceive even yourself. What is the danger of such self-deceit? Spend some time searching your heart right now. In what areas do you see pride, e.g. in what areas do you look down upon others? Judgmentalism and feelings of moral superiority? Lack of love for spouse, children, or neighbor? Anger? Unresolved guilt? Bitterness toward God? Lust? Greed? Jealousy? Deceit? Unforgiveness?



## REVIVE

### Revive—Drive It Home

Take out a daily newspaper or go online to your favorite source for news around the world. Spend time perusing the leading stories and noting the brokenness and sin in the world. Now take time to say to yourself that each of the atrocities committed and perpetrated in those stories could have been done by a heart like yours. (Your feeling of discomfort with this exercise is probably directly correlated to your willingness to suppress the truth or self-deceive about your own heart; see again Romans 1:18, 1 John 1:8, 10.) Once you have done this, spend time reflecting on the overwhelming goodness and grace of God who saves a sinner like you!

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## RISK

### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Use your prayer time to pray through the weeping, wailing, and way protocol and make it personal to you. The protocol is clearly displayed in Psalm 51 (see pages 245–46 in the book for how the protocol is laid out). The psalm is printed in sections below:

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

<sup>6</sup> Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I



would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

<sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;

<sup>19</sup> then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Record and initial thoughts that touched your heart while reading:

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### *Day 5—Dealing with Idols*

Read from the bottom of page 250 to the end of page 262, and work through the following:



#### **React—Consider the Truth**

Question 1—Which questions on pages 258–61 were meaningful to you? Imagine a window of your heart being blown open by an extreme trial in your life. Explain in your own words what it might be like to sit at the window of your heart with the Holy Spirit. What might you see, hear, smell, and feel? Do you think sudden loss of some sort can expose the depth and rootedness of your idolatry? How so? How can community or counseling help here?



#### **Reform—Change the Heart**

On page 251, John helpfully defines and explains idolatry this way:

“Idol work” centers on evicting the false gods from our hearts and replacing the lies that enticed us to invite those idols into a position of dominance in the first place. St Augustine described this as “making good things the only thing.” This tendency in human hearts points to the fact that Satan has no creative power of his own. As C.S. Lewis often pointed out, Satan has never come up with a new and original evil. Instead, he twists the things God has made good, tempting us to worship the creation instead of the Creator. Sexuality is good. Twisted by the evil one, it becomes pornography. Work is good. Twisted by the evil one, it becomes workaholism. Fitness and sports are good. Twisted by Satan, they become compulsive addictions. What is good becomes bad.

\*Question 2—How would you distinguish between your conception of sin and the above conception of idolatry? What good things are you twisting into ultimate things? What good things have central importance, preference, and priority in your life? How do you keep a check on good things becoming ultimate things?

Read Romans 8:1–4 in the box below, and answer the following question:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Question 3—The concept of *idolatry* truly broadens the shape, character, and definition of sin. It goes from being a few laws broken to other gods worshipped. This is important because our concept of sin will define our concept of the Savior. If we believe our sin is “messing up a few times” or simply being as bad as the worst person we can imagine, then we will seek salvation in moral discipline and/or asceticism. If we believe that the root of sin is in institutional structures and culture, then we will seek salvation in government and social engineering, etc. But if we see sin as fundamentally a problem of who or what our hearts love, then the only Savior is Jesus. He is the only One who can truly be, as Thomas Chalmers once noted, “The expulsive power of a new affection.” In other words, only love for Him can expel love for the lesser gods; only seeing how wonderful, beautiful, majestic, tender, and holy He is can take away our worship of gods that hold no real power. Continue to consider your own idolatry by reading the four bulleted questions on page 252? Which one(s) resonate? How are you trying to “be God” in everyday life?

Question 4—How has Jesus forgiven us? What does it mean that *you* have “no condemnation”? As you begin to understand the true depth of your sin/idolatry, how much sweeter does the other “extreme of the gospel,” God’s mercy, become? Looking at the list on page 257, do those things characterize you? Do they characterize who you want to be? Are you willing to uproot the idols in your heart to become that person? How can your community group help?



### Revive—Drive It Home

Write down one or two of the idols you have discovered in this process. Perhaps you can trace the origins of the idols. How and why do those

idols become very apparent in times of trial and crisis? How might you commit to turn to Jesus instead of those idols as new trials and suffering inevitably come?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Hopefully it is clear that idols are complex and mostly invisible yet powerfully influential things in our lives. Often idolatry is exposed through the *trials* of our lives, and these idols must be attacked head on with the *truth* of God's Word. But it is equally important that we meet the power of idolatry with the *togetherness* of God's people. Keeping our struggles with idolatry to ourselves is self-sufficiency, self-destructive, and an idolatry all to itself! Therefore, commit to confessing your idols to someone in your group (James 5:16) this week and asking for follow-up and accountability. Make note of any initial thoughts below:

Record any "aha moments" from the week or things you want to share with the group:

## GROUP MEETING #8

As the group arrives and grabs refreshment, dessert, or food (depending on how the group is organized and the time they meet), encourage everyone to simply spend time engaging in profitable, “how’s your week *really* been” conversation. This will give you the opportunity to get to know one another more deeply.

### ENGAGE

Use question 2 from Day 4 and the story about Yehiel Dinur and Adolf Eichmann from pages 248–49 as a point for opening discussion. Have the group members share their answers as well as other thoughts they may have.

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages: 74, 75, 76, 77, 79[2], 81).

### LIVE IT OUT

Pair off in groups of two to four (groups within the group—same sex recommended to limit awkwardness in sharing intimate details). Take your Day 5 *Risk* section and confess to one another one or more idols you have discovered (James 5:16). Talk about strategies to break the idolatry by the “expulsive power of a new affection.” Have each person put the gospel in their own personal

words (the template of “more sinful than I ever imagined and more loved than I ever hoped” is a good place to begin). Record any notes from the conversation below.

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### PRAYER

Stay in your groups of two to four, and pray for the power of the Spirit to break the roots of idolatry in one another’s hearts. Pray specifically in terms of the protocol of weeping, window, and way that you have been learning in the book. Ask that God would use the weeping in one another’s lives to expose and open windows to identify idols and bring the healing that comes from the grace of Jesus Christ. Pray deep gospel texts like Romans 8:1–4, Zephaniah 3:17, and Matthew 11:28–30 over each person.

## WEEK 8: FINDING YOUR WAY FORWARD

Objectives: In this week's lesson, you will:

1. Encounter the dangers of materialism
2. Study and model Paul's prayers of using suffering for His kingdom (Ephesians 3, 1 Thessalonians 1)
3. Study other biblical examples of God's redemptive power (King David, exiles, Jesus)
4. Summarize what they have experienced thus far
5. Work through the four principles for reentry after suffering:
6. Mark the Change of Heart—less stone, more flesh
7. Moan the Purpose of the Spirit—less me, more Christ
8. Marvel the Mercy of God—less whining, more worship
9. Move the Mountain with Faith—less ruminating, more redeeming
10. Discover relevant ways you can reengage and become co-redeemers

### Day 1—All Ways

Read pages 263–72, and work through the following:



#### React—Consider the Truth

On page 263, you find a quote from Jonathan Edwards followed by another from George

Whitefield. Reread those in the box below and reflect on the question that follows:

Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, and what good I have got by them.

A true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ.

Question 1—What is your initial reaction to the quotes above? What parts ring true? What parts leave you wondering? Do you believe that God has great purposes to accomplish in your life and perhaps in the lives of people around you through affliction? How has this study changed your initial beliefs about God? About yourself? About suffering? Anything else?

On page 264, John says:

It seems unbelievable, but despite what God has done for us in Jesus, our hearts easily forget these truths. Our hearts forget that all life, both temporal and eternal, centers in Christ Jesus. If we're completely honest with each other, we know how readily other realities push the true truth aside to take their place in the forefront of our daily lives. In fact, one of the most grievous implications of sin is the

*forgetfulness* that is so often its hallmark! This forgetfulness, in turn, leads us in one of two directions: humanism or materialism.

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\*Question 2—Look over the qualities and characteristics of humanism and materialism on pages 264–65. Which one of those two deadly deceptions do you tend to embrace most? How does the protocol of the weeping, window, and way break the power of both deceptive philosophies?



### Reform—Change the Heart

**REFORM** Question 3—On page 266, John describes the way the Holy Spirit “prepares each window opened by weeping for the express purpose of working in our hearts a fresh understanding of the way of the cross.” Do you believe with all your heart that the Spirit does such work? Do you see a need for it to happen not just seasonally or as a result of some heart-shattering tragedy but *daily*? What would such work look like practically in your life (hint: see page 267)?

\*Question 4—Do your prayer requests typically reflect the biblical protocol of *weeping, window, and way*, or do you pray only to alleviate and avoid suffering? Consider the prayers from Ephesians 3 and 1 Thessalonians 1 quoted on page 269. How can you begin to conform your prayers to the biblical model for trusting God to use *conflict* to *conform* you?



### Revive—Drive It Home

**REVIVE** Read over the biblical examples offered on pages 270–72. Take time to write out a few personal examples of your own suffering. Where are you in the process of this protocol? Which places are you cutting short by not moving from the weeping to the window or from the window to the way? How does it change your heart and motivation to know that even Jesus walked this path before you (Hebrews 5:7–9)?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** Look over any lists of prayer requests that you keep or that you receive from your church or another ministry. Evaluate those requests against the biblical protocol of the weeping, window, and way. Then pray for your own pain, suffering, and brokenness

in terms of the biblical models/WWW protocol. Record any note, highlights below.

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to following the biblical protocol of the weeping, window, and way all the way through. Record anything you want to share below.

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## ***Day 2—Mark the Change of Heart***

On each of the next four days, you will study one of the four principles for reentry into a broken world as outlined from page 284–309.

Read from page 273 to the bottom of page 291, and work through the following:



### **React—Consider the Truth**

On page 281, John states:

God alone can change your heart, using life's circumstances and His redemptive plan, in connection with His Word to bring about the repentance, faith, attitudes, and actions that will not go unnoticed. But he will not force you to move into the world's calamity, chaos, and change with renewed urgency. You can choose to waste your weeping and debase the suffering of your Savior by focusing it exclusively on yourself ... Or you can choose to let the transformation God has worked in your softened heart to bear abundant fruit in you life. What do you want, Christian?

Question 1—Seeing the choice for your suffering laid out in such stark terms, which direction will you choose? Commit yourself again now



### **Reform—Change the Heart**

Ezekiel 11:17–21 is quoted again for you below. Reread the passage and answer the following:

Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord GOD.

\*Question 2—What glorious realities do you see in this passage? Mercy? Suffering? New heart? Warning? Are they a part of your life? Describe

the process you see of God declaring His merciful intentions, using suffering to remove their idolatry, giving them a new heart and purpose, and warning them against ignoring this powerful moment of redemption in their lives. Describe in your own words how this applies to you.



### Revive—Drive It Home

Use the long line below as a time line of your life. Mark significant events of suffering, brokenness, and/or pain on the line. Jot to the side of each event/circumstance how you saw God change your heart from stone to flesh? Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary for space. Do you long for more of such change? What does this process tell you about God? Yourself? Trials of any sort?

Birth Present Day

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### Risk—Take It to God and Group

As you have marked such changes of your heart, when have you talked about this change with someone else? Why might a private versus a public affirmation of a change of heart be important? Will you commit to sharing at least one change with someone in your group? Do you now see how doing so is an integral part of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ?

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### Day 3—*Moan the Purpose of the Spirit*

Read from the bottom of page 291 to the middle of page 295.



### React—Consider the Truth

On page 292, John says:

Nothing can touch the born-again believer except that which God intends to use for his own glory, for our good, and for the good of those whose lives we might influence!

Question 1—This is a broad and sweeping statement. When you read it, do you respond in cynicism, unbelief, joy, etc? If such a statement were really true, how would it transform your



attitude about all of life and perhaps the lives of those around you?



### Reform—Change the Heart

Reread Romans 8:28–29, and answer the following:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

\*Question 2—Have you ever heard this verse simply quoted as a benign platitude in a time of tragedy or suffering? What is/was your response? This verse does not claim that your suffering or that evil itself is good but that God is *using* even that which has invaded and ruined His good creation to bring about His glory and your good. How can this promise minister to you in times of weeping? What is the specific result that God promises?

\*Question 3—This verse could still seem like a pious platitude were it not for the undeniable truth that follows in verse 32: “He [God] who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” What is the security and unshakeable guarantee that God’s love, mercy, grace, and good purposes are trained on us like a laser beam to conform us to Christlikeness?



### Revive—Drive It Home

To make the point of the Spirit’s purpose more vivid, fill in the blanks below with your own experiences of suffering. Feel free to make up more of your own:

God is right now using

to make me more like Jesus.

God is right now using

to teach me more of His character and to demonstrate the tenderness of His heart toward me in suffering.

God is right now using

to open and expose a window in my heart.

Through this weeping, I am seeing

God is right now using

to lead me forward and show me the way to  
minister to

God is right now using

to glorify Himself in the world.

God is right now using

to make me more God-aware, self-aware, or  
story-aware.



## Risk—Take It to God and Group

**RISK** Use the exercise you just did in the *Revive* section and make it a prayer, both to mark the change of heart in suffering (Ezek. 11:19) and to moan the Spirit's purpose in your life (Romans 8:18–30). If helpful, use the space below.

*Day 4—Marvel the Mercy of God*

Read from the middle of page 295 to the middle of page 302, and work through the following:



## React—Consider the Truth

On page 297, John quotes a common thought line that runs through a murmuring heart:

God is not listening to my prayers or taking my agenda into account! I only want what I deserve! I can't believe this, that, or the other thing is happening to me while heaven remains silent and my prayers bounce off the ceiling of my bedroom. Why can't I get through to Him? Why aren't my needs being met for once?

Question 1—How does a murmuring or complaining spirit stifle the force of God’s mercy in your life? Can you think of examples in Scripture where such complaining is explicitly condemned (see Exodus 17 for just one example)? What might be the “sin beneath this sin”? How does the alternative of “sanctified suffering” offer a better and more transforming path than bitter complaint?



## REFORM

### Reform—Change the Heart

Question 2—After tragedy, trial, suffering, and weeping, is it your goal to merely “return to normal”? Is this a biblical goal? How would remembering your suffering in the context of God’s redemptive purposes to change you and show you the way forward bring about a different and better life after suffering? For you? For God? For people who see you as an example?

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Romans 12:1–3, 9–20 are reprinted for you below. Reread the verses and answer the following questions:

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

<sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

<sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

<sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Question 3—How is mercy (v. 1) the foundation of all real transformation and growth in Christlikeness? Is it possible or advisable to find and see the way forward without marveling at God’s mercy in your life? How can you do that in times of suffering? How is evil and suffering

most likely to overcome you? What gives you the power to overcome evil with good (v. 21)?



### Revive—Drive It Home

List out a few of the areas of your life that are characterized by complaining and murmuring. Are some of these areas “severe mercies” where God is opening a window in your heart to reveal an idol that needs to be seen, acknowledged, and destroyed? Are there some opportunities for character formation? Explain. Are there some occasions to trust the Lord? Hold these situations up under the light of Romans 8:32 and marvel at God’s mercy.

### Day 5—Move the Mountain with Faith

Read from the middle of page 302 to the end of page 313, and work through the following:



### React—Consider the Truth

\*Question 1—In what ways do you see yourself as a person being “redeemed to redeem,” comforted to comfort, blessed to bless, etc.? How does such a calling show you the *way* forward after *weeping* opens the *window* of your heart?



### Risk—Take It to God and Group

Use Romans 12:1–20 as a template to pray for each member in your small group. Pray that these truths would characterize the community that has formed and of which you are a part.

Reread Job 19:23–27 in the box below and answer the question that follows:

Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

Question 2—Job sees at least two things clearly, one, His Savior is living, active, and powerful, especially in the worst suffering ever known, and two, that his coming resurrection life with that Redeemer serves not just as a future comfort but a present impetus to his calling to reengage a broken world with passion and urgency. Note the *zeal* and emotion of John throughout! Do you believe with all your heart that your Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is alive? How does the redemption you have experienced in Him propel you forward as a “co-redeemer” with Jesus? Be as specific as possible.



**REVIVE**

### Revive and Risk Combined



**RISK**

Take some time now to flip back through this book, especially the boxes where you recorded any “aha moments” or other things that you marked for future reference. Revisit the days and lessons that were most impactful. Look again at the commitments you made and the truths you learned. Consider again the entire protocol of the weeping, the window, and the way. What windows has God opened and invited you to peer through? What way(s) is He showing you and calling you forward as someone redeemed to redeem? Reaffirm those truths and

commitments, share them with someone from your group, and spend time praying specifically for the protocol of the weeping, window, and way to be a *daily* reality in your life.

Consider then ... how a prayer of the following kind might help bring a daily remembrance of “the protocol” of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* to mind for you and the members of your community group:

God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your manifold mercies, your wisdom and in Your infinite yet intimate redemptive plan to use our poor choices that resulted in sin for Your glory, our blessing, and the redemption of all things broken and decaying ...

*Please* redeem my times of weeping and my small and large free falls by establishing and/or undergirding the foundations of my faith based upon Your wide and deep creation, Christ, and covenant.

*Please* then, at the “window of my heart,” reveal and rout out all falsehoods of my heart and replace each with true truth. Even though it’s sometimes painful, I love Your purifying Holy Spirit Who has come to make me more like You, my Savior, Lord, and Redeemer Jesus, more than the “comforts” of avoiding risk and renewal.

*Please*, then prepare me to be sent in the way, back into the chaos of the world’s universal

and personal calamities, conformed more in the person of my Savior and Redeemer King Jesus! Armed, fully prepared, and “missionally-ready” to do battle as a wounded healer, a tender warrior, a compassionate truth bearer, a “co-redeemer” with You as my Brother, my Captain, and my King (Hebrews 2:5–18). Amen.

Record any “aha moments” from the week or things to you want to share with the group:

[illegible]

## GROUP MEETING #9

As the group arrives and grabs a refreshment, dessert, or food (depending on how the group is organized and the time they meet), pair off with a member and fill in this blank as you talk.

The study we have done together of *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* has impacted me most by\_\_\_\_\_. Follow-up questions encouraged! This will give you the opportunity to get to know one another more deeply.

### ENGAGE

Use the *Revive* section from Day 3 to begin discussion of all the principles of this book. This will be a good opportunity and place to hear “testimony” from several in the group on the overall effect in their lives from the study of this book.

### STUDY

As a group, discuss together the questions from the personal study section marked by an asterisk (\*) (pages: 86[2], 87, 89[2], 92).

### LIVE IT OUT

Take five minutes of silence for each member of the group to privately reflect on the entirety of the book and the past eight lessons of study. Consider what one practical, personal response

from this journey to which you have committed or want to now commit. After the five minutes, each person should share their “one thing” as well as the desire for how he/she can be held accountable to such change by the group.

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### PRAYER

Use the Romans 12:1–21 passage to pray for the entire group. Pray that the qualities articulated there would characterize each person in the group and the group as a whole. Pray through the entire protocol of weeping, window, and way, asking that God’s good would always overcome Satan’s intent for evil. Record any important aspects of your prayer below.

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# APPENDIX

## A GOOD GOD AND A SUFFERING WORLD

Everyone who has suffered knows that in the midst of pain, we desire healing and wholeness. This is good and right, yet if we attempt to make comfort the goal of our lives, we will miss much of the good that God has to offer; we will miss the wonderful sculpting He has planned for us (Eph. 2:10). However, in the West, we live in a culture of comfort, a sanctuary of security, a place of passion for the pain-free life. We spend billions of dollars to create the illusions of safety and to foster the notion that we can live inside a force field surrounded by green pastures and immune to the suffering that lurks in other, darker corners of the universe. Despite our preferences and pretensions, suffering remains as the undeniable reality of our world. Suffering comes regardless of age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, education, or creed. Pain will come, and it will live up to its name. Because of this reality, the Bible never teaches us how to avoid, overlook, ignore, or get around pain. Instead, you will find it again and again teaching us how to prepare for suffering when—not if—it comes, how to endure it well when it gets here, and how to use it powerfully and faithfully for God’s purposes. Take 1 Peter 4:12 for instance: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” The question is not will you suffer; the

question is, what will you do with your suffering? How will you approach it, engage it, understand it, grow from it, and ultimately use it for the glory of God? That question is what this book, and the journey you will take as you study it through this guide, is all about.

Christianity has always taught that there is transformative power in redemptive suffering. But when suffering, pain, brokenness, and trials come—and they will come—most of us will have honest questions for God, asking how a God who loves us can possibly allow us to become so undone, so miserable, so destitute, and so riddled with sadness. In times like this, our mental and emotional anguish usually leads in two directions. First, we want to know, can a good God really exist in a world where so much is not good. Second, if God does exist, we wonder what His character must really be.

Christians emphatically believe that God is both all-powerful (omnipotent) *and* all-loving. Thus when suffering arises and brings weeping into our lives, it is easy to question whether such a God exists at all. Doesn’t atheism or simple apathy just seem easier? After all, atheists do not have to reconcile a loving God with a painful world because they believe in a world without God. While Christians must come to terms with a universe containing God and pain, atheists only have



to come to terms with a world of pain. But such a quick assumption would be unwarranted. When we examine such a claim more carefully, we learn that the *absence of God cannot explain our anger at our pain*. When MLK Jr. wrote his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, he remarked that the only way to know that a law is unjust is if there's a divine, higher law from God that tells us so. If there were no divine law from God, then how could anyone know if a human law was out of accord or not? With what would it be out of accord? If there is no God, someone could say that a law was unjust, but that would be according to *their* standards. Let's take it a step further to say that if there is no God, then there is no way to say that any particular circumstance is unjust. As Tim Keller has so powerfully remarked, "If there is nothing but nature, what is more natural than violence; it's how you and I got here—natural selection, the strong eating the weak." In other words, if there is no God, nature is our only model for the way the world should work, and in nature we find indescribable violence and suffering. In the same vein, Dostoevsky wrote, "If God is dead, then all things are permissible." If there is no God, then on what possible basis could you object that the natural order of violence, suffering, brokenness, and pain is unnatural? On what basis do we ask for a better world? Therefore, suffering and evil is a problem for the existence of God but an even bigger problem for the absence of God! Abandoning God cannot help you understand, endure, or use your suffering. It can only create intellectual and emotional dissonance as you measure your innate belief that something is not right with the world against an atheistic philosophy in which whatever exists in the world must be "right," including your suffering.

After questioning God's existence, we usually want to understand His *character*. After all, we reason, if God really cared about me, He would give me pain-free existence. But what if a pain-free existence is not the best but the worst thing possible for us? *The Weeping, the Window, the Way* is all about not only that possibility's exploration but its certainty. As Christians, we claim to believe in a God who is unimaginably large, unimaginably wonderful, unimaginably mysterious, and unimaginably wise. And if we have a God who is large enough to be angry at for not stopping suffering, then we have a God who is large enough to have very good reasons beyond our comprehension for allowing it to continue. We cannot have it both ways!

Furthermore, *only Christianity gives us a God who has suffered with His people*. We need to see that not stopping suffering is a question of which God Himself has faced the pain. Take a look at Luke 23:35–38. Notice what the crowd cries out to Jesus, "He saved others; let him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His chosen one. If you are the king of the Jews, then save yourself!" They are calling on Him, not to stop the suffering of the world but to stop His own suffering. They are mocking the God who has "chosen" Him for not stopping the blood-letting. Does God have the power to stop it? Of course. Remember His statement in Matthew 26:53, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" In other words, more than sixty thousand angels with flaming swords would be at His bleeding side in a moment if He called them. Now put yourself in the Father's place, watching His Son be tortured, hearing Him scream out, seeing the mocking, watching Him rise to gasp for air only

to slide back down again breathless, hearing Him be rejected, and observing His death, all while you had the power to send more than twelve legions of angels to His side. You better believe if that were your son, you would move heaven and earth to be there; you would be an unstoppable force to armies, soldiers, bystanders, and weapons. And yet God watched on; Jesus died on. God Himself has faced the reality of not stopping His own suffering infinitely more powerfully than you and I ever will because He not only allows suffering to continue in our world but He allowed it to continue on for His own Son. We face the pain of *powerless* suffering, where we have little control over the situation, but God faced the pain of *powerful* suffering—that is, suffering with the full power to end it and yet letting it continue in horror.

There would have to be an amazing reason to do something like that, and there is. He did that for the infinitely valuable result of the salvation of you, me, and all of creation. Christianity is the only religion that gives us a God Who is not removed from suffering but comes and Himself takes on the suffering that should have been mine and should have been yours. He does not require your blood but provides His own.

John Stott says that he personally could not believe in God if not for the cross where the One Who is all powerful humbles Himself and suffers a type of punishment that you and I will never experience. So we don't know for sure what all the reasons for suffering involve, but we know what it isn't, what it can't be. It cannot be because He doesn't love you; it can't be because He doesn't care; it can't be because He is aloof.

God loves us and hates suffering so much that He was willing to come down and get involved

in it personally. Our hope is that as you have worked through this journaling and community group study guide, you have experienced God's personal, intimate involvement in your life.