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**LEADER GUIDE**  
by Betsy McPeak and Vicki Price

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(for Class Info, Experiencing Transformation Exercises, Retreat, & Celebration)

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE LEADER GUIDE

First of all, *thank you*, from the bottom of our hearts. If you are reading this guide you are most likely either leading a group of apprentices through *The Good and Beautiful You*, or you are considering it. This guide is written for *you* ~ to equip and encourage you to lead others on this amazing journey of discovering the person Jesus created each apprentice to be. We are so grateful for your willingness to love others as they become who they already are.

Who leads the leaders? Ultimately Jesus by his Holy Spirit, but we are blessed to serve alongside Jesus in this adventure. In case you want to know a bit about the authors of this guide, here are our bios. We offer them to increase your relational connection with us and to make sense of the variety of Transformational Exercises we have offered. We hope you will not be overwhelmed by those options, but that you will appreciate being able to find a Transformational Exercise that fits you and your group. We have also created handouts to ease your preparation for class.

### BETSY MCPEAK

Betsy loves to accompany others in their spiritual journey, working with those discovering their identity, recovering from trauma, or going through the dark night of the soul. Betsy serves as a spiritual director and greatly enjoys designing/leading retreats, often tapping into the visual arts to give voice to the soul. She loves hot air balloons, biographies, and the color periwinkle. Betsy earned her philosophy degree from a state university, her Spiritual Direction certificate from the Catholics, her masters in Spiritual Formation from the Quakers, and her Soul Care training certificate from the Anglicans. She is a Renovaré Institute graduate and a C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow. In her earlier life she taught apologetics and K-12 for 25 years, coached speech and debate for 12 years, and designed keynote presentations for 5 years. Betsy lives in San Antonio with David, the man beyond her dreams. They have 4 adult sons, 2 daughters-in-law, and 3 delightful grandchildren.

### VICKI PRICE

Vicki is the Director of Education at CAPS (Child Advocacy and Parenting Services) in Salina, Kansas—where she presents the Happy Bear program, a Bullying Prevention program and also teaches parenting education classes. Prior to CAPS, she was an elementary school teacher and school board member. Vicki earned her B.A. from the University of Northern Colorado and her M.S. from Kansas State University. Vicki is married to her high school sweetheart, Scott, and they have 3 children, 2 sons-in-law and 3 grandchildren—truly incredible, remarkable people! All of her family is active in the arts. Vicki and Scott are members of Trinity United Methodist Church in Salina, KS, where they sing in the chancel choir, have taught various Sunday school classes and, since 2008, teach the two-year Apprentice classes based on *The Good and Beautiful God*, *The Good and Beautiful You*, *The Good and Beautiful Life* and *The Good and Beautiful Community*. Last, but not least, Vicki is also big sister to the author, James Bryan Smith!



Each chapter guide is written with the same flow:

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

What have others struggled with in this chapter? (This section is just for you.)

WELCOME

Let your apprentices know that you are glad to be with them each week.

CENTERING MOMENT

A short reflection to set a tone of connection to God and others.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

Don't skip a minute of this. The Holy Spirit does good things in silence: defragging, calming, illuminating, comforting, stirring, whispering, healing.

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

Read the provided prayer slowly, allowing apprentices to transition out of silence.

DISCUSSION OF SOUL TRAINING EXERCISE

This exercise was assigned to be done at home.  
Apprentices are invited to share about their experiences.

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER

Discussion questions. You may want to break into small groups of 3 or 4  
if your group is large so that each person can share.  
Some groups like to all stay together.

~ BREAK (if you choose) ~

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

A Scripture reading pertaining to the chapter topic with a few discussion questions.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

An exercise to taste and see that the Lord is good! These group activities are designed to give experiential support for the themes and true narratives in the chapters.

GO IN PEACE

Send apprentices out with blessing and grace.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

Assignments for next week, usually the next chapter/soul training exercise.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE LEADER GUIDE

The CHAPTER CHALLENGE is meant to give you a heads up about issues you might want to be aware of before your group chapter discussion. The first Chapter Challenge is lengthier than the others because the topic of Chapter 1 (You have a soul) is expansive and may be unfamiliar to many apprentices. It is also very foundational to the rest of the book.

The CENTERING MOMENT will help set the tone for the silence that follows it, preparing the apprentices' souls to listen to God. We recommend that you ask for weekly volunteers to bring and share a prayer, daily devotional, spiritual reading, poem or secular material that speaks to their hearts. Letting apprentices share helps create a sense of belonging and joy. They may share their reflections prior to the five minutes of silence. Leaders may ask for volunteers at the end of each class or use any scheduling system they like. Or you may share a Centering Moment yourself, or use the one provided in the Leader Guide.

SILENCE: We live in a busy, fast-paced, noisy world where so much is clamoring for our attention. Silence is a gift to let our souls breathe. You rarely know what a person has been through in their day before they arrive at your group. They may be coming from a difficult conversation with their boss, a family quarrel or the stress of a traffic jam. Silence will give grace to transition their presence from where they've been to where they are now in your group conversation and interaction.

The EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION exercises are varied to give you plenty of choice, but *please* don't let the options overwhelm you. Different leaders and groups will enjoy different types of exercises. Some incorporate art because images speak to parts of the soul that need to hear from God visually, like Ezekiel and the dry bones. Some focus on nurturing a sense of belonging and affirmation. Some are meant to be fun. Supplies needed will be listed within the directions for each exercise.

DISCUSSION SETTING: There will be times for apprentices to share during "Discussions of the Soul Training Exercise," "Engaging the Chapter," "Engaging the Word," and on some "Transformational Exercises." You may want to break up into small groups of 3 or 4, or your group may prefer being all together for these discussions. Smaller groups allow more people to share more in depth, but having the discussion as a whole group allows everyone to hear all of the comments, and may build group cohesion and a sense of belonging to the larger group. So use your prayerful judgment in your own situation. You may want to experiment with both large group and small group sharing, or do some of each, even within the same meeting.

To help make the Leader Guide more useful and readable: headings are printed in CAPS/SMALL CAPS; instructions are in a regular font; any part that should be read aloud to the group is in italics.

SUPPLIES: Most meetings will utilize a large screen video if available. If your group is small, you might be able to use a laptop. Other supplies needed will be listed in the descriptions of each Transformational Exercise.

As with all guides: please use it; don't let it use you. Make it your own. Adjust it freely. Change things. Add things. Omit things. Or follow it exactly if that suits you. It is not meant to measure or burden you, but to make things easier for you. When you have options, you are meant to pick one or possibly two. If there are 5 questions listed, sometimes discussing one question in depth will be more beneficial than trying to answer them all. Follow God. He is your Shepherd and will gladly lead you.

Your group may be entering this book study after doing the first and foundational book in The Apprentice Series: *The Good and Beautiful God*. If so, your group may notice how their perceptions of themselves as human beings is very connected to and stems out of how they view God. If your group is studying this book as a stand alone, just note that as the leader, sometimes you may need to help an apprentice see that their false narrative of who they are may be based on a false narrative of who God is. For example, if you see God as one who sits in a black swivel chair so He can turn away from you when you mess up, then you will see yourself as living under continual condemnation, rather than being forgiven once for all. *The Good and Beautiful God* may have additional help as you help others restore connecting false narratives.

Again, we are so grateful for YOU!

## Study Schedule

*The Good and Beautiful You*

Week	Session	Chapter	Length
1	Intro Week	Community Connect	120 minutes
2	Chapter 1	You Have a Soul	90 minutes
3	Chapter 2	You Have a Sacred Body	90 minutes
4	Chapter 3	You Are Desired	90 minutes
5	Chapter 4	You are Loved	90 minutes
6	Chapter 5	You Are Made for God	90 minutes
7	Chapter 6	You Are Forgiven	90 minutes
8	Chapter 7	You Have Been Made Alive	90 minutes
9	Chapter 8	You Have Been Made Holy	90 minutes
10	Chapter 9	You Have a Sacred Story	90 minutes
11	Retreat	Telling Your Story	TBD
12	Chapter 10	You Are Called	90 minutes
13	Chapter 11	You Will Be Glorified	90 minutes
14	Final Week	Community Celebration	TBD

## INTRO WEEK

### BOOK STUDY COMMUNITY CONNECT

Dear Leaders, *The Good and Beautiful You* has been called the most personal book of The Apprentice Series. Certainly this adventure of “Discovering the Person Jesus Created You To Be” (as the subtitle states) hints at how the readings, exercises and discussions inspire reflection about your person. Many topics will be totally new ground for some apprentices. All to say that the relational connections among your group and the safety of your group fellowship will have a significant impact on each individual’s experience of the book study. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to spend a whole meeting connecting with one another in God’s presence as you embark upon this significant, communal experience.

“Change does not come through inspiration nor information, though both are important. Change comes through engagement in relationship.” ~Dallas Willard

The purpose of this meeting is to:

1. Form or deepen relationships and encourage an atmosphere of belonging.
2. Clarify the nature of the journey.
3. Agree on intentions to foster a community of trust, respect and grace.

Supplies needed:

1. A copy of BUILDING TRUST & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS for each apprentice.

Resources to help you write the initial guidelines:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/ground-rules-for-group-discussion>

<https://www.changemyrelationship.com/small-group-guidelines/>

[https://www.toolsformentoring.com/media/files/tools\\_for\\_mentoring-guidelines\\_text.pdf](https://www.toolsformentoring.com/media/files/tools_for_mentoring-guidelines_text.pdf)

2. A bell to ring during one of the readings.
3. An extra copy of the Praise & Thanksgiving section for a reader to help you.
4. Ask each apprentice to bring a snack to share; the leader might bring drinks and paper products for the snack time.
5. Ask each apprentice to bring one item to “Lay the Altar.”
6. Copies of p. 3 of the guide, replacing the top sentence with “Meeting Flow Handout” before printing. Place it on the altar to be picked up by each apprentice.

Below is an explanation that you can email apprentices ahead of time, which includes asking them to bring their item and a snack:

**In our opening meeting, which we are calling our *Book Study Community Connect*, we will be doing a practice called “Laying the Altar.” This is a way for our group to express their hopes and intentions as we join God and other apprentices in this study of *The Good and Beautiful You*. Please read the Introduction to the book to help you think about what’s ahead for us all.**

Please bring one item that symbolizes something about how you are looking forward to this time of study and experience. The item you bring should be simple, not elaborate, and not larger than a 12" X 12" X 12" so that all will fit nicely on the altar. As you lay your item during the meeting, you will share briefly about the significance/meaning of your object.

Here are some possible items to get your juices flowing, but don't let them limit you: a stone; a candle; a stick; a pressed flower; a photo; a printed quote; a glove or scarf; a cup; a paintbrush. Look about your home, your yard or a nearby park, together with God, and find some item that expresses how you are looking forward to the weeks ahead.

Please also bring a snack to share. Drinks will be provided. We can't wait to see you soon!

7. Please have an "altar" set up in the middle of a circle of chairs. Usually a rectangular table works well. Please make it sacred (set apart for the purpose of offering one's expectations and intentions to God as a community) with a tablecloth spread. Also have a cross and a candle/matches ready to set on the table during the reading. Put the snack table outside of the circle of chairs, so as not to distract from the meeting.

## COMMUNITY CONNECT

WELCOME (2-3 minutes)

Have everyone sit in the circle of chairs around the 'altar.'

Let apprentices know how glad you are that they have chosen to be a part of this amazing journey! Your simple, but heartfelt welcome will set the stage for the gathering.

FIRST NAME INTRODUCTIONS (6-7 minutes)

If everyone doesn't know each other's names, say:

*Please introduce yourself by sharing a fun way to remember your first name (by some association). For example, "My name is Emil. I love the flavor lime, which is my name spelled backwards." Or "My name is Esther, and my friends say I'm queenly." If someone is stumped, please ask for help from someone beside you. I'll go first...*

After everyone introduces themselves, you might want to see if anyone wants to try to recall each person's name. Keep this moving along, since you will have lengthy introductions when Laying the Altar.

PRAISE & THANKSGIVING (10 minutes)

Ask a reader to help you read aloud the part in bold following the word: **Reader.**

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very dark, God said: "Let there be light."*

**Reader:** ***And there was light.***

[The sign of light—a candle—is lit on the 'altar.']

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very quiet, the Word was with God.*

**Reader:** ***And the Word was God.***

[The sign of Christ—a cross—is placed on the table.]

**Leader:** *When the time was right, God sent his Son.*

**Reader:** ***He came among us and was one of us.***

**Leader:** *And Jesus is still among us when we gather in His name.*

[A chair for Jesus is set in the circle between two apprentices.]

—adapted from Iona Abbey Worship Book (Wild Goose Publications, 2001), 171.

- SING together (Acapella) The Doxology, or any familiar worship song or chorus.

Please say: *I will speak the thanksgivings. After I ring the bell each time,  
please join the reader in the group response: **We give you thanks.***

The leader reads the part in italics; the leader rings the bell;  
the reader leads the others in HEARTFULLY speaking the response in bold.

*O God, for your love for us, warm and brooding,  
which has brought us to birth and has opened our eyes:*

***We give you thanks.***

*For your love for us, wild and freeing, which has awakened us to the energy of creation:  
to the sap that flows, the blood that pulses, and the heart that sings:*

***We give you thanks.***

*For your love for us, compassionate and patient, which has carried us through our pain,  
wept beside us in our sin, and waited with us in our confusion:*

***We give you thanks.***

*For your love for us, strong and challenging, which has called us to [trust] you,  
asked for the best in us, and shown us how to serve:*

***We give you thanks.***

*O God, we come to celebrate that your Holy Spirit is present deep within us,  
and at the heart of all life...*

*Awaken us to the love that Christ offers, and draw us into your presence.*

***AMEN.***

—from Iona Abbey Worship Book, 141ff.

## BUILDING TRUST & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS (15 minutes)

Please come up with guidelines that your group can follow to have a climate of gracious encouragement so that trust is built and people feel safe sharing. You might print copies of the guidelines for apprentices to sign and keep as a reminder of how they are committing to interact with others so that your fellowship nourishes, encourages and strengthens each person. Issues to consider are confidentiality, how punctual start and end times will be, what makes a good group discussion that involves everyone, when and how to agree to disagree, when and how to handle interpersonal conflicts, encouragement, humility, and grace. If there are no changes in the guidelines you give out, have apprentices sign and keep with their book. If needed, make edits to hand out next week for them to sign and keep.

~ BREAK ~ (15 minutes)  
Snack time.

## LAYING THE ALTAR (1 hour)

Invite members to first share a briefly (a couple of minutes) introduce themselves, their family, their work, their interests, their church if they have one. This is not a deep sharing time, but an initial one. (Deep sharing and telling one's story will occur at the Retreat after Chapter 9.)

You will need to divide the hour of Laying the Altar by the number of apprentices to determine how much time each person will have and guide them in that. If your group is large, consider extending the time of this first meeting, or taking another meeting to give everyone time to Lay the Altar.

This sharing is best done from their seats so that they are facing everyone. (As they move toward the altar, someone is behind them.)

After they have told a little about their self, have them show the object that they brought and tell the group (in a few minutes) how the object symbolizes their hopes or intentions for this community book study of *The Good and Beautiful You*.

Lastly, have them place their object on the altar.  
Pause for a minute of silence after the last person lays the altar.



“MY HOPE FOR YOU” (2-3 minutes)

Next, please share your hope for this experience together, adapted slightly from what James Bryan Smith wrote in the introduction of the book on page 4:

*My hope for you as we study this book together in community is that you will discover the good and beautiful you that Jesus created you to be. I pray that you will see yourself with wonder, see yourself as sacred – even though you are flawed and broken. I long for you to know that you are loved by God, forgiven for what you have done, and made alive by the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Your sacred story, sacred body, and sacred longing for God is at your core. I hope and pray that you will come to know your unique calling in this life and your divine destiny for glory in the next.*

*But there is one more desire I have for you as we read and engage this book in community: that you will see your neighbor in the same way, for each person you know and meet is also of divine origin.*

*Only God, through Christ, can reveal to us who we truly are. I hope you discover the person Jesus uniquely created you to be.*

GO IN PEACE (6 – 7 minutes)

*Let’s hold all we have experienced together in our hearts, in gratitude,  
letting the Holy Spirit bubble up any specific reflections.  
I will ring the bell at the end of the silence.*

Ring the bell after 3 minutes. Then say this prayer:

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Thank you for the treasure of each person in our group, and  
for Your call to walk together on this path of discovering who Jesus created us to be.  
Amen.*

*Are there any questions or thoughts to share for the good of the group?*

*Thank you for your precious presence and participation!!  
Please pick up your item from the Altar and take it with you.  
Please also pick up a copy of the Meeting Flow Handout from the table.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

*Please look over the Meeting Flow which describes the flow of our upcoming meetings.*

*Read Chapter 1: You Have a Soul.*

*Do the Soul Training Exercise, “Holy Leisure.”*

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 1: YOU HAVE A SOUL

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Chapter 1 starts off with the worthy topic of the soul, which might be daunting to some. Recognizing and caring for our souls can seem puzzling, or not really necessary. Some members will have souls that long to remember closeness and joy with God. Some have never found that connection and are longing for this study to show them the way. Some have never given their souls much attention at all.

You, as the leader, will meet them where they are, walk alongside them and encourage them every step of the way. Think cheerleader or coach. Your acceptance, understanding and support, combined with the work of the Holy Spirit, will help them discover (or rediscover) how to perceive and to care for their souls.

This Chapter Challenge for Chapter 1 is longer than any of the other Chapter Challenges because there may be language/terms that are unfamiliar, and also because the topic is also comprehensive, acting almost as a foundation to the rest of the chapters.

First, let's look at two key terms: *What is the self? What is the soul?*

#### SELF:

"The self is an isolated individual" (14).

"The self is a construct that is built on the narrative that says you are an accidental, carbon-based life form that is here today and gone tomorrow" (14).

#### SOUL:

"Your soul is the wellspring of your spiritual emergence from birth to death" (15).

"...your soul gives life to your body" (15).

"Your soul is the essence of who you most deeply are" (17).

Contrasting the values of the self and the values of the soul might also be helpful. What does the self long for? What does the soul long for?

#### LONGINGS OF THE SELF:

"...the self is primarily interested in survival and finds its value in how it looks, what it possesses, and what others say about it" (14).

#### LONGINGS OF THE SOUL:

"Our soul hungers for God" (15).

"Our souls seek harmony, want to share deeply with one another...yearn to be free from practices that harm...long for integrity – to show on the outside who they are on the inside" (16).

To exemplify this distinction between self and soul, we can look at the life of Henri Nouwen. In his book *In the Name of Jesus* Henri describes how he had an identity crisis when he moved to L'Arche, an adult community for those with mental challenges. Henri had depended on his accomplishments for his identity. After all, he was a professor at an Ivy League school and had written many books. He was famous! But the people at L'Arche did not value or even recognize those accomplishments. It would be a long process for him to find his value as a person outside of the accomplishments of the *self*.

Henri also liked being like a tight-rope walker. He wanted to accomplish ministry solo so he alone could get the praise. He lived for the applause, for being seen as spectacular. Trevor, one of the men at L'Arche, called Henri when he went on a speaking engagement alone and Trevor told him how much he missed Henri. Henri would come to take Trevor and others with him to his speaking engagements. They would often blurt out what they thought, or even ask to have a turn at the podium. Henri was transformed from his isolated, impression-managing self to a soul that longed for harmony and connection.

Secondly, how we can help apprentices not feel overwhelmed by this chapter:

*I am far from having these soul desires met!*

When your group members read about the ten needs/longings of the soul they may feel overwhelmed, unfulfilled, excited, cheated, condemned, expectant or full of regret. You may need to encourage some with one or both of the following depending on how your group responds to Chapter 1:

**1. God is the source.** As the author points out on page 24: "All that I needed, Thy hand has provided." We are not the source of our own fulfillment of our needs. Our needs are all met in Christ. God has created us with these needs, but has also provided for these deepest needs. Yes, we must "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov. 4:23; NIV). However, we guard under the care and with the provision of Jesus, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (1 Peter 2:25) who restores our soul. Getting in touch with your needs is actually designed to have you seek God in whom the fulfillment of your soul-needs exists.

Option: Sing the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" together or listen to a good recording of it. Encourage all to rest in God's faithfulness as you begin this adventure.

**2. Becoming the Good and Beautiful You is a *process*, as well as a plan.** Even though the seed of your identity was there at the point that God designed you (the plan/design), you still have to grow into the person Jesus created you to be (the process). Colossians 3:10 says that "your new self is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it."

In each chapter you will learn about one aspect of your soul. You will go step by step, chapter by chapter, through the aspects of the soul. All will be somewhere on the spectrum of living in sync with these dimensions of their soul. Each chapter includes a Soul Training Exercise to put you in the presence of God in a way that you may receive the graces and blessings that He has for you so that you can be transformed, from glory to glory. “You do the connecting; He does the perfecting” (Jan Johnson).

Final note: The term *self* is used in other ways by other authors. For example, some refer to the “True Self” as the design God intended for you to be. The author of *The Good and Beautiful You* uses *self* to mean the isolated person seeking to establish their worth through accomplishments, possessions and impression management, an overwhelming and impossible pursuit.

#### WELCOME (2 minutes)

First, let apprentices know how glad you are to be with them on this journey.

Use your own warm, welcoming words.

End your welcome by saying:

*I look forward to today’s discussion with those who are no mere mortals,  
but never-ceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul.*

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

This poem shows how God uses everything in our lives to cultivate our souls into the design he had in mind.

#### *O Sapientia*

*I cannot think unless I have been thought,*

*Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken.*

*I cannot teach except as I am taught,*

*Or break the bread except as I am broken.*

*O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,*

*O Light within the light by which I see,*

*O Word beneath the words with which I speak,*

*O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,*

*O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,  
O Memory of time, reminding me,  
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,  
My Maker's Bounding Line, defining me,  
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,  
Come to me now, disguised as everything.*

(By Malcolm Guite)

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence is the beginning of listening.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Eternal Friend,  
grant me an ease  
to breath deeply of this moment,  
this light,  
this miracle of now.  
[In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.]  
AMEN.  
(by Ted Loder)*

SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large, you might want to divide into small groups of three or four. Invite any of those who practiced Holy Leisure to share how their experience was. After all who want to share have done so, you might consider these questions as a larger group, allowing apprentices to share:

- 1. What did you find more difficult in your practice of holy leisure?*
- 2. How did God meet you in holy leisure?*
- 3. What did you learn about yourself and God as you practiced Holy Leisure?*

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25-45 minutes]

[Note: Be sure to decide which questions you especially want to discuss, in case you don't get to them all.]

*The main idea of this chapter is that even though it is invisible, and often denied or neglected, the most real thing about us is our soul. Our soul longs above all else to be unconditionally loved by God. Our soul cares about all that is most important in life, all that is good and true and beautiful.*

1. *What has been your understanding of the soul? Do you think much about your soul? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think you seldom think about it?*
2. *A central point made by the author is that we are embodied souls, or ensouled bodies, stressing the truth that the soul and the body are united and not separated (which is the mistaken teaching called dualism). Why is this important?*
3. *On pages 13-16 the author says that it is a false narrative that we are a self, and a true narrative that we are a soul. What are the differences between the self and the soul? Do these narratives help you make sense of life?*
4. *There are ten things listed that our souls cannot endure (p. 18), and ten things that our souls need (pp. 20-21). Is it a good thing that God made our souls in such a way that they cannot endure those things on the first list? Why or why not? Which one in the "cannot endure" list do you struggle with most? What might be blocking you from receiving the corresponding gift from the "soul needs" list?*
5. *The author says that "The good news is that the God who created our needy souls has, by grace, provided all that our souls will ever need. We cannot achieve or attain these things our soul needs. They have to be given to us by God, as a gift. And God has provided all of those things in Jesus." How does that good news seem to you?*
6. *Are you aware of ways in which you personally try to achieve or attain your soul needs? What happens as a result of that strain to get your God-given needs met? How would it look to change that dynamic to live in sync with the good news described?*
7. *The purpose of this book is stated on page 24: "The rest of this book will examine how God, in Christ, has created the good and beautiful you, and has provided the deepest needs of your soul. Each chapter will examine these actions of God on your and my behalf." What thoughts and feelings does that stir up in you?*

~ BREAK (if you choose) ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10-15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scriptures aloud slowly, and then use the questions below as a discussion guide.

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them (Gen. 1:26-27, NET). Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you...(Jer. 1:5, NASB). ...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...(Eph. 1:4, NASB).*

1. *Who is the source of your soul? What implications does that have?*
2. *What does it mean to be made in the image of God?*
3. *How could we be chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and consecrated before we were born? Close your eyes and prayerfully consider what this means about you.*

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

(Choose one, or two if time permits.)

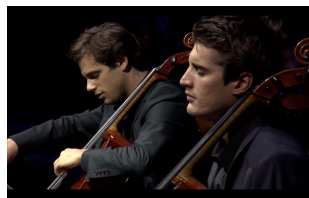
#### Option #1: Let Your Soul Soar with Musical Beauty (15 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen video to watch this performance, OR, a laptop computer if your class size is small, not ideal with a large class. Watching this video will enhance the experience because the "souls" of the performers really shine visually.

*"The soul is made to soar in transcendence" (19).*

*This exercise is simple. Please let your soul soar as you listen to this beautiful piece of music.*

[https://youtu.be/f\\_RjIPuqyc2](https://youtu.be/f_RjIPuqyc2)CELLOS - Benedictus (by Karl Jenkins) [LIVE at Arena Zagreb]



After listening, give a moment of silence. Then say:

*I'd like to invite a few of you to share how you experienced the music, especially being mindful of your soul. Appreciate and affirm whatever was shared.*

Option #2: Taking Your Soul's Temperature (15 minutes)

Supplies: Thermometer handout and pencils

As our author writes, *"Your soul was intricately designed with several needs; there is no debating them or escaping them—they simply must be met" (20). So we begin at the beginning—assessing those soul needs. We can evaluate them by taking our soul's "temperature."*

Give apprentices a copy of the Thermometer handout (below).

Share these directions:

1. *Think about these ten God-created longings of your soul:*
  - To see our body as sacred*
  - To be desired*
  - To be loved*
  - To connect with God*
  - To be forgiven*
  - To be alive*
  - To be holy*
  - To own our story*
  - To feel called to a life of purpose*
  - To live forever in peace and joy*
2. *How fulfilled do you think each of these are in your life today?*
3. *Pencil in the percentage you feel fulfilled for each need on the corresponding thermometer.*

Apprentices can share their responses with a partner or with the group, as they are comfortable. Or, you can have them answer the following questions personally in their own heads and hearts:

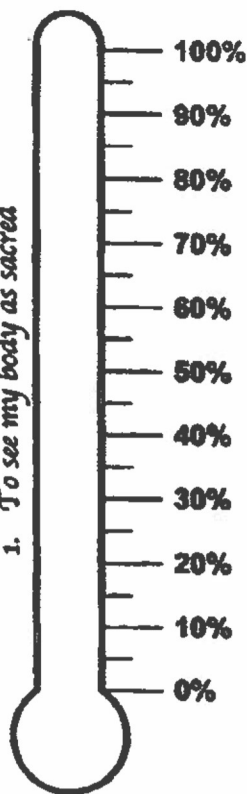
1. *Was anything surprising to you about your thermometers?*
2. *Which one(s) had the highest percentages of fulfillment?*
3. *Which one(s) had the lowest percentages of fulfillment?*
4. *Which "soul areas" do you hope to improve during our book study?*

Have them keep this handout in a safe place and monitor any changes in these "soul areas" as they go through *The Good and Beautiful You*. We will look back at this handout at the conclusion of the book.

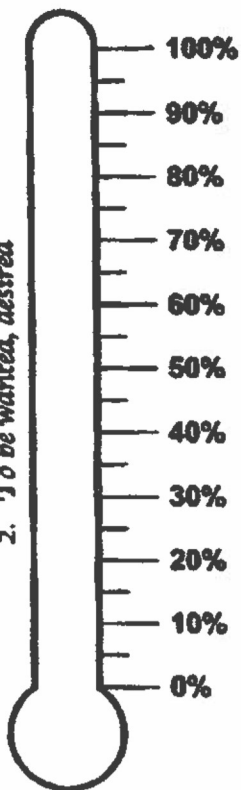
HANDOUT TO PRINT - Chapter 1, Option #2  
THERMOMETERS FOR "TAKING YOUR SOUL'S TEMPERATURE"  
(on the next page)



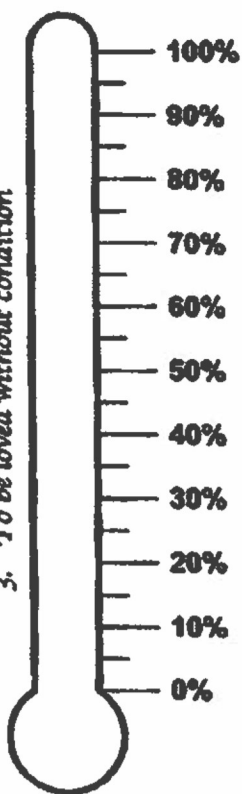
1. To see my body as sacred



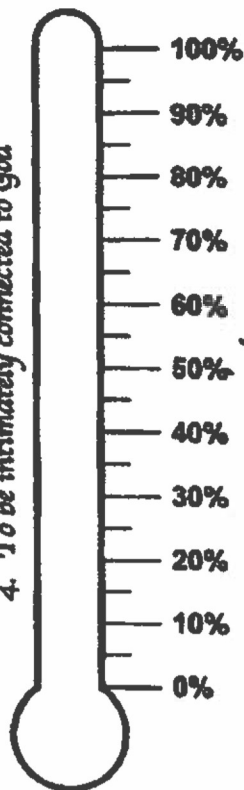
2. To be wanted, desired



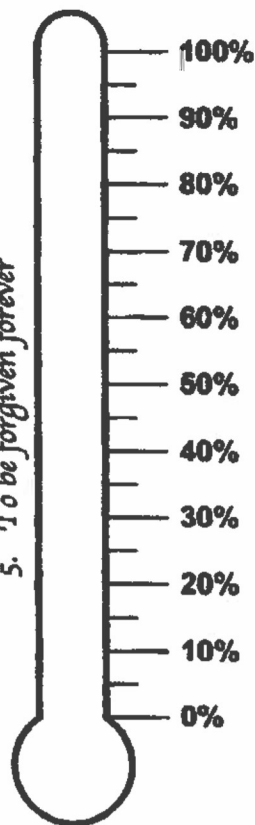
3. To be loved without condition



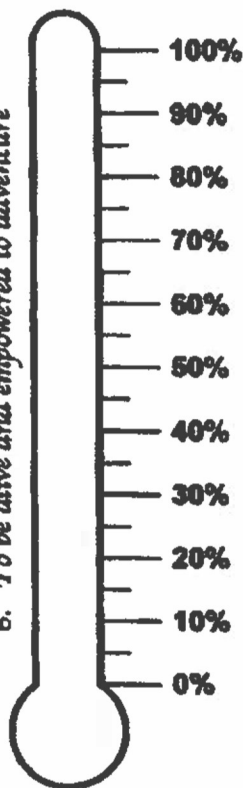
4. To be intimately connected to God



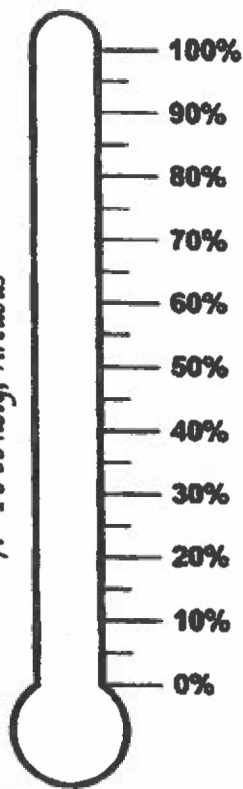
5. To be forgiven forever



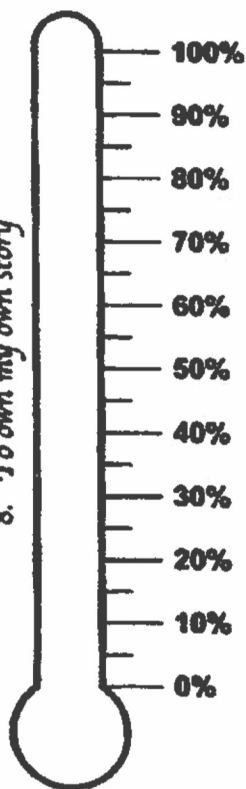
6. To be alive and empowered to adventure



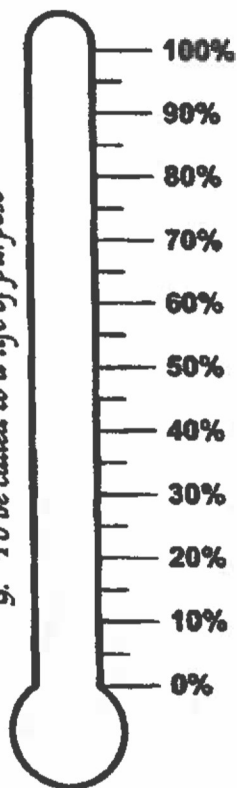
7. To be holy, virtuous



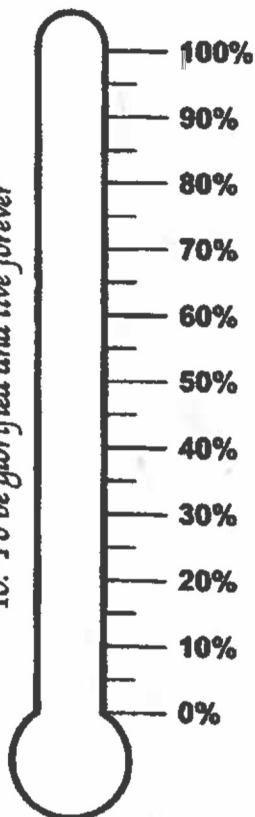
8. To own my own story



9. To be called to a life of purpose



10. To be glorified and live forever



Option #3: Let Your Soul Soar with Visual Beauty (15 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen for viewing this painting or printed copies of the Handout of this painting for apprentices. This painting is in the public domain.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Storm\\_in\\_the\\_Rocky\\_Mountains,\\_Mt.\\_Rosalie#/media/File:Albert\\_Bierstadt\\_-\\_A\\_Storm\\_in\\_the\\_Rocky\\_Mountains,\\_Mt.\\_Rosalie\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Storm_in_the_Rocky_Mountains,_Mt._Rosalie#/media/File:Albert_Bierstadt_-_A_Storm_in_the_Rocky_Mountains,_Mt._Rosalie_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

*"The soul is made to soar in transcendence" (19).*

*As you look at the painting, let your eye scan the painting, then notice the thoughts and feelings that arise in you. There are no right or wrong answers, just engagement of your soul with beauty. Let your soul soar as you enjoy the goodness and beauty of Bierstadt's painting, "A Storm in the Rocky Mountains."*

After 5 minutes of enjoying the painting, invite a few apprentices to describe their experience with the group. Appreciate and affirm what is shared.

A Storm in the Rocky Mountains



by Albert Bierstadt

Option #4: Lectio Divina on Psalm 63: 1-5 (NASB) (20 minutes)

Supplies: Printed handouts for Lectio Divina and pencils.

<sup>1</sup>God, You are my God; I shall be watching for You;  
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,  
In a dry and exhausted land where there is no water.

<sup>2</sup> So have I seen You in the sanctuary,  
To see Your power and glory.

<sup>3</sup> Because Your favor is better than life,  
My lips will praise You.

<sup>4</sup> So I will bless You as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands in Your name.

<sup>5</sup> My soul is satisfied as with fat and fatness,  
And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.

If you want to skip the handout, you can lead them through the exercise while they write in their journals. Even if apprentices use the handouts, the Scripture should still be read aloud to them by you or an apprentice.

The LECTIO DIVINA INSPIRATION page is for you (the leader) to draw from as inspiration, and may be used to invite apprentices into this exercise as you choose.

Sharing Time:

Be sure to ask for a couple of volunteers to share at the end. If you choose, break into groups of 3 for ten minutes of sharing. Each person would get around three minutes to talk.

## EXTRA RESOURCE TO SUPPORT Option #4, Chapter 1:

For the leader to draw from to introduce this exercise, though many may be familiar.

You could read some of these quotes aloud, but all would probably be too much.

### LECTIO DIVINA INSPIRATION

“Knowing the Bible is one thing;  
Knowing the Author is another.”

John 17:3 – This is eternal life, to know You.

“The word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation. Do not look for new thoughts and new connections in the text, as if you were preaching! Do not ask ‘How shall I pass it on?’ but ‘What does it say to me?’ Then ponder this Word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you.” ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

### READING FOR TRANSFORMATION!

“IS NOT MY WORD LIKE FIRE?” declares the Lord,  
“AND LIKE A HAMMER THAT SHATTERS A ROCK?” JER 23:29

**HEB 4:12** - <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (NASB)

<sup>12</sup> See, the Word of God is alive! It is at work and is sharper than any double-edged sword — it cuts right through to where soul meets spirit and joints meet marrow, and it is quick to judge the inner reflections and attitudes of the heart. (CJB)

Thomas Watson – 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan:

“Let the Scriptures not only inform you but also inflame you.”

Through this process,  
may you fall more and more in love with the God who loves you!

LECTIO DIVINA HANDOUT

**1. READ 2. REFLECT 3. RESPOND 4. REST**

LATIN COROLLARY WORDS: 1. LECTIO 2. MEDITATIO 3. ORATORIO 4. CONTEMPLATIO

**1. READ:** (read or listen to the passage read aloud)

*Listen for a word or phrase that "shimmers."*

*(WHAT STANDS OUT/WHAT SEEMS LOUDER/WHAT ATTRACTS OR BOTHERS YOU)*

Write that word or phrase here:

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**2. REFLECT:** (read or listen to the passage read aloud)

*Why do you think the word or phrase stood out to you? How does the word or phrase that shimmered connect with what's going on in your life today?*

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**3. RESPOND:** (read or listen to the passage aloud)

*Talk to God about what you think the Spirit is saying to you. Pray in whatever way you are led. You might thank God for something or ask God for something. Write your thoughts or prayer here:*

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**4. REST:** *Do as you are led. Receive from God. Drink. Fill up.*

*You may wish to wait on God – to simply be with Him.*

*Enjoy His presence. You may wish to pay attention to God, pondering especially: How did God SEEM in the passage?*

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*Sit in the companionship of God – the one who invites you to come away and be with Him!*

## GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

Conclude by having everyone close their eyes while one person reads the words below. Other apprentices hold out cupped hands, and imagine receiving the gifts one by one as they are read. The reader then asks, while each gift is still in their hands, "Do you receive this gift?" Apprentices respond, "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift." Then they press the gift into their heart as a bodily sign of their intention to receive the gift from God. Apprentices then hold their cupped hands out again to receive the next gift. (You might want to practice the movements once before actually starting, so everyone knows what to do, or have a "model" stand by you.)

*Please close your eyes as we participate in a liturgy to help our souls open, or at least soften, to the gifts God gives. Please hold your cupped hands out to receive a gift from God. I will name the gift that God gives you personally. Be very present and aware of the gift. During the pause, let yourself appreciate it, meditate on its qualities, and receive it at whatever level you can. When I ask if you will receive the gift, if you will, say "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift." Then press what you are holding in your hands into your heart as an outward gesture of an inward intent to receive this gift. Any questions?*

1. *God gave you a soul. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
2. *God desires you because he designed you. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
3. *God loves you without condition. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
4. *God forgives you once for all. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
5. *God gives you vibrant life. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
6. *God inhabits you with holiness. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
7. *God writes and rewrites your story with you. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
8. *God gave you a sacred body wherein the Holy Spirit dwells. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*  
Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."  
Press gift into your heart.
9. *God is intimately connected to you. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*

Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."

Press gift into your heart.

*10. God calls you to a life of purpose. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*

Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."

Press gift into your heart.

*11. God glorifies you and gives you life everlasting. (pause) Do you receive this gift?*

Apprentices: "Yes, Lord, by your grace I receive this gift."

Press gift into your heart.

*May your soul go in peace, being filled to overflowing.*

#### FOR THE COMING WEEK

*Read Chapter 2: You Have a Sacred Body.*

*Do the Soul Training Exercise, "Move," while remaining aware of God and your body.*

*[Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?](#)*

**Leaders:** You may want to ask for volunteers to bring items for the Chapter 2 Experiencing Transformation next week, if you are going to do Option 1.

## CHAPTER 2: YOU HAVE A SACRED BODY

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Very few people like their bodies. Globe Newswire reported that “The global cosmetic surgery market is expected to grow from \$39.01 billion in 2021... to \$48.84 billion in 2026.” In addition to how we feel about our own bodies, many of us have soaked up the idea referred to in the chapter as *dualism* ~ that the body is bad and only for this world, while the spirit is good and exists for eternal life.

It is hard for us to believe that our bodies are GOOD. However, our bodies are even better than GOOD. As the author points out, we must look back to creation. What did God think of human beings after He made them as body-souls? On the sixth day God made male and female in His own image. At the end of the sixth day “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” Your body made from the earth that God breathed life into is integral and entwined with your soul and is very good according to God. The Hebrew word that we translate as good, “TOV,” means “magnificent and wonderful.” Most of your class members will have a very difficult time wrapping their heads around that!

Be patient and help them to be at peace about this. Gently remind them that God needed a beautiful place to house their beautiful soul. Our bodies are sacred treasures, and through their magnificent capabilities, we can connect to God.

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Let apprentices know how glad you are to be with them again!  
Any specific comments you can make about your own enjoyment of your last meeting and your anticipation of this meeting will be contagious.

End your welcome by saying:

*I look forward to today's discussion with you who are no mere mortals,  
but never-ceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. And you have a sacred body.*

### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

*Sometimes we envision the body as only temporary and forget that Jesus appeared as a resurrected body as well as a resurrected soul. He ate fish in his resurrected body, and he ascended into heaven as a body. Paul described the resurrection of our bodies as being raised incorruptible. Though we may not know exactly what the correspondence of our incorruptible, resurrected body will be to our perishable body, we know that we will be raised in glory and power (1 Cor. 15:43).*



5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence lets our souls breathe.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.*

*I will end the silence with a prayer.*

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Come, Lord Jesus,  
startle me  
with your presence, life-sustaining as air,  
to open my heart  
to praise you  
to open my mind  
to attend you,  
to open my spirit  
to worship you,  
to open me  
to live my life  
as authentically and boldly  
as you lived yours.*

*Amen.*

~Ted Loder

SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large, you may want to divide into smaller groups of three to allow each person to share.

1. *What version of "Move" did you try?*
2. *Did you find yourself more appreciative of your body? More aware of your body? More aware of the One who designed your body?*
3. *Did you notice your body movement producing hope in you?*
4. *Did you feel God's pleasure in your movement?*

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (30 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. *How did you feel as you read how the author's pastor, Jeff, performs the sacrament of Chrismation (anointing and blessing hands and feet and lips, etc.)?*
2. *How does your culture reflect the distortion that bodies are commodities? How does your own thinking reflect the distortion that bodies are commodities?*

3. The author says that “Your body needs your soul in order to live and move—to animate it. And your soul needs your body in order to reveal itself, to be made known, and to act.” Can you describe your experience of daily life in this intertwinement?

4. Why does it matter whether you form your view of human beings on Adam or on Christ?

5. The section, “Five Signs That Our Bodies are Sacred” names the five parts of the Christian story (Creation, Incarnation, Church, Eucharist, and Glorification) that affirm the importance of the body. Which of those five give you the most encouragement about you body and appreciation of your body?

6. What is the significance to you that Christ ascended in bodily form?

~ BREAK (if you choose) ~

#### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10-15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud: Romans 6: 13-14; Romans 7:17, 20-25; Romans 12:1; and I Corinthians 15:53-54.

1. How did Paul describe the conflict within us? Would it make sense to train the body for this conflict? Why or why not?
2. How does God rescue us from this conflict?

Be sure to give apprentices time to share, either a few sharing in the large group, or breaking up into groups of 3 for each to share.

#### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION (Choose one, or two as time permits.)

##### Option #1: Celebrate Your Senses (20 – 25 minutes)

Supplies: see the bullet points below for items needed

Instead of focusing on physical bodies, lead apprentices to concentrate on their bodily senses. Our five senses— sight, smell, sound, taste and touch—don’t often get a lot of attention, and we generally take them for granted. We live in a very high-tech, low touch society, and several of our senses can lose their importance in our busy lives. We need to have our senses “awake” and in good working order so that we can better hear what God is saying to us. God often speaks to us through our senses.

You can provide the stimuli, or you can ask volunteers to bring them to class. Gather things such as:

- Pictures of famous art or nature (sight) ~ Or use the handout below.
- Diffusers or candle warmers with scents/candles (smell)
- Music such as Pachelbel's Canon (sound)  
<https://youtu.be/NlprozGcs80> (you get sight and sound if you use this YouTube link)
- Cinnamon rolls or any other delicious treat (taste)
- Unscented and/or scented lotion as participants can give themselves hand massages (touch). As they massage their hands and forearms, share these facts:

*-- The technical names for hand bones and finger bones are the metacarpals and phalanges.*

*--Each hand contains 28 bones. That means that 56 of your body's 206 bones are in your hands.*

*--No actual muscles are in your fingers and thumbs-- your digits move by the action of almost 40 muscles in your forearm and hand. The tendons attached to the muscles move them like a rope and pulley system.*

*--Our hands have many sensory receptors that can tell us how hot or cold something is, how rough or smooth, and even the shape of something.*

Spend several minutes with each of these endeavors. When all have been completed, ask:

1. *What was your favorite activity? Were any uncomfortable or difficult?*
2. *What thoughts or feelings did you have as you experienced each one?*
3. *How can you be more intentional about using your senses to communicate with God?*

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 2, Option #1 - Celebrate Your Senses





Option #2: Jesus as a Body/Soul in 4 Paintings (20 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen video to cast images one-by-one, or enough copies of the Handout below for apprentices to each have one.

*Let's explore how artists depict Jesus living as an incarnational, embodied soul.*

Briefly discuss the questions below each painting. The main point of this exercise is for apprentices to identify with Jesus as having a body, as well as a soul, just like them.

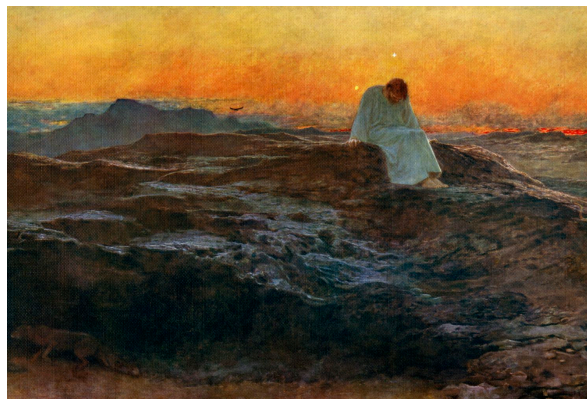
The Baptism of Jesus:



Artist Unknown

1. *Would it have been the same if Jesus had just thought about being baptized in his mind? Why or why not?*
2. *What do you think it felt like in his body for Jesus to be baptized?*

The Temptations of Christ:



Satan Tempts Jesus

[https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/d3lUurZOjYClf3wsFSSZwE2TnXA=/1500x1000/filters:fill\(auto,1\)/Satan-Tempts-Jesus-GettyImages-463967715-5808f7b65f9b58564c318113.jpg](https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/d3lUurZOjYClf3wsFSSZwE2TnXA=/1500x1000/filters:fill(auto,1)/Satan-Tempts-Jesus-GettyImages-463967715-5808f7b65f9b58564c318113.jpg)

*Question: How was Jesus' body involved in the temptations?*

*"Turn stones into bread ... jump from a high tower ... bow to me and you'll be rich and powerful," the Enemy whispered.*

Thomas tests his doubts about Jesus:



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, 1603 by Caravaggio

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Incredulity\\_of\\_Saint\\_Thomas\\_%28Caravaggio%29#/media/File:Der\\_ungl%C3%A4ubige\\_Thomas\\_-\\_Michelangelo\\_Merisi,\\_named\\_Caravaggio.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_%28Caravaggio%29#/media/File:Der_ungl%C3%A4ubige_Thomas_-_Michelangelo_Merisi,_named_Caravaggio.jpg)

(In public domain)

*Questions: Did Jesus actually die in his body? Or was it only a spiritual crucifixion?*

*Was Jesus resurrected as only a spirit? Or was His body resurrected?*

Let apprentices respond to these questions. Then offer this passage if it seems good.

Luke 24:39

*"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you plainly see that I have."*

Jesus Christ Ascended Bodily:



The Ascension of Christ, by Rembrandt

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/rembrandt/the-ascension-of-christ-1636>

(In public domain)

*What does it mean that Jesus' resurrected **body** ascended?*

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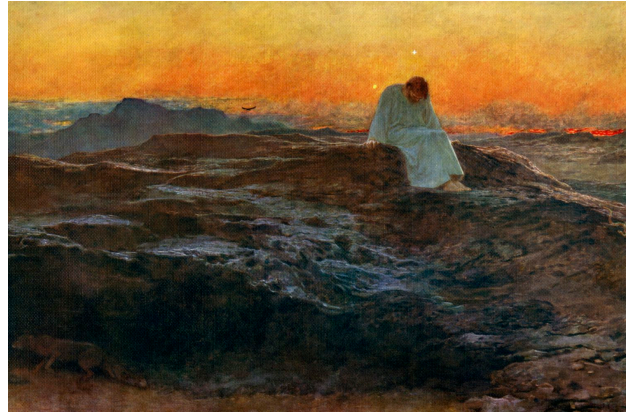
*\*Synthesizing question for this Transformational Exercise:*

*What role did Jesus' body play in these key moments of his life?*

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 2, Option #2 - Jesus as a Body/Soul in 4 Paintings  
to print for educational use only



**The Baptism of Jesus, artist unknown**



**Satan Tempts Jesus**



**The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, 1603 by Caravaggio**

*What role did Jesus' body play in these key moments of his life???*



**The Ascension of Christ, by Rembrandt**

Option #3: MOVE WITH THE MUSIC (20 minutes)

Play the following video, “Father Let Your Kingdom Come” (Live)  
(feat. Urban Doxology & Friends) by Porter’s Gate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqPk7roZsHo>

1. The first time through have apprentices just watch and listen to the song.
2. The second time through invite apprentices to move with the music.  
Suggestions: clapping, swaying, dancing, etc.

Questions to ask:

1. *How was your experience the first time when you just listened/watched?*
2. *How was your experience the second time when you moved with the music?*
3. *Which did you prefer? Why?*

GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*You are invited to spend a few minutes in silence imagining God’s creation of you, sometimes called your conception. Imagine the creation of your body as God’s purposeful design. Imagine the connection of your body to all other parts of your soul (mind, will, emotions, etc.) in your creation and as you grow and develop. Imagine the joy God had in making you.*

*May you go in peace, grateful that your body is exactly the one that God purposefully designed and created to be the good and beautiful you.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

*Read Chapter 3: You Are Desired.*

*The Soul Training Exercise will be “Lectio Divina” on Psalm 139 and Ephesians 2:10, which highlights God’s desire for you.*

*Let God speak to you through His living and active word.*

*[Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?](#)*



## CHAPTER 3: YOU ARE DESIRED

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter may connect with a very tender place for some in your group. You may have apprentices who feel unwanted, but don't know why. Others will know why. Perhaps they have been adopted, and though they are thankful for the parents who did want them, the fact that their birth parent didn't want to keep them may still be a deep wound. Others may have had either or both parents say cruel things to them – in words or in deeds, even expressing their wish that their child had never been born. Some were born a different sex than what one or both parents wanted. Some in your group may have been the parent who didn't want a child or the one who treated someone as unwanted, and this chapter might bring up incredible pain for them as well. Some may have never found a significant relationship or a person to marry, and they interpret their singleness as being undesirable and rejected.

Comprehending the narrative that God individually desires us is essential in order to have a connectional life with the Trinity. If we cannot believe that God is truly interested in our lives, why make the effort to pray? Why spend time with a vaguely interested deity?

While allowing apprentices to be honest with where they are in their journey, you can be a guidepost to point them to the grand truth that the God of the universe had them in His heart before they were even born. God willed them into existence from a place of fierce love, intentionality, desire, and keen interest in how His design will unfold in history, or they wouldn't be here! Being wanted by human parents is not always secure; God's desire for each person is always a firm foundation.

As Macrina Weiderkehr prayed, "Oh, God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful." Apprentices may want to pray this prayer, and in time, the Holy Spirit will help them truly receive the truth that they were and are wanted by God.

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Greet your apprentices warmly,  
letting them know how glad you are to see each one of them.

End your welcome by saying:

*I look forward to being with each of you who are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. And you are desired.*

### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

*"Deep silence leads us to realize that prayer is, above all, acceptance. When we pray, we are standing with our hands open to the world. We know that God will become known to us in the nature around us, in people we meet, and in situations we run into. We trust that the world holds God's secret within and we expect that secret to be shown to us. Prayer creates that openness in which God is given to us.*

*Indeed, God wants to be admitted into the human heart, received with open hands, and loved with the same love with which we have been created."*

~Henri Nouwen

#### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

*Holy One,  
untamed  
by the names  
I give you,  
in the silence  
name me,  
that I may know  
who I am,  
hear the truth  
you have put into me,  
trust the love  
you have for me,  
which you call me to live out  
with my brothers and sisters  
in your human family.  
AMEN.*

~ by Ted Loder

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

#### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Now,  
O Lord,  
calm me into a quietness  
that heals  
and listens,  
and molds my longings  
and passions,  
my wounds*

*and wonderings  
into a more holy  
and human  
shape.  
AMEN.*

~by Ted Loder

#### SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large, you may want to divide into smaller groups of three or four to allow each person to share. You can also discuss in your larger group. Here are some questions to help apprentices share about their experiences with “Lectio Divina” (64-66) at the end of Chapter 3.

- 1. What words or phrases stood out to you from the readings? How did that connect with your life?*
- 2. Would anyone like to share what they wrote in their journal?*
- 3. How did it affect you to take time to rest in God’s interaction with you in this passage in the fourth step?*

#### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25-45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

*You are not an accident, because your conception was an intentional, planned creation by God, no matter what was going on with your parents. God designed you in just the way He wanted you to be, and then He looked at you and said, “You are very good.” God continues to look at you and say “You are very good.” He is so happy with his creation of you!*

- 1. Have you ever felt like you were an “accident”? Where are you in your journey of receiving the reality of being wanted and designed by the Creator of the universe?*
- 2. Adrian Van Kaam uses the analogy of a seed to express how you are designed by God. The seed is your form planned and created by the Divine Forming Mystery. What does that name for God (Divine Forming Mystery) that Van Kaam uses say about you? How do you think and feel about being designed?*
- 3. How is Christ’s incarnation the source of our validation?*
- 4. Did Dawn’s illumination about the blade of grass speak to you in any way?*

5. Poetry is meant to be read aloud. Ask someone to read the following poem, quoted in the chapter, while others just soak in the images painted with words. Then read it a second time, just listening to the words and not looking at them on the page. Finally, ask what stood out to you?

*Whisper to me again  
How you formed me in my mother's womb,  
Fashioned me over generations,  
Over eons of unfolding of the earth  
Until it could bear life  
On its flaky crust, the dust  
From which you formed our earthly frame  
Endowing each of us with a name  
Known to you alone.  
Remind me how I dwelt in you,  
My source and origin,  
A call from eternity,  
An archetype of life to be  
Unique and irreplaceably  
Your own.*

~ Adrian van Kaam

~ BREAK (if you choose) ~

#### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 - 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scriptures aloud, and then use the questions below as a discussion guide.

*Bring My sons from afar  
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,  
Everyone who is called by My name,  
And whom I have created for My glory,  
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.  
[Isaiah 43: 6b-7, NASB]*

*Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands...  
[Isaiah 49:16]*

*The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it.'*  
[Rev. 2:17, NASB]

1. What does God inscribing you on the palm of his hands mean?
2. If you had to make a wild guess, what do you think is written on your white stone?

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION  
(Choose one, or two if time permits.)

Option #1: You Are God's Poem (15-20 minutes)

Supplies: Printed handouts (below) and pencils.

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).*

*Scripture tells us that God knew Jeremiah before He formed him. This is also true of us, as Psalm 139 tells us. Surely He had **a design** of who we would be in mind.*

*Ephesians 2 says: <sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. The word 'workmanship' in the original language is Poeima. Think of God writing a poem that is YOU. What would He write? Surely He included who He had in mind for you to be! As the author says, "A good poem creates an image no one has ever imagined before" (57).*

*To make it easier, since we are not all poets, we will write the poem that we imagine God wrote about us by using the form of a poem called a Haiku. A Haiku has 17 syllables, in the form of 5 – 7 – 5. The first and third lines have 5 syllables; the middle line has 7 syllables. Let's read the examples from your handout.*

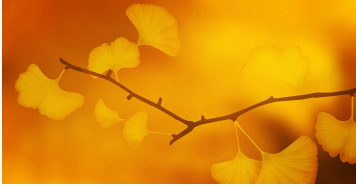
Leader, you may want to read aloud the examples listed on the handout.

*First, let's take a few minutes for you to just prayerfully listen to God. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, we ask you to help each of us hear Your thoughts of what words and phrases describes who You intended Your creation of us to be. What is the unique combination of characteristics You made in me?*

1. *You will have 5 minutes of listening to God. Write any words/phrases you hear on your worksheet.*
2. *Now, take another 5 minutes to try different ways of forming 5 and 7 syllable phrases using the words/phrases you heard already. Add some words as needed.*
3. *Lastly, take a couple more minutes to write your final Haiku.*

Let those who would like to share their Haiku do so.

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 3, Option #1 - You Are God's Poem  
How to write God's thoughts about you in a HAIKU



[1https://pixabay.com/photos/texture-background-ginkgo-2136831/](https://pixabay.com/photos/texture-background-ginkgo-2136831/)

A Haiku is a Japanese poem with 17 syllables, in the form of 5 – 7 – 5.  
The first and third lines have 5 syllables; the middle line has 7 syllables.  
A syllable is like a beat. Flower has 2 beats, so 2 syllables.

Japanese has 3 beats, so 3 syllables.

JAP – AN – NESE – FLOW – ERS = 5 syllables

So “Japanese Flowers” could be the first line of a Haiku, since it has 5 syllables.

This exercise is just to explore in a fun way what God's poem of us would be if it were a Haiku. *What Haiku would God write about you?*

Here are examples from 4 different persons:

Person 1:  
*Sees shapes and structures*  
*Treasure hunter on the loose*  
*Designs the unseen*

Person 3:  
*Tender nurturer*  
*Whether puppies or people*  
*Love that opens flow'rs*

Person 2:  
*My bundle of joy*  
*Seeing, sensing, feeling deep*  
*Free to chase it all*

Person 4:  
*Creates adventures*  
*Brings others into the dance*  
*Lives from overflow*

1. Write the words that could describe God's intent in creating you:

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2. Practice forming them into 3 phrases, 2 phrases with 5 syllables, 1 phrase with 7 syllables.

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3. Write your final Haiku here:

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Tip: If you have trouble, search Haiku Generator on your phone.  
There are many sites where you can plug in words and it will generate a Haiku.

Option #2: A Love Letter from God – (20 minutes)

Supplies: Paper and envelopes, possibly rather fancy to make something special to keep and treasure, and pens.

*Write a love letter from God to you. Since you are the “apple of His eye,” and God desires you, do your best to see yourself from God’s eyes. What would He write to you? What are you yearning to hear from Him? The letter may be anything from a short and simple message of love like the common:*

*I think of you every day.  
Love always, God*

*to a lengthy explanation and description of feelings. If you want to write more than a short message, here are some basics when writing your love letter:*

- 1. Begin by stating the purpose of God’s letter—why is He writing to you?*
- 2. Talk about the past, having God recall His first memories of wanting you and of loving you.*
- 3. Have God name all the things He loves about you.*
- 4. Let God reaffirm His desire for you and His commitment to your future.*

This activity may be very difficult. Some people may see this as extremely intimate and personal, and they could feel very vulnerable in even attempting this. You may want to tell folks ahead of time that these letters will not be shared with the class. They can keep their letter in a special place where they can read it whenever they desire. Or, you could give members the opportunity to read their letters, if they so choose. Some people may find this a healing exercise and want to share that with others.

Option #3: He Desired Me So I Came Close – (20 minutes)

The author explains the connection between God’s design of us and his desire for us: “You are of divine origin, you were planned, you are wanted, you are intricately designed by God and loved into existence” (54).

Shame can block us from receiving the *experience* of God’s desire for us. Let’s see how a 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish nun wrestled with this dynamic.

Read, or have someone read Teresa of Avila’s poem that the author included in the next chapter (73), but it also fits here since it is about God’s desire for us.

*“When I first heard his courting song, I too  
looked at all I had done in my life  
and said,  
“How can I gaze into His omnipresent eyes?”*

*I spoke those words with all  
my heart,  
but then He sang again, a song even sweeter,  
and when I tried to shame myself once more from His presence,  
God showed me his compassion and spoke a divine truth,  
“I made you, dear, and all I make is perfect.  
Please come close, for I  
desire  
you.”*

~Teresa of Ávila, rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

*Let's hold that in our hearts for a few moments.*

*Now let's hear that last part again:*

*God showed me his compassion and spoke a divine truth,  
“I made you, dear, and all I make is perfect.  
Please come close, for I  
desire  
you.”*

*As we sit in silence for 5 minutes, ask God to speak to your heart about how Teresa let  
God's compassion truth eclipse her shame. God, will you show us a way to receive and  
experience Your desire for us?*

This is very personal, but if anyone would like to share,  
please give them opportunity to do so.

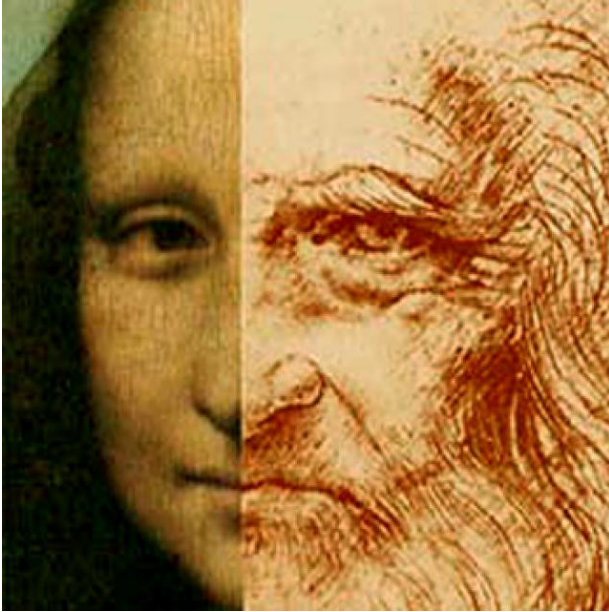
Close with this:

*Come, Lord Jesus,  
shatter the shame that contests  
the brighter, clearer, truer  
reality  
that You desire me  
whom you designed with love  
and still long to love.  
For I am Yours.  
Amen.*



Option #4: You Are God's Mona Lisa (20 minutes)

Supplies: Printed handouts (below) and pencils.



*The author says that “When we dismiss an artist’s creation as worthless, we are in essence dismissing the artist’s creative process and heart in that creation” (59).*

*Legend tells us that Leonardo da Vinci loved his Mona Lisa painting so much that he carried it with him everywhere he went in his final years. Some image-scientists suggest that Mona Lisa is actually a self-portrait of Leonardo, that he used his own facial features, especially the smile, in his portrait of Mona Lisa. That’s a fun idea because we all certainly are made in the image of our Creator as well. We also know*

*God loves His creation of each of us. So there are some connections between the Mona Lisa and you, a treasured work of art that reflects the Maker. As the author says, “You Are An Original” (59).*

Read the following instructions aloud to apprentices. Give them around 5 minutes to answer the questions in Step 1 and Step 2.

*Step 1: Take a moment to reflect on the idea that you are God's work of art, created with love and intentionality by the Divine Artist. Ask God how He feels about His creation of you. Does He feel the same way about you as Leonardo da Vinci did about the Mona Lisa? Can you receive that love and appreciation from God?*

*5 minutes*

*Step 2: Choose three colors that you believe God used in creating you. (Note: Don't focus on physical appearance, as the painting is simply a metaphor for the YOU God created. Focus on who He made you to be.) These colors could represent different qualities or characteristics that you possess. Consider why God might have chosen these specific colors to use in creating you. How does the combination of colors (characteristics) create unique you?*

*5 minutes*

Give apprentices the opportunity to share what colors/characteristics God used when creating them, as they feel comfortable.

Take a moment to give thanks to God for His wonderful, unique creations!

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 3, Option #4 - YOU ARE GOD'S MONA LISA!



Courtesy of Wiki Art

The author says that “When we dismiss an artist’s creation as worthless, we are in essence dismissing the artist’s creative process and heart in that creation” (59).

The Mona Lisa, the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, was painted around 1503–1506, with evidence that Leonardo continued painting it until 1517. Legend has it that he cherished this portrait and carried it around with him wherever he traveled.

Image scientists think that the features of Mona Lisa’s face are similar to artist Leonardo da Vinci’s own face, especially the smile. You are like the Mona Lisa in that you are a beloved work of art by the Master Artist, your features reflect the artist, since you are made in His image/likeness, and the Artist treasures His creation of you!

Let’s have a little fun by *imagining* that you are God’s painting. The Mona Lisa is in shades of greens, browns, and rusts, which give a subdued, serene quality to the painting. What about you?

*Step 1:* Take a moment to reflect on the idea that you are God’s work of art, created with love and intentionality by the Divine Artist. Ask God how He feels about His creation of you. Does He feel the same way about you as Leonardo da Vinci did about the Mona Lisa? Can you receive that love and appreciation from God?

*Write your thoughts here:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Step 2:* Choose three colors that you believe God used in creating you. (Note: Don’t focus on physical appearance, as the painting is simply a metaphor for the YOU God created. Focus on who He made you to be.) These colors could represent different qualities or characteristics that you possess. Consider why God might have chosen these specific colors to use in creating you. How does the combination of colors (characteristics) create unique you?

*Write 3 colors here:* \_\_\_\_\_

What do the colors represent in you? \_\_\_\_\_

How does the combination of colors God used show your uniqueness? \_\_\_\_\_

~Please invite apprentices to share any reflections from this experience.~

GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*You are invited to pray (if you dare) what Macrina Weiderkehr prayed so eloquently,*

*“O God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful.”*

Give 4-5 minutes of silence.

*May you go in peace, knowing that a good and beautiful God made you good and beautiful as well.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter four the theme is that you are loved by God.*

*The soul-training exercise will be “Breath Prayer,” which refers to short, meditative, repetitive prayers in which we affirm a truth about the love of God.*

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 4: YOU ARE LOVED

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Most of us can imagine what unconditional love might be like. After all, it is a deep desire that we are created with. Most of us know that the Bible teaches that God's love for the human race and all of creation knows no limits, since John's gospel tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten son, a gift which meant an excruciating road of pain for the Son that God loved with all of His heart. Romans 8:32 describes God's lavish love: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" [NASB] Paul tells us God's love occurred while we were totally undeserving in Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" [NASB]. Paul at the end of Romans 9 tells us that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God.

The hardest thing to believe is that this love of God is for me. Surely I don't deserve it. I am not loveable enough in some way. The hurdle in receiving God's unconditional love is not Him; it's me. My receivers are broken for any number of reasons as the author points out (70-72).

This chapter circles us back to book one in the Apprentice series, *The Good and Beautiful God*. If apprentices participated in that study or have read that book, they may have already wrestled with the false narrative, "God is an angry judge. If I do well, I will be blessed; if I sin, I will be punished." They may have to wrestle once again with the fact that God truly loves us. No conditions. No qualifiers.

This can still be very difficult for us to believe. Or we might readily believe it one day and struggle with it the next. Our minds and hearts need to hear and re-hear this message repeatedly. Lovingly support your class members as they may continue to struggle with this incredibly good news.

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Please greet apprentices with a warm welcome from your heart. Connection and appreciation from you will open them up relationally to receive what God has for them today. Perhaps you would like to share one particular thing you appreciate about this group or your last session.

End your welcome by saying:

*I want to remind you yet again that you are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
And you are loved.*

### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

#### A Brother's Sacrifice

*An eight-year-old boy had a younger sister who was dying of leukemia, and he was told that without a blood transfusion she would die. His parents explained to him that his blood was probably compatible with hers, and if so, he could be the blood donor. They asked him if they could test his blood. He said sure. So they did and it was a good match. Then they asked if he would give his sister a pint of blood, that it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight.*

*The next day he went to his parents and said he was willing to donate the blood. So they took him to the hospital where he was put on a gurney beside his six-year-old sister. Both of them were hooked up to IVs. A nurse withdrew a pint of blood from the boy, which was then put in the girl's IV. The boy lay on his gurney in silence while the blood dripped into his sister, until the doctor came over to see how he was doing. Then the boy opened his eyes and asked, "How soon until I start to die?"*

*Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends.*

Taken from Ann Lammott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anchor Books, 1994.

### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence makes space for God.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*"Created from love, of love and for love, our existence makes no sense apart from Divine love." (David Brenner) Help us, Holy Spirit, receive this love from You. Amen.*

### SOUL TRAINING (15 minutes)

If your group is large you might want to divide into small groups of three or four before sharing about your experiences with breath prayer.

1. What did you learn about God or yourself in this practice?

2. What affirmations did you use in your breath prayer practice? Which did you find the most encouraging to you?

#### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25 – 45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. *What did you learn from the author's story about how his dad responded to his amazing basketball score of 51 points? What chords did it strike with you in your own story? In what ways has the relationship between you and God been shaped by your parents or other caregivers?*
2. *What are other common sources (besides parents) that teach us, often without words, that love is conditional? Would you like to share from the influences on your own journey?*
3. *What do you think about the Peter van Breeman quote that says that God cannot divide his love as we do, because "God is perfectly one, the perfect unity. We have love, but God is love. His love is not an activity, it is his whole self." What is the significance of Breeman's thoughts?*
4. *Is it hard for you to, as William Blake said, "bear the beams of love"? How does Jesus help us with our capacity?*
5. *How important is it in your other love relationships to receive affirmation? Does it make sense to you that God not only initiates love toward you in the beginning, but that God is the continual initiator of affirmations of his love for you?*
6. *How did Michael the counselor help the author look at his dad's comments about his feet in a different way? Is there a story in your own life that might be retold?*

~ BREAK, if you choose ~

#### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 - 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud:

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit [II Corinthians 3:18, NASB].

1. *How did Paul describe the dynamics of transformation here?*

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ [II Corinthians 4:6, NASB].

*2. If looking in the mirror at the glory of the Lord means gazing upon the face of Christ, what does this mean for you in your sanctification process? How does this connect to love?*

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION  
(Choose one, or two if time permits.)

Option #1: Let Your God Love You (20 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen video, or you may read the poem without using the video.

*True Story: Once a married couple was in graduate school together. While sitting at either end of their dining room table, each of them writing a paper on their own computer, the wife had an amazing, illuminating thought! She starting sharing it with her husband in her bubbling excitement. But her husband had his headphones on to block outside noise so that he could focus on his paper. All he saw was his wife’s lips moving.*

*The husband immediately took his headphones off and said, “Oh dear, please tell me what you said!” The wife felt awful to interrupt and said, “Oh never mind. I’m so, so sorry to interrupt your writing.” But the husband looked his wife right in the eyes with such love and tenderness and said, “Oh sweetheart, I never, ever want to miss a single word you say.”*

*Her heart melted, but she just did not feel worthy of that kind of love. Her inclination was to reject her husband’s invitation to share because she did not feel worthy of such attention and love. But oddly enough, she was writing a paper on being God’s beloved. Strangely, she looked at the word “beloved” and saw it in two words: be loved. She felt the question before her in this moment with her husband was really whether or not she would be loved. Her husband loved her with the tender, attentive love that she yearned for. But would she receive it? Would she be loved?*

*Thankfully this story has a happy ending. The wife decided to be loved. She told her husband the thought that had struck her. She received her husband’s love. And it was a true delight to experience the joy of sharing her thoughts with someone who cared so much about her perceptions.*

*This is where the rubber meets the road for most of us. Will we receive God’s love? Will we be loved? **Our inclination is to recoil in undeservedness.***

Read the story above to your group, then as you watch this video together, ask participants to purposefully open their hearts, like a thirsty sponge, to receive God's love ~ to let God love them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwLiSPJ43TE>

(Note: When the poem in the video speaks of emptying yourself before God, it is not in the Eastern sense of emptying your mind. It means to come empty-handed to God so that He might fill you. Come without the things that might make you feel you do or don't deserve God's love for you.)

The poem in this video is "Let Your God Love You" by Edwina Gateley. Here are the lyrics for leaders who don't have access to a video screen or who would prefer to read the poem aloud:

## Let Your God Love You

by Edwina Gateley

Be silent.  
Be still.  
Alone.  
Empty  
Before your God.  
Say nothing.  
Ask nothing.  
Be silent.  
Be still.  
Let your God look upon you.  
That is all.  
God knows.

God understands.  
God loves you  
With an enormous love,  
And only wants  
To look upon you  
With that love.  
Quiet.  
Still.  
Be.  
Let your God—  
Love you.

After the video or reading of the poem, say:  
*Please take a moment of silence to let yourself be loved.*

After a few moments, ask:

*Would anyone like to share anything about their experience of this exercise? Notice any resistance. Notice if you felt your soul opening up to receive God's love, even just a little. Consider using silence or this poem to purposefully receive God's love in your life.*



Option #2: Beloved Trees (25-30 minutes)

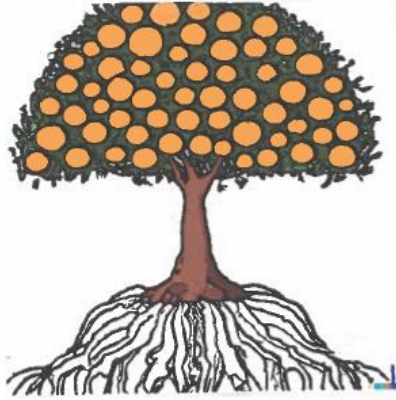
Supplies: Handouts and pencils.

Hand out pictures of the 7 different trees.

1. *How are they different/similar?*
2. *Focus on the roots. They represent God—His strength, His power and His love. All the trees have them. The tree wouldn't be a tree without them.*
3. *Now focus on the trees. They look different and can represent us. What are some of the differences in the trees? Note that some bear fruit, some do not; some seem younger or older; one can look "reborn", etc.*
4. *The roots are ever ready to give life to the trees. Some take that life and make fruit, some make beautiful leaves, some barely hang on. Which tree best represents you?*
5. *Put check marks by the trees you think God loves the most. Why? Which ones do you think he loves the least? Why?*
6. *Lead the class to the idea that every tree is loved by God. No matter what the tree does with its life energy—makes fruit or doesn't make fruit, has beautiful leaves or has none—God looks at each tree with the same unconditional, loving eyes. **It isn't what the tree does that makes it loveable. Each tree is beloved because each tree is loved by God.***

*And, that love is ALWAYS available, ready to give the tree the strength and power it needs to live. During a storm or a drought or the seasons of the year, the tree withstands the stressors because the strong roots give it the power to do so. Our roots are always connected to us, even if we don't acknowledge that, ready to bring us life.*

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 4, Option #2 - BELOVED TREES



Option #3: Thought Rhyming (25-30 minutes)

(This exercise is based on Dr. Jim Wilder's exercise that he calls Joyful Journeying.)

Supplies: Handouts and pencils.

Have someone read Genesis 16 aloud.

Then point out the following steps of the exercise taken from Hagar's story:

---

**1. I see you...**

*Hagar called God "El-Roi" – the God who sees.*

*Hagar named the well "Beer-lahai-Roi" – the Well of the Living One who sees me.*

---

**2. I hear you...**

*God names Hagar's baby "Ismael" – which means "God hears."*

---

**3. I understand you...**

*In this story, the angel of the Lord has a conversation with Hagar, and discusses her situation.*

---

**4. I am glad to be with you...**

*Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she ran away. But the Angel of the Lord initiates a relationship with this Egyptian slave girl, and interacts with Hagar, even though Hagar's contempt toward Sarai seems to be what triggered Sarai's harshness. In any case, the Angel of the Lord is glad to be with Hagar and interact with her.*

---

**5. I can do something about it.**

*The Angel of the Lord gave Hagar guidance... God not only validates our pain, but gives us direction. He gave Hagar a meaningful name for her son...and the promised hope of many descendants.*

---

**Write in God's voice.** Be quiet in your soul. Attune to God. Listen on each prompt to what God would say based on His revelation of Himself. Write what God would say. Receive His presence with you and His love for you.

**SHARE:**

You may want to break up into groups of 3 or 4 to share, or you may want to let a few share from your larger group. Encourage apprentices that this is a practice they can repeat whenever they want to feel close to God and receive His love.

The example in the handout was written in a time of anxiety, but it is also amazing to share our joys with God and let Him magnify your gladness with His presence and love then as well.

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 4 , Option #3 - THOUGHT RHYMING



**Hagar flees from Sarah**

This exercise is called Thought Rhyming because in Hebrew, they used idea rhyming (parallelism), instead of sound rhyming.

Example: sound rhyming – wave, brave, Dave, save

Example: Hebrew rhyming – Psalm 95: 3

“For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.”

The second line states the *idea* of line one in a slightly different way, so in Hebrew, it rhymes!

We will be rhyming our thoughts with God as we follow the categories of the exercise based on Hagar’s experience recorded in Genesis 16, as well as other Scripture. In other words, there is no great pressure to hear an audible voice

from God, just ask yourself from what you know of Scripture, what would God say to you? The Holy Spirit will lead you as you listen. You will rhyme (match) your thoughts with God’s thoughts.

1. I see you...\_\_\_\_\_
2. I hear you....\_\_\_\_\_
3. I understand you...\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
4. I am glad to be with you...\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. I can do something about... \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Example, although yours may look very different:

1. I see you...\_\_sitting there in your jeans and hoodie.\_\_\_\_\_
  2. I hear you....\_\_breathing a little faster with a bit of anxiety.\_\_\_\_\_
  3. I understand you...\_are worried about your son’s relationship with his wife. \_
  4. I am glad to be with you...\_in whatever you face. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Nothing will separate you from My love. I share your heart for your son and for his marriage. I am glad to be with you in your concern. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. I can do something about... \_the anxiety that you feel. If you cast your cares upon Me, I will not only care for you, but I will give you the peace that passes understanding. Imagine you are releasing this burden to Me directly. Let me carry the weight of it. Let me be with you in this. Talk to me often, no matter how you are feeling about it. I can also extend grace to your son and daughter-in-law.
- \_\_\_\_\_

Option #4: Receive Jesus' Love (15 minutes)

Supplies: Handout of Jesus or use a large screen to project the image.

*Usually this passage of Scripture is read as instruction for the way we should love, and it is that. But let's look at the principle of overflow in light of love. We love because He first loved us. Well, how does He love us? He loves us in the same way He wants us to love others. Let's focus on receiving love from God, like drinking the Living Water that will then become a wellspring and overflow into our own capacity to love others well.*

While apprentices are looking at either their handout of Jesus' picture or at the large screen video with Jesus' picture, read I Cor. 13: 4-8 in an amplified way. I will put some suggested amplifications in **red**, but feel free to use your own.

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, look at Jesus eyes full of patience for you, love is kind, look how kindly Jesus is looking at you, receive that kindness like dry ground soaking up a rain, love is not jealous; Jesus never begrudges you what is good, never is envious of your blessings, He wants you to have an abundant life, love does not brag, it is not arrogant. Jesus never boasts to put you down, in fact He is there to raise you up, <sup>5</sup> Love does not act disgracefully, see how full of grace and goodness Jesus' countenance is toward you, love does not seek its own benefit; Jesus willingly laid down His life for you, His friend, love is not provoked, see how Jesus is ready to be understanding of just where you are today, love does not keep an account of a wrong suffered, Jesus forgives gladly, and removes your sins as far as the east is from the west, He doesn't want anything to come between you and Him, and he never holds a grudge, <sup>6</sup> love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; Jesus loves you way too much to not Shepherd you in the way of all goodness and truth, He longs for your freedom, can you see that on His caring face? <sup>7</sup> love keeps every confidence, you can trust Jesus like no other, love believes all things, Jesus knows the truth about all, in fact, He will believe you when you're being honest even when no one else will, love hopes all things, Jesus never, ever, ever gives up on you, but instead, He who began a good work in you will perfect that work until the very end, love endures all things. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails...receive His faithful love that will never fail you, will never disappoint you, and even see you through death.*

~Please give opportunity for sharing in whatever ways seems good.~



HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 4, Option #4 - RECEIVE JESUS' LOVE



<https://picturesofjesus.com/smile/>

## GO IN PEACE

You are invited to gaze at the face of Christ in your imagination  
for a few minutes of silence.

May you go in peace, knowing that you are not your own source,  
but God in Christ loves you with a love that is beyond width,  
beyond depth, beyond length, and beyond breadth, surpassing even knowledge,  
that you might be filled to overflowing with the love of Christ.

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter five the theme is that you are made for God.  
The soul-training exercise of "Worship" will let your soul experience  
the connection to God for which it longs.*

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 5: YOU ARE MADE FOR GOD

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Because we are made for God, we come ready-made with a God-shaped hole in our souls. We long for a spiritual connection with God—transcendence. The challenge to living in relationship with the Trinity, which is the only place our soul will find true belonging, fulfillment and rest, is that the world offers us so many substitutes for union with God. We are offered alternate relationships with money, sex, success, popularity, pleasure and power. But those can never fill the God-void, so we are emptier than before we began seeking those substitutes.

Further, even if we can experience “mountain-top” moments of God-connection, we can’t stay on the peak forever. Life’s demands don’t easily allow that. Stress can dull our senses to connect with God. We don’t have time or can’t have the mindset to look at the beautiful sunset, or hear the birdsong, as we are hurriedly running to the next commitment.

Reigniting our God-soul construct takes time, energy and practice. And, keeping that fire alive throughout our daily lives may take a new way of living. No small feat! This explains why Dallas Willard said that the single most important spiritual practice in our time is to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. Hurry is a challenge to abiding in the Vine, to living in connection with and out of love for our Creator and others.

The author says that “The *transcendent* refers to that which goes beyond or rises above the things of the material realm, the physical world” (87). This connects back to chapter 1 where the author contrasted the self, “a construct that is built on the narrative that says you are an accidental, carbon-based life form that is here today and gone tomorrow...an isolated individual” (14), with the soul who “cares about harmony, connection, and integration...wants to be desire for itself...longs to be loved without condition, and yearns for connection with deeper realities, spiritual realities” (15).

Perhaps helping participants identify their own longings for what is beyond merely physical will demystify the word ‘transcendent’ for them. Here are some common transcendent questions. You might ask if they have ever asked any of these questions:

1. What is life really about? (meaning)
2. Why do I exist? (purpose)
3. Who am I? (identity)
4. Who loves me for just me? (unconditional love)
5. What makes something good?
6. How can I know what is true?



7. Why does some music/art/drama make me cry? laugh?
8. Is there a God?
9. How can I know God?
10. What happens when my body dies?

The answers to all of these deep longings are found in union with the One who created us with these longings. We must satisfy these longing for our soul to rest.

#### WELCOME (2 minutes)

*The Apostle Paul spoke of us being having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Thank you for being a part of this study where we are truly experiencing that dynamic. Each one of you make this journey so much more joyful because of the uniqueness that you bring to our group. I'm so glad you're here!*

End your welcome by saying:

*You are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. And you are made for God.*

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

<https://theprayingwoman.com/only-god-can-fill-the-emptiness-in-your-heart/>

This blog points out the ways we try to satisfy our hunger  
with soul junk food, but only union with God can satisfy.

#### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence fine-tunes the soul to God's voice.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

#### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

In the words of the hymn "In the Garden" by C. Austin Miles:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own,  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
None other, has ever, known!*

### SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large, you may choose to divide into small groups of three for this discussion of the Soul Training Exercise of Chapter 5: "Worship."

1. Share about any personal worship experiences. What did you do? How were you ravished or transported into God's holy presence?
2. Were you able to prepare your heart, mind and soul for corporate worship, as the author suggested? If so, how did that impact your experience of worship?

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25-45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. You are invited to describe any memorable human encounters you have had with the Transcendent God through "the aesthetic perception, that glimpse of radiance, mystery, and meaning we see in a work of art or in the natural world" as Balthasar portrayed and the author exemplified when he listened to Pachelbel's Canon.
2. What have you sought to satisfy your longing for God with in the past? Did something other than God satisfy that deep longing for the transcendent? What graces did you experience to move you more toward God?
3. The author states several times that our longings for things like money, power, sex, and approval are longings for transcendent, but ultimately do not satisfy because they are not truly transcendent. Have you felt this longing, or experienced this dissatisfaction? If so, explain.
4. What role have summit experiences played in your connection with the transcendent dimension?
5. How do you connect with the transcendent dimension in the web of everydayness?

~ BREAK if you choose ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10-15 minutes)

You may break into groups of three if desired.

Have a volunteer read the following Scriptures aloud:

*"... you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" [Rom. 8:15-16].*

*“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” [John 4:24].*

1. How would you describe the experience of the Holy Spirit connecting with your spirit in your own life?
2. What is worship?

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION  
(Choose one, or two if time permits.)

Option #1: Remember the Transcendent (15 minutes)

Supplies: Copies of the questions for a reader from each group if you are going to break up into smaller groups.

Form groups of three, if desired, for apprentices to discuss these questions:

1. *Can you remember a time when a particular scene or object in nature created in you a sense of wonder and awe? Please describe an image from your memory.*
2. *Can you remember a time when a painting, sculpture, play, concert, poem or any other work of art moved you deeply? Please describe it in a few sentences.*
3. *In what ways were you engaged with the transcendent (beyond physical) in these experiences? Please describe briefly.*

Option #2: Dusting Off Our Antennae (15 – 20 minutes)

*Hard-working ants, beautiful butterflies and even cockroaches have antennae that enable them to “see” their world—to move, smell, feed and create. Since the antennae is their lifeline, insects must often clean them to survive. This grooming is necessary, otherwise dirty antennae can “blind” insects to their environment.*

*We humans can become blind to our God-settings. It can be very difficult to experience God in the midst of our complicated lives. We need to dust off our antennae. This chapter closes with a benediction from the poem, “For Longing” by John O’Donohue. Below is yet another blessing for us from the Irish poet, author and priest that can help freshen up our antennae for connecting to God—being present in each moment.*

*A Blessing for Presence by John O'Donohue*

*May you awaken to the mystery of being here  
And enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.  
May you have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.  
May you receive great encouragement when new frontiers beckon.  
May you respond to the call of your gift  
And find the courage to follow its path.  
May the flame of anger free you from falsity.  
May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame and anxiety never linger about you.  
May your outer  
dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.  
May you take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.  
May you be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.  
May you experience each day as a sacred gift,  
Woven around the heart of wonder.*

Source: O'Donohue, J., (1998). *Eternal Echoes. Exploring our hunger to belong.*  
London, Bantam Books (139).

1. Give copies of the poem to each class member and allow them to read it silently. Ask each to note which phrases “speak” to them.
2. Read through the poem aloud, pausing at the end of each line, giving members opportunity for discussing its meaning and what impact it has on them.
3. Engage in further discussion with things like, “Which phrases speak to you most? What phrases are more challenging to you? Which do you find comforting?”
4. If you want to go further, have class members select a phrase or two (or the poem in its entirety) that they want to incorporate into their prayer times for themselves or for others in the class. They could practice these as breath prayers or any other manner they choose. Provide time in the next class for feedback about this activity.

## *A Blessing for Presence by John O'Donohue*

*May you awaken to the mystery of being here  
And enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.  
May you have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.  
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never linger about you.  
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the quiet miracles that seek no attention.  
May you be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.  
May you experience each day as a sacred gift,  
Woven around the heart of wonder.*

Source: O'Donohue, J., (1998). *Eternal Echoes. Exploring our hunger to belong.*  
London, Bantam Books (139).

Option #3: Selling the Spiritual (15 – 20 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen to project images of advertisements, or printed handouts.

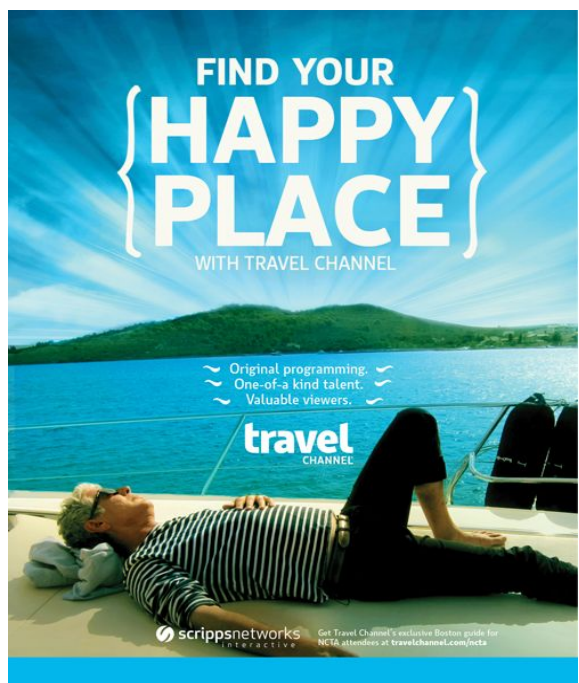
*The author says that if we do not find our deep, spiritual longings met in God, we will try to satisfy these longings with substitutes such as money, sex, power.*

*“Every product in every commercial is selling an answer to our spiritual longing, even if it is in the form of whiter teeth” (89). Whiter teeth will make me more attractive and I will be sexy and admired, right?! Then I’ll be happier, right?!*

*Advertisements for white teeth are not actually selling whiter teeth; they are selling happiness!*

- Ask participants to share examples of commercials they have seen or heard. Have them notice what answer to a spiritual longing the commercial is selling? (This can be done in the large group. As more people share, it will trigger thoughts of other commercials in others.)
- Or you could also collect some commercials (or use the ones in the handout below) and show them to the group. Ask participants what spiritual (transcendent) longing/need is being sold.
- Final REFLECTION QUESTION to ask: How have you sought the transcendent, the spiritual in money, sex and power? What lies have you believed from the culture about meeting your deepest needs that will truly only be met in God Himself?
- Allow time to answer the REFLECTION QUESTION if anyone wants to share.

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 5, Option #3 – SELLING THE SPIRITUAL



Option #4: Lectio Divina on PSALM 63 (20 minutes)

Supplies: Lectio Divina Handout, located in Chapter 1

## Psalm 63

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.  
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.  
Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,  
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,  
So I will bless you as long as I live;  
in your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,  
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips...

Option #5: PSALM 63 Reflection/Discussion (20 minutes)

After having someone read Psalm 63 (above) aloud, ask apprentices to:

*Take a moment to reflect on a time in your life  
when you felt completely satisfied in God,  
as with fat and rich food.*

*Enter into the memory and enjoy everything about it. (5 minutes)*

Group discussion can be in your large group or breaking into groups of 3.

*Share your reflections with others if you choose. (10 minutes)*



## GO IN PEACE

You are invited to spend a few moments in silence simply letting your spirit connect to the Holy Spirit as a child of God.

May you go in peace, and may you dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of your life, beholding the beauty of the Lord, meditating in His temple [from Psalm 27:4].

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter six the theme is that you are forgiven, once for all,  
and that we do not have to live a frantic life of confession to make sure  
we are forgiven for each jot and tittle of our sins.  
The Soul Training Exercise of "Laying Down Your Burden" will train you  
to walk in newness of life.*

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 6: YOU ARE FORGIVEN

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

The *finality of the cross* may be a new and even confusing phrase to some. Even the author says that when he first heard that phrase on a radio show, he wanted to ask the radio preacher if that was even Biblical. The *finality of the cross* means that Jesus has forgiven your past, present, and future sins on the cross. If some in your group struggle with whether that is Biblical, it might be very helpful for them to take the author's sidebar suggestion on page 107 to look up the verses in Hebrews ((listed on pages 107 – 108) and highlight the phrase “once for all” in their Bibles. “Once for all” speaks of the eternal redemption that Christ's sacrifice on the cross secured, and that we are FOREVER FORGIVEN because of what God, in Christ, has done—not because of anything we have done.

This knowledge is freeing. Our sins are *taken away*, not just covered up as in the concept of sacrificing animals. Our souls can be as light as feathers knowing that God is no longer dealing with us on the basis of our sins! This finality does not give us license to sin, but rather makes the sin so much less appealing (“slop”, as Dallas Willard states). We are inwardly motivated by this all-encompassing love and forever forgiveness to live out our identity of being “One in Whom Christ Dwells and Delights.” We will live differently, with a new joy, not because we *have to* (laws/guilt), but because we *want to* (response to love). God is not outside, judging us, but inside of us, drawing us into a life of deep union with Him.

Living under continual confession in order to be forgiven of our sins is a form of bondage that harms the soul and weighs it down. Imagine how that dynamic would play out in a relationship with your spouse or friend. Christ died in order to bring us to God, to restore our relationship with God, to open the door to deep union with the Trinity, not to put us under a burden of continual confession that would prevent the life and joy of our connection with Him.

Christ died to secure freedom from the power of sin and guilt. Some apprentices may think that believers need to confess continually to receive forgiveness. I John 1:9 is often used to support that position. Be prepared to address the Scripture in I John in light of healing (see pages 113 - 114). **You may be surprised to learn that to confess does not mean asking for forgiveness, but agreeing with a truth.**

Here's a word study that might be a place to start if you want to delve deeper into I John 1:9:

I John 1:9 says that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [NASB]. The Greek word here that is translated ‘confess’ is homologeo, which according to The Outline of Biblical Usage created by Larry Pierce means

to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent

Here is the *Vines Expository Dictionary* entry:

**Confess, Confession:**

lit., "to speak the same thing" (*homos*, "same," *lego*, "to speak"), "to assent, accord, agree with," denotes,

(a) "to confess, declare, admit," [Jhn 1:20](#); e.g., [Act 24:14](#); [Hbr 11:13](#)

If you look at John 1:20 (John the Baptist did not fail to *confess* that he was not the Messiah), Acts 24:14 (I *confess* that I worship the God of our ancestors) and Hebrews 11:13 (they *confessed* that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth), you will see the word translated *confess* in I John 1:9 means to agree with something. That something is found in I John 1:8, which says that you cannot claim you have not sinned. Somehow confession has come to mean asking for forgiveness of sins, a thought that is going farther than the meaning of *homologeō*, *agreeing* that you cannot claim sinlessness. Also, further context includes I John 1:7 which says that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin," where cleanses is in the future tense.

We ought to view this particular Scripture (I John 1:9) in light of the very clear teachings of Hebrews that Christ's blood is effective to cover sin once for all when Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies. Agreeing with the truth that we are not sinless does give us a reason to seek God's once for all forgiveness, but continually confessing our sins after receiving once for all forgiveness does not make us more forgiven. This is not just a New Testament concept. Psalm 103 clearly teaches that God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west.

WELCOME (2 minutes)

The writer of Psalm 133 says that dwelling together in unity is good and pleasant, like the anointment of fine oil that flows from head to beard and over the collar, and as refreshing as the dew. Perhaps you would like to describe the fellowship of your group in a way similar to express the warmth and goodness of your times together as you welcome them to another session.

End your welcome by saying:

*How wonderful to be on this journey with you who are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.*

*You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.*

*You are loved. You are made for God.*

*And you are forgiven.*

CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

from "How Far is the East from the West"  
by Hanne Moon

Western civilization orients itself northerly. All our maps are drawn with North being on the top of the page. We have a North pole at the top of the Earth and a South pole at the bottom of the Earth. Yet the Earth rotates on its axis in an easterly direction. Its movement is a continuous east-to-west-to-east rotation. While the North and South poles are definite points on the planet, and as such have a finite distance from one to the other, that is not true for the east or the west. There are no poles that delineate east and west. There are no fixed points on the globe that say, "This is east and this is west!" East to west to east is continuous, unending, and infinite.

Do you know how the Tabernacle was built? It was built in an east to west direction. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered up the sacrifices from the east and worked his way to the west, where the Holy of Holies was situated. There were two goats – one for a sin offering and one to be sent out into the wilderness, symbolically carrying the sins of the Israelites away. The goat that was freed was released in an easterly direction into the wilderness. This symbolized Israel's sins being removed from the east to the west and remembered no more.

Knowing that east to west is a limitless and non-ending rotation, Psalm 103:12 becomes clear: "He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west." That means our sins are removed from us in a way that has no end. There is no finite stop on this east-to-west direction.

<https://www.ourancientpaths.org/post/how-far-is-the-east-from-the-west>  
5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence is like a soul massage.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Jesus said,  
"Your sins are forgiven;  
rise and walk."  
Forgiveness is an unlocked door  
to walk through  
into a wide-whoopie-open world.  
Forgiveness is a seed  
to water with new dreams and wild risks  
until it bears unexpected fruit.*

*Forgiveness is a song to sing.  
Oh Lord, unlock the door  
of my heart.  
Amen.*

~ by Ted Loder ~

### SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large you may choose to divide into small groups of three.

Here are some questions to help apprentices share about their experiences with the Soul Training Exercise: "Laying Down Your Burden."

- 1. How did it feel to carry the weight of your sins around?*
- 2. How did it feel to lay your burdens down?*
- 3. How was it to walk with Jesus without your sins in the way?*

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25-45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. Do you live with unmanageable sin debt? Are you burdened by continual confession to keep your accounts clear with God? Does this keep you from living in the reality of the resurrection?
2. On page 106 the author says he had to pull his car over when he heard this on the radio:  
*"Until you rest in the finality of the cross, you will never experience the reality of the resurrection."* What does that mean? Do we too often think of the cross as the final thing rather than the beginning of victorious life in Christ? How so?
3. Have you ever entered into an intense battle to keep the law comprehensively? How did that go? What was the problem you ran up against?
4. How is our sin problem dealt a final blow? After contrasting the sacrificial system with the cross, we read on page 112 that "Jesus didn't cover up sin; ... he took away sin." Is there still a need to confess our sins to be forgiven? Why or why not?
5. On page 114 we read that "... confession is of great value." What is the value of confession if not for forgiveness? Please explain.
6. If it is true that we have forgiveness of sin once for all, doesn't that give us license to sin?

~ BREAK if you choose ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 – 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach” [Hebrews 10:1].

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens; who has no daily need, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because He did this **once for all time** when He offered up Himself [Hebrews 7:26,27, NASB, emphasis added].

Now please read in unison the following paraphrases of these Scriptures while giving thanks in your heart:

*The law can never make me perfect by continually offered sacrifices.  
But Christ took care of my sins **once for all time** by offering himself.*

Have another volunteer read the following Scripture aloud, and then answer the questions below:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33)

1. *What does it mean for God’s law to be written on your heart? Does that change your desires toward sin?*

2. *What is the relational outcome of that law within you?*

#### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

Option #1: Living Out of Forever Forgiveness (20 – 30 minutes)

The premise: “How would you live differently if God’s unconditional love and forgiveness permeated your soul? What might you be feeling or doing differently? What do you hope for in your new way of walking with God?” Since your group has studied half of the book together, some sense of community and trust have been developed. That trust is needed for this activity.

The activity: You may want to use a timer or have folks watch the time for 10, 15 or 20 minutes. (You, as leader, can set the time according to your group’s sharing/interaction levels they have displayed thus far in your study together.)

Have them get with a partner. Then give directions, or have them written for them:

*You may sit next to each other, or you may walk around together (indoors or out). You will be role-playing—one partner will play themselves and one partner will play God. The “person” begins the conversation with words like, “Sometimes it is still difficult for me to believe I am really forgiven, now and in the future.” They may continue talking in any manner they wish. “God” only needs to respond with affirmations like, “Yes, you are forgiven now and always.”*

*When the “person” seems at peace in the conversation, “God” can take the lead with questions like, “So now that you understand I am not dealing with you on the basis of your sins, what kind of things would you like to do...or not do? Would you like to make any changes? What things do you hope for in your life?”*

*The “person” may need some think time, so continue walking/sitting patiently together. Whenever the “person” does reply, “God” should respond with words of assurance such as, “I will be with you,” or “I am always with you.”*

*When it seems all has been shared, switch roles and repeat the process. Have them return to the room at the agreed upon time.*

*When everyone has gathered again, ask for feedback. What thoughts or feelings did they experience in this activity? What was difficult? What was easy? Any new insights or understandings?*

Option #2: The Prodigal by Tissot (15 minutes)

Supplies: Handouts of the painting, or project it on a large screen.



The Return of the Prodigal by James Tissot

in Public Domain

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/89/Brooklyn\\_Museum\\_-\\_The\\_Return\\_of\\_the\\_Prodigal\\_Son\\_%28Le\\_retour\\_de\\_l%27enfant\\_prodigue%29\\_-\\_James\\_Tissot.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/89/Brooklyn_Museum_-_The_Return_of_the_Prodigal_Son_%28Le_retour_de_l%27enfant_prodigue%29_-_James_Tissot.jpg)

Have an apprentice read aloud the parable from

Scripture: Luke 15:11-32.

Then lead a discussion on the painting using these questions as a guide:

1. *Let yourself be drawn into this painting. Observe carefully for 5 minutes.*
2. *What strikes you most?*
3. *Describe the emotions you see expressed in each of the figures.*
4. *Which figure do you identify with most? Why?*

HANDOUT TO PRINT IS ON THE NEXT PAGE: Chapter 6, Option #2







Option #3: Forgiveness as a Beginning: What's next? (15 – 25 minutes)

Choose two or more of the following passages to be read aloud to let apprentices ponder life after forgiveness in these narratives.

Have an apprentice read aloud the forgiveness story of John 8: 1-11.

- Ponder: *What kind of life did Jesus describe for the woman after her forgiveness?*  
*How might your life look if you lived in the same post-forgiveness way?*
- Share: Invite a few in your group to share if they choose.

Have an apprentice read aloud the forgiveness story in Luke 7: 36-50.

- Ponder: *What kind of life did Jesus describe for someone after they have been forgiven much?*  
*How might your life look if you lived in the same post-forgiveness way?*
- Share: Invite a few in your group to share if they choose.

Have an apprentice read aloud the forgiveness story in Mark 2: 1-12.

- Ponder: *What next steps did Jesus describe for the man after his forgiveness?*  
*How might your life look if you lived in the same post-forgiveness way?*
- Share: Invite a few in your group share if they choose.

Have an apprentice read aloud the forgiveness parable in Luke 15: 17-24.

- Ponder: *What kind of life did the father describe for the prodigal son after his forgiveness?*  
*How might your life look if you lived with the same post-forgiveness way?*
- Share: Invite a few in your group share if they choose.

End the exercise by reading this quote:

*Dallas Willard said to the author: "It is a wonderful thing to know that God is no longer dealing with us on the basis of our sins."*

GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*Reflect silently for a few minutes on how different your life is now that your sins are removed as far as the east is from the west.*

*May you go in peace, knowing that you have a clean erasure of all your sins, even the ones you never confess.*

#### FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter seven the theme is that you have been made alive in Christ. The Soul Training Exercise, "If I were a child," will help you enter the Kingdom as a little child, full of life, joy, and curiosity. Please note that this exercise may be practiced throughout a whole day if you choose. Also, feel free to explore TRUST as another category in addition to JOY and CURIOSITY. Children are generally very trusting if their parents have provided an atmosphere of safety. God, your Father, is trustworthy. You might explore responding as a child to your trusting Father God.*

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 7: YOU HAVE BEEN MADE ALIVE

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

We know we have been forgiven, and now we go a step further in learning who we really are. We are *alive with Christ*. This idea can conjure up a boring, “stuffed shirt” life to some. However, Jesus promises *abundant* life!

#### Cross more familiar and focused on than the empty tomb

The cross is perhaps the most common concept/symbol in most of our church cultures. Millions of people wear a cross as jewelry, but who wears an empty tomb? In some church denominations they have an altar call at the end of the Sunday service that is totally focused on the cross and on the decision to receive Christ, without equal emphasis on the new life lived in the power of the resurrection that Christ gives. Many participants in your group may think the focus on the cross is normal, or even good and right.

#### Necessary, but not Sufficient

As the author says, the cross is an incredibly important part of the gospel. But it is not the whole story. As Paul said in I Corinthians 15: 14, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain.” [NASB] Christ’s death on the cross was a true sacrifice for our sins, but that takes us back to square zero. Guilt removed. The gospel does not leave us as merely forgiven. It offers us new life! And that occurs through the Resurrection.

Although it may be different to focus on the Resurrection as much as on the Cross, it will be a joyful, powerful, hopeful change in perspective! So do not be afraid to announce this amazing part of the whole gospel. Christ was raised from the dead to give us abundant life *beginning now*, continuing through all eternity! Jesus came to give us His joy!

This blissful, exuberant type of life is not on the radar of many Christians. Some may balk at the idea of looking at the world with child-like wonder—it can seem immature or even silly. Indeed, there are many ways we can express our delight in living in God’s unshakable kingdom. This pleasure can take the form of literally jumping for joy by some or simply having a wide grin come across the face of others. Joyfulness comes in many shapes. Allow your extroverts and your introverts the freedom to share their excitement in the forms most comfortable to them.

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Express your joy in discovering the person Jesus created you to be  
in the community of this particular group.

End your welcome by saying:

*I look forward to being with you who are no mere mortal,*

*but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. You are made for God. You are forgiven.  
And you have been made alive!*

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

##### True Story

A lady wanted to take her granddaughter, a little 4-year-old girl named Alayna, to see the cherry blossoms when they were in full bloom in the D.C. area. The grandmother bought paddle boat tickets for the Tidal Basin, a lovely body of water surrounded by 4,000 Yoshino cherry trees and several memorials. The grandmother drove to the address on the tickets she had purchased online. It was over an hour's drive, and when they arrived, the grandmother realized there was no water! It turned out she had driven to the office of the paddle boat company, not the address of the Tidal Basin. Because she had to have Alayna home at a certain time, she couldn't drive another hour to the Tidal Basin, but the National Arboretum was nearby. Since it had lots of trees, surely it would have lots of cherry blossoms also. Right? But after driving around the arboretum for 20 minutes, they finally found *one* cherry tree. By now the grandmother is feeling very disappointed in the adventure, but as they parked the car and got out to walk up the little hill to the single cherry tree, Alayna stepped out of the car and said with such joy, "Grandma, Grandma!!!" Though Alayna had been riding in the car for hours by now, she bent down and picked a flower and with a voice full of sheer delight said, "A dandelion!"

The grandmother melted in sheer amazement that in her frustrated quest for exotic cherry blossoms, Alayna was just thrilled with a common dandelion, which wasn't common to Alayna at all. It was beautiful because she still had that child-like excitement to see the yellow flower she knew so well in all its glory. Her face was so full of light and joy! The grandmother didn't even know if she should bother hiking the little hill to the cherry tree. But they did, though it was not the star of the show that day.

May we all be alive enough to come to each day with child-like joy.

#### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (6 minutes)

*May your prayer of listening deepen enough  
To hear in the depths the laughter of God.  
(John O' Donahue)*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*O God, your gracious Spirit  
moves over the mysteries of living and dying  
and is strangely present to me  
in the falling leaves,  
the call of the wild geese,  
a child's birth,  
the light in a friend's eyes,  
the sudden lifting of the heart,  
and the deep longing which brings me to you now.*

*Make me aware of your presence  
that wonder may have its way with me,  
my passion be released,  
my confidence renewed in the depths of your holiness  
until, for a moment,  
my longing for you be fulfilled  
and I know I am really free  
to share bread and intimacy,  
to laugh and exchange mercy,  
to be at ease in my struggles,  
bold in my loving,  
brave in facing down my terror,  
hopeful in the rising music of your kingdom,  
joyful in my living,  
and graceful in my life becoming  
a song of praise ever sung to you.  
Amen.*

*~ by Ted Loder ~*

SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

If your group is large, you may want to divide into small groups of three to share how the Soul Training Exercise of being child-like was experienced.

- 1. Did you have resistance to this exercise? How were you able to overcome that resistance?*
- 2. The author says that "Your soul was not made for sin, but for happiness and fun and excitement." Did this exercise put you in a place of experiencing happiness, fun or excitement? Would you like to share specifics?*

*3. Did your soul seem a little lighter or freer after your experiences of child-like responses or curiosity? Please elaborate.*

#### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25 – 45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

*1. After Stan finally realized that he was a butterfly, he said “Now the gospel makes sense. It is not about what we do for God. It is what God has done for us” (123). What about you? Are you, even some of the time, living as though it’s all about what you do for God? If so, what is that like for you? Or are you living in the gospel that it’s all about what God has done for you? If so, what’s that like for you?*

*2. The author says on page 124 that a gospel that focuses only on escaping death “is not wrong, it is just incomplete.” Think back to your conversion story or maybe the first time you were presented with the gospel. Was it an incomplete gospel? What was missing? How did that affect your journey?*

*3. How does the resurrection apply to your everyday life?*

*4. What’s your response to this statement on page 129: “You and I come pre-made to be conformed to the image of Christ”? What effect does it have on your day-to-day journey that you are already “shaped” for becoming like Jesus?*

*5. What is the image of God in you? How would you support that from Scripture? How do you become conformed to that image?*

*6. What are two aspects of the easy yoke? Have you experienced either of them? You are invited to share your experience with either.*

~ BREAK if you choose ~

#### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 – 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud. Then use the questions below to discuss this passage:

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” [Gal. 2:20].*

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” [Eph. 2:4-6].*

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *this person is a new creation*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come [2 Cor. 5:17].

1. *According to these Scriptures, why is it unnecessary to walk around as a “forgiven dead person”?*
2. *What seems to bring about Christ living in you according to these Scriptures?*
3. *What might life be like if you lived in the reality of Christ in you and you in Christ?*

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION  
(Choose one, or two if time permits.)

Option #1: Jesus showed Himself alive after his suffering. (20 – 25 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen for projecting the image below.

*Acts 1:3 tells us that after the resurrection, Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering” to the disciples. The victorious, resurrected Lord had suffered a cruel death on the cross, was marred more than any man, and bore our shame. But he lived to tell about it, not as a survivor, but as a thriver! Jesus connected with the disciples in familiar, relational ways, such as walking along a road while chatting, inviting them to a fish sandwich breakfast, suggesting they throw their fishing nets to the other side of the boat.*

*How this must have encouraged and strengthened the disciples!*

- *Have you suffered? Without sharing too many details of your suffering, please share how you have presented yourself alive after your suffering, as Jesus did?*

*For example, maybe you were abandoned by your spouse. You suffered great loss. But God was with you every step along the way and has restored you to healthier relationships. You learned so much about yourself and about God during your suffering that you can’t imagine learning any other way. You are walking closer to God than ever before.*

*Form groups of 3 to share with each other ways that you now thrive, where you once suffered. This will encourage and strengthen each other.*

*(If some in your group can’t think of anything to share, or maybe they are still in the middle of the suffering, invite them to pass and just listen to those who can encourage them with their life after suffering.)*

You might have this picture of Jesus on the road to Emmaus up on a screen during the exercise for inspiration:



<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/35/9d/74/359d741d1964ac469437a4f0665e5860.jpg>

Option #2: Gladness of Heart (25 minutes)

“Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). We may have long ago lost our thrill of feeling alive in God’s good and beautiful world. Many adults need “enjoyment” practice. So, this activity will bring us back to our child-like gladness of heart.

Supplies: You will need at least one balloon or beach ball, however you will want to gather several/many smaller beach balls, balloons, beach towels and/or hula hoops if you choose certain activities from the suggested list.

You can choose from the list of options, depending on the size of your room and your group, as well as their movement comfort level. You may want to experience this activity outdoors if the weather is acceptable. Whatever you choose, the goal will be the same—experiencing elation and glee!

1. Whole group: Have the group work together to keep the balloon or beach ball off of the floor as they hit it to each other around a circle. As the leader, you could use a timer and see if the group can increase the “air” time with succeeding tries, or you could count the number of “hits” before the balloon touches the ground. Have the group try to increase that number of hits with further efforts.



2. Individuals: Each person throws their balloon/beach ball into the air and claps as many times as possible before catching it. Try to increase the number of claps as each tosses their object again and again. This could also be done in pairs.
3. Pairs: One partner firmly holds a hula hoop as a basketball goal and the other partner tries to “shoot” as many free throws as possible in a set time (the distance apart can be as little or as far as you like). Partners can switch and then add their scores together for their team. Teams can aspire to the highest score, or add all team scores together, trying to raise the group score with succeeding attempts.
4. Pairs: Partners need one beach towel and one balloon/beach ball and firmly hold the four corners of the towel. After they place the balloon/beach ball in the center of the towel, the leader says, “go,” and partners flip their beach ball in the air with their beach towel as many times as they can before the object hits the ground. Again, teams can aspire to the highest score, or add all the team scores together, trying to raise the group score with succeeding attempts.
5. Pairs: (for the athletically inclined) Place a balloon/beach ball between the backs/hips of each pair, partners standing back-to-back. Partners can link arms at the elbows or simply walk closely together around a circle, keeping the object between them. The goal is to keep their object from falling to the floor. If the balloon/ball falls, they are out of the competition. Last pair upright and walking wins!
6. Celebration: You may want to award some prizes (candy or trophies) at the next class session. You can present awards for the various competitions, not just for top success, but for other areas such as “Most supportive team,” “Loudest laughing team,” etc.

At the conclusion, process with the group: *What did you experience? How did you feel? What was comfortable/uncomfortable? What thoughts did you have? Did you experience elation and glee? What did that feel like?*

Option #3: He is Alive! (15 minutes)

Watch this video of David Phelps singing “He’s Alive!”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gGa1w\\_bnvM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gGa1w_bnvM)

Then read Romans 8: 9-11 aloud.

*“<sup>9</sup> ... you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. <sup>10</sup> If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” [NASB]*

Group discussion:

*What differences does it make in your life that the resurrected Christ lives in you?*

GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*You are invited to live the resurrection life because  
“the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you”  
[Romans 8:11, NIV].*

Give apprentices a few moments of silent reflection.

*May you go in peace, resting in the reality of resurrection life,  
which is given to you freely, as a gift.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

*The theme of chapter eight is that you are made holy  
because Christ dwells and delights in you.  
The Soul Training Exercise of “Saying Yes to God Always” will flow out of the reality of  
the resurrected life of Christ living in you.  
*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?**

## CHAPTER 8: YOU HAVE BEEN MADE HOLY

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

We might be beginning to grasp that we are loved and desired by God and even that we are forgiven forever, but *holy*? Really? That takes us to a whole new level of identity—one that can cause much consternation.

The author explains that we are not holy because of our behavior, but because of our identity in Christ. We are not holy because of what we have done, but because of what God has done. In fact, we *can't* accomplish holiness simply by our willpower.

Our *nature* is made holy as a gift given to us by God when He makes us a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5: 17). Our *character* then begins the process of being changed to conform to that holy nature through the indwelling Christ. Yes! He actually lives, dwells, inhabits, abides in us! Holiness is not simply modifying our behavior. Holiness is deeply relational, which means that this conformity of our character to Christ's character, also in sync with our new nature, is not accomplished by sheer grit, but through our union with Christ. Psalm 1 is a great illustration of this reality, that the tree planted by the rivers of water, sinking its roots deep down into the Living Water that is Christ grows and changes as a result of the Christ-life taken into the very fiber of the tree through the stream.

Dallas Willard's definition of holiness: "Doing the appropriate thing at the appropriate time," may be helpful in our understanding of the word *holy*. Not all holy people are called to move mountains. Taking soup to an ill friend, truly listening to a hurting teenager, shoveling snow for an elderly neighbor or baking cookies for the local first responders are all holy acts done by a holy person. Being in relationship with God and responding to His nudges makes us holy. This symbiosis with Christ's power enables us to find sin no longer interesting. Simply put, it's just not who we are any more. We are now saints made holy by Jesus, because His indwelling strength and love will be forever in us. This symbiosis with Christ's power enables us to find sin no longer interesting. Simply put, it's just not who we are any more. We are now saints made holy by Jesus, because His indwelling strength and love will be forever with us.

Through Christ's death we are forgiven; through Christ's resurrection we are made alive; through Christ's indwelling we are made holy.

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Offer a warm welcome to your group,  
sharing how much you appreciate the fellowship of each apprentice.  
Highlight any joys and share any hopeful expectations.  
End your welcome by saying:

*What a joy to be with you who are no mere mortals,  
but never-ceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. You are made for God. You are forgiven. You have been made alive!  
And you have been made holy.*

CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

*"Transformed"*

The following 4 quotes are from *Hinds' Feet on High Places: Journal*

*"Not only would I have to make your feet like hinds' feet, but you would have to receive another name, for it would be as impossible for a Much-Afraid to enter the Kingdom of Love as for any other member of the Fearing family. Are you willing to be changed completely, Much-Afraid, and to be made like the new name which you will receive if you become a citizen in the Kingdom of Love?  
~ The Chief Shepherd*

*"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."  
~ Romans 12:2 [ESV]*

*"God is waiting...to transform us through every experience we have, waiting for us to recognize Him in each move we make.  
We can make our lives a prayer by becoming aware of God in each moment as we move through our day, whether we're having a breathtaking moment of adventure and beauty or performing a mundane task.  
God is the God of the present;  
He is in each moment and He wants to be found."  
~ Mia Pohlman*

*For [God] is, indeed, a wonderful Father who long to pour out His mercy upon us, and whose majesty is so great that He can transform us from deep within.  
~ Teresa of Avila*

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

*Silence invites us into awareness of our union with the Trinity.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.*

*I will end the silence with a prayer.*

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*God, we receive your “everlasting intent for human life –  
namely,  
that we should be in every aspect a dwelling place of God...  
as a reality on earth,  
centered in the person of Jesus.”\*  
May we abide in You,  
as You abide in us.  
Amen.*

*\* (~ Richard Foster)*

SOUL TRAINING (15 – 20 minutes)

If your group is large, you may want to break up into groups of 3 for this discussion.

1. *Did you sense an area where God is calling you to say Yes to him?*
2. *How was it to just connect to God as tree roots draw nourishment from the earth and river?*
3. *What specific graces did you receive from connecting to God?*

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25 – 45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. Why do you think the “I’m just a sinner, saved by grace” narrative is such a prevalent one? Has it had much power in your own life? What kind of fruit does it seem to produce?
2. Is the narrative “By the grace of God, I have been made holy” new for you? Does it seem more in sync with your soul’s longing for purity? How would you explain this narrative?
3. The author states that “this sanctification, this holiness we receive by grace, is not merely positional but is ‘accomplished’” (146). What difference do you see in these two ideas, and why does it matter?
4. The author states that “What Christ has done compels us to what we can and now must do” (148). What has Christ done? How is that compelling?

5. Since your identity in Christ is “a saint made holy by Jesus,” what brings consonance with that identity? What brings dissonance? Does your own experience validate this dynamic?

6. The pride form, the desire to be God (original sin) resists grace, and puts our soul in a state of dissonance and war within. How can our pride give way to holiness?

~ BREAK if you choose ~

#### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 - 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud :

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. [1 Cor. 15:22]

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. [Eph. 5:8]

Therefore, walk in the light as he himself is in the light. [1 John 1:7]

...Christ...is our life. [Col. 3:4]

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. [Gal. 2: 20]

1. What do these verses on light and life have to do with relational holiness?

2. What kind of hope do these verses give us for being conformed to the holy character of Jesus?

#### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

Option #1: Mirror the Mystery (20 minutes)

*Adrian van Kaam taught that as our life form becomes conformed to the Christ-form within, we find obedience easier. We begin to reflect the Mystery. Jesus told us to love one another as he has loved us. It is the nature of love to overflow. Mirroring the Mystery means to first receive from God all things good and true and beautiful, so that these can overflow from us into the world.*

1. *Take a few moments of silent prayer to listen to God for one area where you struggle to be conformed to the image of Christ. It might be gossiping or ungratefulness or unforgiveness, etc. Listen to God with the heart of the Psalmist:*

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;*

*Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there is any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way."*

Psalm 139:23-24 [NASB]

2. Write the word (your area of struggle) in your journal in small letters.
3. Now prayerfully ask God what you need to receive from Him to Mirror the Mystery of who He is. Write whatever that is in larger letters over the top of the struggle word that you wrote.

*For example, if you are struggling with gossip, you might hear God connect your gossiping to your deep desire to be loved and admired. (That is not always the motivation for gossip, which is why we are listening to the Lord to reveal specific motivations.) The Spirit may then show you that His love and admiration is what you need to receive in order to not need to gossip to make someone else look bad so that you look good. Jesus knew that He was Beloved of God. As you come to know that you are Beloved of God, you should have no need to gossip to receive love and admiration. You would write LOVE AND ADMIRATION over the word gossip.*

4. Take time to receive what you need from God. Meditate on the aspect of God and His grace that you need.

*(Note to show another example for the same struggle: Perhaps the Spirit tells you that you are gossiping because you are just loose with your tongue and want to make people laugh or feel like an insider. Then perhaps what God draws you into is how Jesus is the way, the TRUTH, and the life. Perhaps you need to receive God's way of love that always rejoices with the truth. Receive how much it means to you that God always speaks the truth in love to you, that He is never haphazard with His words, but speaks words of life and grace to you.)*

~Give time for processing in the group.~

Then end with this quote:

*"You are the living flame...enter into me and set me on fire after your pattern and your likeness." ~ John Henry Cardinal Newman*

#### Option 2: Big decisions/little decisions (20 – 25 minutes)

1. Show the image of the Annunciation on a screen or make copies and hand out to the apprentices. Read the last few lines of Malcolm Guite's poem, *Annunciation as they look at the painting*.

*... on this day a young girl stopped to see*

*With open eyes and heart. She heard the voice;  
The promise of His glory yet to be,  
As time stood still for her to make a choice;  
Gabriel knelt and not a feather stirred,  
The Word himself was waiting on her word.*

~Malcolm Guite, *Annunciation*



*Annunciation* by Henry Ossawa Tanner

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Annunciation\\_\(Tanner\)#/media/File:Henry\\_Ossawa\\_Tanner,\\_American\\_\(active\\_France\)\\_-\\_The\\_Annunciation\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Annunciation_(Tanner)#/media/File:Henry_Ossawa_Tanner,_American_(active_France)_-_The_Annunciation_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg) (In public domain.)

2. *What is a big decision that God has called you to make in the past? What was that like? Did your decision flow out of your relationship with Him? How so or how not so?*
3. *Show this image to apprentices on a large screen or hand out copies for them.*



<https://pixabay.com/en/siblings-brother-sister-children-817369/960X669>  
(Copyright free image.)

4. *What is a little decision you have made in the last day or two that flowed out of your relationship with God? What was that like?*

Please have apprentices share their reflections in the large group or in groups of three.



HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 8 , Option #2 – BIG DECISIONS, LITTLE DECISIONS



*Annunciation* by Henry Osawa Tanner



Option #3: A Sacred Identity Reminder (25 minutes)

Materials needed: paper, pens, markers

We can forget that we are a holy child of God, empowered by His spirit. This can happen to those who have newly come to believe this great news as well as to those who have long lived in that beautiful reality. We all need reminders.

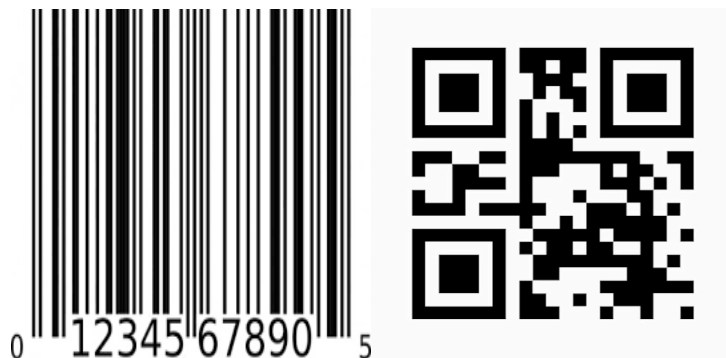
Even though our author exposes the negative reflections of a barcode—the outside message can override the inside truth—they most often are packed with accurate data. In a small space, bar codes and QR codes give us important information. In this exercise, they will be our inspiration for remembering “who we are.”

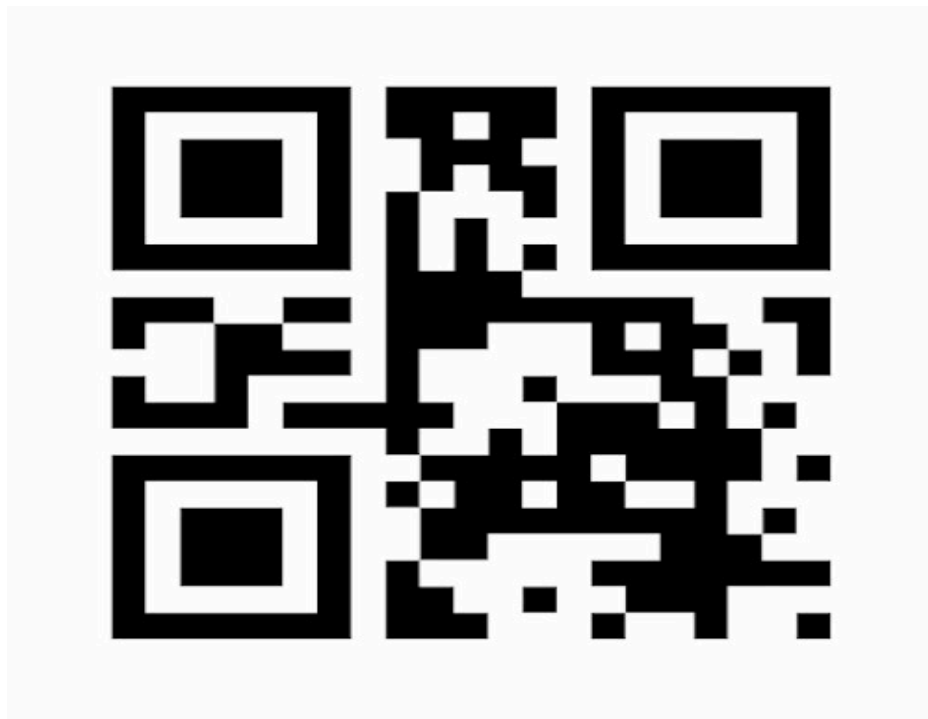
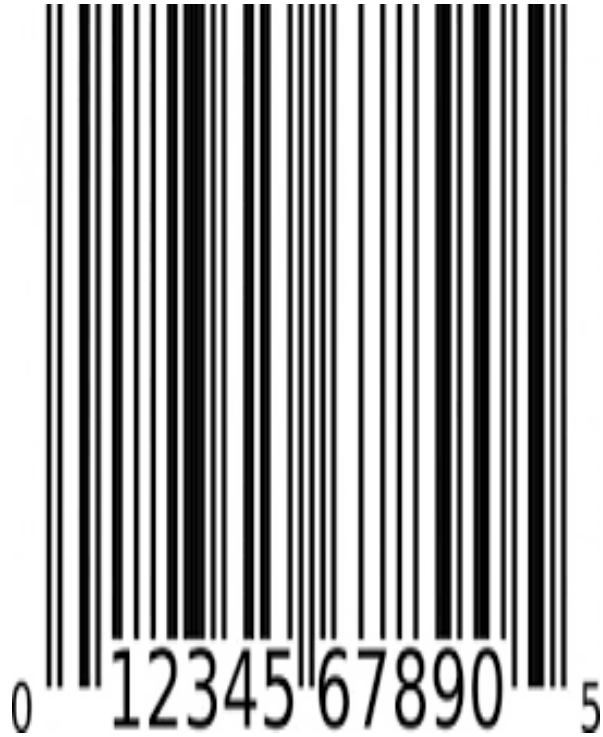
Have each class member think of words or phrases that are strong messages of their identity in Christ, and then write them down. It can be as simple as one sentence, “I am holy because I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights.” It can be lengthier like on p. 154 of our book, “I was wanted by God before I existed. I am loved by God without condition. I have been forgiven forever, I have been made alive, and I have been made holy by the grace of God in Jesus. I can approach God with freedom and confidence.”

Each class member will then be ready to create their own personal bar code/QR code. Using the words they selected, have them make a design with their messages resembling the shape of a bar code or QR code. Their words can be written/drawn sideways, lengthwise—in any manner they choose. Sizes and shapes of designs will vary. It is their design and meant to be a reminder of their sacredness. Creativity can abound!

Folks might even choose to frame theirs or make copies to put in various places—their car, on their desk, carry in their wallet, etc. so they can always remember who they are and whose they are.

Members may share their completed creations with the class, and/or all can be displayed together in the classroom.





GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*You are invited to rest in Christ whose Spirit dwells in you, making you holy.*

*Let's pray:  
"Now,  
O Lord,  
calm me into a quietness  
that heals  
and listens,  
and molds my longings  
and passions,  
my wounds  
and wonderings  
into a more holy  
and human  
shape."  
Amen.*

~ Ted Loder ~

*Let's take a few minutes of silence.*

After a few minutes:

*May you go in peace, empowered to be holy as He is holy, because He lives in you.*

#### FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter nine the focus is on your sacred story. The soul-training exercise of letting God retell a part of your story will help you to see yourself from God's perspective.*

*[Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?](#)*

**Leaders:** Please read through the Chapter #9 Chapter Challenge before you dismiss the class from this Chapter #8 session. You may want to save time to prepare them for the topic a little, especially the Soul Training Exercise.

## CHAPTER 9: YOU HAVE A SACRED STORY

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Some people will have very painful stories that may be unhealed, so this chapter may hit them in a very uncomfortable way. You as a leader might let apprentices know that is not uncommon to approach one's wounds with various negative emotions. Others in the class surely feel the same way. Jesus wants to enter into their stories with them and show His power and love to redeem their story, which sometimes can be a long process. As the author points out, "...true healing comes only from the One who is truly sufficient, the One whose love never fails" (160).

It is crucial to understand that we are the subjects of a much better story than the one we usually tell ourselves. Learning that the real author of our story is God and when we experience His re-narration of the difficult and heartbreaking times in our lives, our hearts can begin to heal. "Losses, rejection, neglect, verbal and physical assault affect us—but they do not get the last word." (169).

Maybe now is the time for some to receive deep healing from God. This may come as they work through this chapter, but they might also need the help of a trusted counselor, therapist, prayer minister, spiritual director or pastor. You might help apprentices find the help they need.

A note about the Soul Training Exercise: "Retelling Your Sacred Story"

This exercise is NOT intended for apprentices to relive any trauma or pain. Note the last sentence under ##2 on page 175, which says: "Write the assault or withdrawal in your journal, but don't try to dwell on it or relive it." We can ask Jesus to show us any hurts or trauma that resulted in a lie that is falsely shaping the story we tell ourselves about our life. Entering back into the emotional pain of that event isn't necessary for God to re-story us, to tell us the true narrative. For example, if you were emotionally abused by a brother (bullying, belittling, etc.) which resulted in a false narrative about yourself that you are unworthy to be loved and respected, you need to decouple the abuse from the false narrative you are telling about yourself, yet without *feeling* the pain of that abuse. You need God to replace the lie you believed (your unworthiness to be loved and respected) as a result of the abuse. That does not require going through the pain again. If intense pain surfaces anyway, though you are not focusing on it, that is an indication that you might need someone to accompany you in the healing of your story.

WELCOME (2 minutes)

Warmly welcome your group from your heart.

Larry Crabb describes *community* as a place “where no one remains unknown, unexplored, undiscovered, or untouched; where we discover our true selves; where we realize that we really are passionate followers of Jesus; where people become spiritual friends.”

You might thank apprentices for the vulnerability they are showing to journey in this good and beautiful community together, especially around this chapter’s theme of their story.

End your welcome by saying:

*What a joy to be in community with you who are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. You are made for God. You are forgiven. You have been made alive!  
You have been made holy. And you have a sacred story.*

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

Suffering and pain do not get the last word in our stories.

“God reveals Himself in our suffering. There is no resurrection without crucifixion; no glory without suffering. Healing, therefore, isn’t quite what we thought it would be. Our dark emotions reveal God; they open the road to true joy. This is the central message of the book of Psalms: *we encounter divine goodness in the midst of pain.*”

~ Dan Allender

“There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!”

[Rom. 5: 3-5; The Message]

#### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*“... to come into silence is to come into the presence of the Divine...  
you allow yourself to be enfolded by that stillness.”*

~ John O’Donohue

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to enter the Divine presence.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

## PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Help me to believe in beginnings,  
to make a beginning,  
to be a beginning,  
so that I may not just grow old,  
but grow new  
each day of this wild, amazing life  
you call me to live  
with the passion of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

*~ by Ted Loder ~*

## SOUL TRAINING (15 – 20 minutes)

If your group is large you may want to divide into small groups of 3.

- 1. What did you learn about yourself as you looked more closely at your story?*
- 2. What did you learn about God as you looked more closely at your story?*

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25 – 45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

- 1. What is meant by the term “circle of origin”? What is your circle of origin?*
- 2. The author says on page 163 that “Mom and Dad not only give us their DNA, they also give us our sense of worth.” In what ways did you get both DNA and sense of worth from your parents or other primary caregiver?*
- 3. Is anyone’s circle of origin also a circle of sufficiency? Why or why not? What is the only circle of sufficiency? Can you share your personal experience with the only sufficient circle?*
- 4. What are the two ways others harm us? Did you experience either of those in a way that shaped your soul? Please share as you are comfortable.*
- 5. What does it mean to ultimize parts of your story? What does it mean to minimize your story? Do you see any examples in your own life? If you feel comfortable, you are invited to share your example.*
- 6. What does it mean to experience healing of your story? Why do we sometimes resist that? How did God begin the healing of Hope’s story? Have you received some healing of your story? What has that looked like?*

~ BREAK if you choose ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 – 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scriptures aloud prior to discussing the question(s) that follow each selection:

Reader, please include this brief introduction in your reading aloud:

*This first verse is probably one of the most frequently quoted Scriptures, especially in times of tragedy, and perhaps our overfamiliarity with it makes it hard for us to hear the living and active truth of this amazing promise. But open your heart to hearing it afresh.*

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose [Rom. 8: 28, NASB].*

*Sometimes it helps to hear it is an alternate version:*

1. *“Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good” [Rom. 8: 28, JB Phillips].*

*How might this truth apply to your sacred story?*

2. *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Rom. 8: 38-39].*

*How might this verse encourage you regarding the difficult elements of your story?*

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

Option #1: God Is There After All (25 minutes)

Supplies: Please cast the image on a large screen, if possible. If not apprentices can use their imagination from hearing the I Kings passage (below) read aloud.

Read while apprentices look at the image or ask them to imagine the scene:

*Elisha and his servant were in a city surrounded by an army and chariots. Elisha knew that God was with them, but the servant couldn't see it. So Elisha prayed for the servant's eyes to be opened, and then the servant could see that God had filled the hills with horses and chariots of fire. (see I Kings 6: 15-20)*





<https://i0.wp.com/thewarehouse.blog/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2-Kings-6.jpg?resize=1200%2C500&ssl=1>

*1. What is a part of your current story where it seems that God isn't present? Maybe it is a suffering child or friend. Maybe it is a failure, struggle or loss. Whatever it is, take a few minutes of silent prayer to ask God to show you where He is in that aspect of your current life. Listen for Him to communicate with you. He may bring an image, words or a thought to your mind. Receive His presence with gratefulness. He is with you through the fire.*

~ 5 minutes of silent prayer ~

*2. Break into groups of 3 if desired to share your example of how God is there after all. Or invite any that want to share in the large group.*

Option #2: All my love, God (25 minutes)

Supplies: gift pens, wrappings, notes, extra goodies or flowers

Having God rewrite our story with us is the most beautiful of gifts. Sometimes an actual present can be a physical symbol that will help reveal this.

Get pens engraved with words such as, "You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights." Place pens in small gift boxes or bags to be given to each class member. Decorate them if you choose. Inside of each, write the following on a piece of paper or a card:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You are the wonderful subject in your sacred, beautiful story. Yet some of your story may not feel beautiful at all. Rest in Me. You and I are now writing together. We can rewrite your past as well as compose the rest of your

magnificent story together. You will never be without my strength and peace since I dwell in you. We are a marvelous team – what adventures we will have!

All my love, God

To make your gifts sweeter, you may want to add cookies, candy, other treats or flowers to the individual presents. If a holiday is near, that can inspire your creation.

After your apprentices open their gifts, allow time for their reflections and then ask:

1. *How do you feel about your gift?*
2. *Are there important parts of your story that God has rewritten with you? Why were these “rewrites” so vital?*
3. *What do you hope your “future story with God” might look like?*

Allow time for class members to share their individual “rewrites with God” or “future story with God” as they feel comfortable.

NOTES FROM GOD TO PRINT AND CUT (on next page)

*Dear*

*You are the wonderful subject in your sacred, beautiful story. Yet some of your story may not feel beautiful at all. Rest in Me. You and I are now writing together. We can rewrite your past as well as compose the rest of your magnificent story together. You will never be without my strength and peace as I dwell in you. We are a marvelous team--what adventures we will have!*

*All my love, God*

*Dear*

*You are the wonderful subject in your sacred, beautiful story. Yet some of your story may not feel beautiful at all. Rest in Me. You and I are now writing together. We can rewrite your past as well as compose the rest of your magnificent story together. You will never be without my strength and peace as I dwell in you. We are a marvelous team--what adventures we will have!*

*All my love, God*

*Dear*

*You are the wonderful subject in your sacred, beautiful story. Yet some of your story may not feel beautiful at all. Rest in Me. You and I are now writing together. We can rewrite your past as well as compose the rest of your magnificent story together. You will never be without my strength and peace as I dwell in you. We are a marvelous team--what adventures we will have!*

*All my love, God*

*Dear*

*You are the wonderful subject in your sacred, beautiful story. Yet some of your story may not feel beautiful at all. Rest in Me. You and I are now writing together. We can rewrite your past as well as compose the rest of your magnificent story together. You will never be without my strength and peace as I dwell in you. We are a marvelous team--what adventures we will have!*

*All my love, God*

Option #3: Mending with Gold (25 minutes)

First, watch this short video explanation of Kintsugi all together:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPIJQHs\\_JxU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPIJQHs_JxU)

*The author ends chapter 1 by saying "I am sad for the few years I struggled as my soul atrophied, but I am not sad that I struggled. It led me to a new kind of love and freedom and passion I could never have experienced if I had not struggled" (25).*

1. *How have you experienced brokenness?*
2. *How have you also experienced having your soul redeemed in those broken places?*
3. *How might God be speaking to you in the Kintsugi process?*

Break up into groups of 3 if desired to share perceptions and to even ask for prayer. Or share in the large group and offer a prayer at the end.

Option #4: The True Story (20 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen to cast image below if possible. Otherwise, just read the story.

*Amy Carmichael was a single Irish lady who served as a missionary to India for 55 years. The crux of her work was rescuing young girls who were temple prostitutes, as well providing a home for children who were abandoned or orphaned.*



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/Amy\\_Carmichael\\_with\\_children2.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/Amy_Carmichael_with_children2.jpg)

(in public domain)

When Amy was a little girl her mother told her if she asked God for something, He would hear her prayer. So she prayed for Irish blue eyes. The next morning she woke up and ran to the mirror, but wailed when she saw that her eyes were still brown. Years later she would realize that God had meant for her to have brown eyes so that she could go into the Hindu temples in a sari with dark stain on her face and her brown eyes, passing as a Hindu so that she could rescue many temple

prostitutes, and give them a home. God knew her brown eyes would be a necessary part of her life's work.

1. *Can you think of an example of "brown eyes" in your life or in someone's life that you know? It could be something about you (or someone you know) that you (or someone you know) wanted to be different, but you can see how God made you just the way He wanted you to be?*
2. *Did God ever answer your prayer with a "no," as He did Amy when she asked for blue eyes, only for you to find out later why He said "no"?*

Give time for reflection of each question. The invite group to process in the large group, or in smaller groups if you choose.

GO IN PEACE (5 minutes)

*The Trinity encircles you with all that you need, even if you didn't get it from your family. The Trinity heals your soul of any inflicted harm. You are invited to spend a few minutes silently resting in the sufficiency of the circle of the Trinity.*

~ Silence ~

*May you go in peace, knowing that God looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun, and that He has written your unique name on a white stone, a name that is not erased by your story, but showcased by your story, for God is the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul, preserving your identity as you live out your sacred story.*

## RETREAT: TELLING YOUR STORY

~PLEASE PRINT this page and the next to give to Apprentices prior to the Retreat.~

The purpose of this retreat is to let each apprentice share their story  
in the presence of God and community:  
*to know and be known.*

This storytelling experience will hopefully:

1. Help each person to see God's movements and grace in their story.
2. Include the re-storying of at least one part of their story  
from the Soul Training Exercise at the end of Chapter 9.
3. Deepen the relationships within your group as you hear each other's stories.

INSTRUCTIONS for Apprentices – Please Complete Prior to the Retreat:

1. Please form a timeline, map, diagram, or any other visual form that allows you to describe your overall Spiritual Journey.
2. Please include one part of your story that you have let God rewrite, where you have traded in a false narrative, such as “I was so alone in my divorce,” to a true narrative, such as “God was right there providing comfort and wisdom through my sister and pastor.” You may want to relook at the Soul Training Exercise at the end of Chapter 9 so that you can add this redeemed element to your story.
3. Use any paper you like—or don't use paper.  
You may bring objects or even make PowerPoint presentations.

Do not fret about your final product! Artistic work is not the goal. Small symbols can mark major events—they can also indicate points when your path has changed. You can even draw where you want to be headed.

Your journey may have some broken or empty years of wandering in the desert; experiences of incredible growth; or times when you have solidified your closeness to God. You do not have to share painful details, or you may—however the Spirit moves you. Someone may share details about a suicide attempt; another may share things in a more general, non-specific way, such as “this was a very dark period in my spiritual life.”

Please bring this description of your Spiritual Journey to the Retreat.

## PROMPTS

Reflect on and include *only* what seems important to you:

- Who/when/what has influenced who you are spiritually.
- Relationships, including parent/child, spouse, extended family, community, world.
- Time periods: Early childhood, elementary years, Jr. high years, high school years, young adult years (college? entering job market? travels?), adult years.
- Cultural, socio-economic, and religious factors.
- Ideas, dreams, interests, longings, experiences.
- Where was God in the different stages/experiences of your life?

Let the Holy Spirit guide you as to what you choose to include in your Spiritual Journey. Tell us what you think is important and leave the rest.

Note: If you participated in “Mapping Our Spiritual Journey” at the beginning of *The Good and Beautiful God* study, that map can provide a basis for this activity.

You will want to add at least one re-storied element that came from the Soul Training Exercise for Chapter 9, and maybe more.

You will have 15 – 20 minutes to share your story in the group.

Lastly, you will have deepened your knowledge of God and yourself since that Mapping, so you can build upon your previously made map if you choose.

## NOTE

“Spiritual Journey” – This phrase – especially the word ‘Spiritual’ is not meant to narrow your focus to only “churchy” or “religious” elements, but to broaden your story to all the aspects of your life that have formed who you are in your inner person. The real you. Not the mask that you may wear to work or church or even with family. This is not a resume. This is the story of how YOU have become who you really are. Your essence. Your uniqueness. Your belovedness. Of course, if you are ‘in Christ,’ the indwelling of the Spirit, your relationship with God and longings for Him will affect every aspect of your being and doing.

---

[Please add any details you want to add here:](#)

Please adapt the Suggested Retreat Schedule below to suit your group and give that to participants either the week before or the morning of the retreat. You don't need to include the instructions or the prayers/readings, but just the time schedule of events. Most people want a sense of the schedule before they arrive, but you may have extra copies at the retreat center for those who have lost or forgotten theirs.

You could include the retreat center details/address/points of contact to the schedule document.

If a retreat away doesn't work for your group, consider accomplishing the storytelling within your normal meeting time. It may take a session or two to let everyone tell their story, but the bonding of your group will be more than worth it.

### SUPPLIES

- Bibles and journals for inspiration and notes
- Blank paper and pens/pencils for those who still need to work on their Spiritual Journey Friday evening after the meeting time.
- Large screen video
- Small table to place in the center of the circle, including a tablecloth. A candle to light for the table and a cross to put on table during the PRAISE FOR HIS PRESENCE on Friday evening and Saturday morning.
- Bookmarks & supplies if you choose Option 2 on Saturday afternoon (see below). You will also need some tables for making the bookmarks, perhaps in the dining room?

### RETREAT FACILITY

Please locate a retreat facility where there are enough rooms for all, and where there is a large meeting room to accommodate the size of your group. Unless your group is simply too large, you will want to sit in one large circle of chairs for the storytelling. Reserve an extra chair to place for Jesus. If your group is too large, then you will need more meeting rooms. Consider whether you want the retreat center to provide meals (recommended), or whether you will ask apprentices to prepare meals (can be fun, but complex).

Please arrange for a small table to be placed in the center of the Storytelling circle to acknowledge the sacredness of this time and space, meaning God is in your midst, like you may have done in the opening session to this book study. Make sure the candle and cross won't obstruct the view of apprentices from seeing those on the other side of the circle.



## SUGGESTED RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday evening:

6 p.m.            DINNER together

7 p.m.            MEETING begins

- WELCOME – Set the tone of warmth, love, acceptance and grace as you welcome your group to this retreat.

(Also hand out any needed schedules for the retreat and go over any housekeeping or retreat details. You may want to set “cell phone guidelines” for your group. Some groups like to place phones in basket during meetings. Parents of young children or those caring for others who need to be “on call” may need to be exempt.

- OPENING PRAYER: “Empty Me” – good for a time of letting go of anything that would keep apprentices from being fully present with God and each other.

Let's pray:

*Gracious and Holy One,  
creator of all things  
and of emptiness.  
I come to you,  
full of much that clutters and distracts,  
stifles and burdens me,  
and makes me a burden to others.  
Empty me now  
of gnawing dissatisfactions,  
of anxious imaginings,  
of fretful preoccupations,  
of nagging prejudices,  
of old scores to settle,  
and of the arrogance of being right.  
Empty me  
of the ways I unthinkingly  
think of my self as powerless,  
as a victim,  
as determined by sex, age, race,  
as being less than I am,  
or as other than yours.  
Empty me*

*of the disguises and lies  
in which I hide myself  
from other people  
and from my responsibility  
for my neighbors  
and for the world.  
Hollow out in me a space  
in which I will find myself,  
find peace and a whole heart,  
a forgiving spirit and holiness,  
the springs of laughter,  
and the will to reach boldly  
for abundant life for myself  
and the whole human family.  
Amen.  
(by Ted Loder)*

- **RESPONSE:**

*Please join me in a response to this prayer.*

*1. Hold in your hands on your lap whatever you need to release to be fully present at this retreat. Silently, name it to God.*

*2. Now move your hands that are still holding it up to your heart, continuing to hold what needs to be let go. While holding it next to your heart, silently tell God anything you want Him to know about it.*

*Leader: Give a few moments of silence here.*

*3. Now release it to God as you raise your arms above your head and open your hands.*

*When all hands are lowered:*

*Thank you, Lord, for carrying our burdens and for removing what so easily entangles us so that we might fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. May we fully embrace our brothers and sisters in Christ in this time and space of Retreat. AMEN.*

- **PRAISE FOR HIS PRESENCE** (repeated from the Laying the Altar session)

Ask a reader to help you read aloud the part in bold following the word:

**Reader.**

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very dark, God said: “Let there be light.”*

**Reader:** ***And there was light.***

[The sign of light—a candle—is lit on the table in the middle.]

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very quiet, the Word was with God.*

**Reader:** ***And the Word was God.***

[The sign of Christ, the Word made flesh—a cross—is placed on the table.]

**Leader:** *When the time was right, God sent his Son.*

**Reader:** ***He came among us and was one of us.***

**Leader:** *And Jesus is still among us when we gather in His name.*

[A chair for Jesus is set in the circle between two apprentices.]

- OPENING SONG: “Oh the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”

*We acknowledge that all things good and true and beautiful flow out of Jesus’ deep, deep love for us as individuals and as a group. So we begin by pondering that deep, deep love as our foundation for this retreat.*

*Feel free to sing along (lyrics on the screen).*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZNfMj3MdCM>

(Or, you may sing the hymn together if you have a musician to lead your singing. Then please provide lyrics.)

- OPENING PSALM to read aloud (may ask someone else to read this):

*May our hearts enter into the goodness, truth, and beauty of God’s Word:*

**Psalm 133 – NIV**

<sup>1</sup> *How good and pleasant it is  
when God’s people live together in unity!*  
<sup>2</sup> *It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron’s beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.*  
<sup>3</sup> *It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.*

Leader: *Let us take a few minutes of silence to bless God  
for His deep, deep love.*

~ 2 minutes of silence ~

*Let us thank God for how good and pleasant our group is.*

~ 2 minutes of silence ~

*Would anyone like to share a reflection for the good of the group?*

~ BREAK (10 minutes)

so that everyone can be fresh and settled to focus on the storytellers.

8 p.m. LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN! (Around 20 minutes/each story)

**Leader**, please share your Spiritual Journey first. This will break the ice and give people an idea of how they might share their stories.

If there are any co-leaders please have them share their stories next. If not, please ask a couple of people ahead of time to tell their stories Friday evening so that they are ready to go. You will probably have time for 3 or 4 stories Friday evening, depending on how long storytellers talk.

Please allow some people to ask questions or make comments at the end of each story, as it can feel off-balancing to share with no response. You, as the leader, are the ultimate time-keeper of your group. You decide how much time to allow for questions and comments. Always handle time issues with the air of grace.

It is suggested that you say:

*You are free to ask questions or make brief comments after the storytelling, but no criticism or advice, please. Also, don't share a story from your own life that you are reminded of. This is a time for reflective comments, which means that we keep the focus on the storyteller, affirming them and what they shared, letting them know that we hear them, understand them and love them.*

9:30 – 9:45 p.m. STORYTELLING COMES TO A CLOSE

9:45 p.m. BLESSING

Please choose one or both of the following:

1. Deep Peace Video: [https://youtu.be/EAFcY\\_4mrWM](https://youtu.be/EAFcY_4mrWM)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eve2y-P-Zjk>
2. Scottish Blessing by John O'Donohue:

May this new night of rest  
Repair the wear of time  
And restore youth of heart  
For the adventure  
That awaits tomorrow.  
~AMEN~

Please blow out candle and remove cross from the table, so it can be placed again tomorrow morning. Also, please take Jesus' chair out of the circle so that it can be purposefully placed during the PRAISE FOR HIS PRESENCE tomorrow.  
Saturday morning:

7:30 a.m. BREAKFAST together

8:30 a.m. MEETING begins

- WELCOME – Set the tone of warmth, love, acceptance and grace as you welcome your group to another day of storytelling.
- PRAISE FOR HIS PRESENCE (as you did last evening)

Ask a reader to help you read aloud the part in bold following the word:  
**Reader.**

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very dark, God said: "Let there be light."*

**Reader:** ***And there was light.***

[The sign of light—a candle—is lit on the table in the middle.]

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very quiet, the Word was with God.*

**Reader:** ***And the Word was God.***

[The sign of Christ, the Word made flesh—a cross—is placed on the table.]

**Leader:** *When the time was right, God sent his Son.*

**Reader:** ***He came among us and was one of us.***

**Leader:** *And Jesus is still among us when we gather in His name.*

[A chair for Jesus is set in the circle between two apprentices.]

- OPENING SCRIPTURE/PRAYER to read aloud (leader or an apprentice):

***Selections from John 17 – MSG***

*Let us join Christ in his prayer:*

*Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life  
That you conferred as a gift through me,  
So they can be one heart and mind  
As we are one heart and mind.*

*My joy is completed in them.  
I gave them Your word.*

*I'm praying not only for them  
But also for those who will believe in me  
Because of them and their witness about me.  
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—  
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,  
So they might be one heart and mind with us.  
Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.  
The same glory you gave me, I gave them,  
So they'll be as unified and together as we are—  
I in them and you in me.  
Then they'll be mature in this oneness,  
And give the godless world evidence  
That you've sent me and loved them  
In the same way you've loved me.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*[end of Scripture; continue praying]*

*God, our Father, we receive this love you have for us,  
the same love that You have for Your Son. Wow!  
Holy Trinity, we receive Your heart and grace for us  
to be unified with each other as You are among Yourself,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Wow!  
AMEN.*

8:50 a.m. LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN Again! (Around 20 minutes/each story)

Remind apprentices:

*You are free to ask questions or make brief comments after the storytelling, but no criticism or advice, please. Also, don't share a story from your own life that you are reminded of. This is a time for reflective comments, which means that we keep the focus on the storyteller, affirming them and what they shared, letting them know that we hear them, understand them and love them.*

10:00 a.m. (flex the time to break between storytellers) BREAK for 10 -- 15 minutes

10:15 a.m. LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN Again! (Around 20 minutes/each story)

Consider a stretch-in-place break around 11 a.m. *between* stories.

11:45 a.m. WATCH VIDEO: "Tell Me Who I Am"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSIVjjY8Ou8>

Afterwards: *Let's take a few minutes of silent reflection. (2-3 minutes)*  
*Would anyone would like to share any thoughts?*

12:00 noon LUNCH together

1:15 p.m. LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN Again! (Around 20 minutes/each story)

After the first 2 storytellers, ask everyone to stand, then play this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIGm7qYVz4>

Invite apprentices to MOVE, at least clap their hands. It will wake everyone up! After lunch can be a hard time to be attentive, so consider your movement a gift to the next storytellers, making it easier for everyone to give them the attention they deserve.

After the video/MOVE break, LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN Again!

3:00 p.m. BREAK 10--15 minutes (suggest a brisk walk outside if feasible)

3:15 p.m. LET THE STORYTELLING BEGIN Again! If you need more time for storytelling, take what you need and adjust the Noticing/Affirmation experiences below. If everyone has told their story, please return to the circle, but now it is a:

#### NOTICING, AFFIRMATION CIRCLE

*"One of the deepest longings of the human soul is to be seen."*

— John O'Donohue

Option 1: NOTICE Each Other

Begin with one person in the NOTICING CIRCLE.

*Please say something that your "noticed" as someone else told their story. Even though there were times for comments or questions already, as the stories have settled in your heart, let God bring to mind something that stood out to you that you would like to affirm in another. Keep you comments uplifting and loving.*

*Please let your noticing take the form:*

*"name of the person you choose," I noticed \_\_\_\_\_.*

Let's say Francis goes first. He will simply say: Sheila, I noticed \_\_\_\_\_. After Francis notices Sheila, Sheila shares with someone else what she noticed about another person's story, for example: David, I noticed \_\_\_\_\_. David goes on to notice someone else, until the last person to go notices Francis. The NOTICING CIRCLE will then be complete.

No one can notice the first person (Francis in the example) except the last person to do the noticing.

Each person receives just one noticing.

Option 2: Affirmation Bookmarks (What God Sees in Us through Others' Eyes)  
(Please move to tables to do this activity.)

Even though our worth comes from God, sometimes others can bless us by seeing us as God sees us. Our fellow Apprentices can have the ability to look past our imperfections and see our strengths or talents when we are unable to do so. We can often be blind to our attributes or gifts from God. Others in our community can see these in us with great clarity.

This seemingly small exercise of making bookmarks can bring revelations and joy.

Step 1: Provide bookmarks, pens, markers, etc. Have each person put their name on their bookmark and design as they like. (Some "crafty" members might bring clip art or scrapbooking materials to share.)

Step 2: Pass decorated bookmarks around so that each member can write affirming words or phrases ("compassionate" or "brings love and light to the world") on each other's bookmarks. Apprentices may use descriptive words/phrases for their fellow class members that are inspired by something spoken during the storytelling sessions.

These creations can be useful bookmarks as well as beautiful reminders of what God sees when He looks upon us.

If time allows, the group could return to the Affirmation Circle for each person to be given their bookmark. It is encouraging if the person presenting the bookmark or the person receiving their bookmark reads what is written on it aloud to the group.

4:30 p.m.      CLOSE by singing a simple, familiar worship song, such as the Doxology. The Leader may offer a closing prayer or speak the following blessing.



Closing Blessing:

*May you remember that you have a good & beautiful story that God is writing.  
May you tend the warmth of our fellowship in Christ as you would tend a fire.  
May you rest in He who designed you and who now dwells and delights in you.*

If you want to extend the retreat, even optionally for those who are able, you could have dinner at 6 p.m., informal fellowship in the evening, breakfast in the morning, and a simple worship service before departing.

#### FOR THE COMING WEEK

In chapter 10 the theme is that you are called. The soul-training exercise of listening to the verbs of your true self will give you insight into the nature of your calling.

*Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?*

## CHAPTER 10: YOU ARE CALLED

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter isn't just for high school or college students wrestling with their calling or the job they may choose for their life's work. It's a chapter for everyone who has pondered how to embrace their skills, their talents and the desires of their souls. The author asks us to focus on our primary Calling of being "One in whom Christ dwells and delights"—and that life-giving "Call" is worth contemplating at every stage of our lives.

Your class members may be embarking on their first jobs, busy in their chosen occupations or retired from their life's work. As the author points out, vocation may bring up negative thoughts and feelings, since "Many people in our world today do not have the luxury of choosing a vocation" (182). Some of your apprentices may feel discouraged or even bitter about the work they did or do now, or about the work they have always wanted to do but haven't been able to do. Whatever their age or job status, they will all be seeking that "deep gladness" that will satisfy their souls. On that search, they will be more alike than different, no matter their age. As their leader, encourage them to stay closely "tuned into" God and focused by "listening" to their lives.

You can offer encouragement and hope in ways expressed in this chapter.

1. "While we are called to many things, our first and primary calling is to be in relationship with the Trinity. We are all called to be *in Christ*" (183).

There is no one that cannot live out this primary Calling to be the one in whom Christ dwells and delights. Can you think of any situation where that cannot be lived out? Joseph when imprisoned, Daniel in the lion's den, those with a terminal disease ~ all can pursue their calling to be in relationship with the Trinity. That availability cannot be prevented by circumstances.

2. "We are all born with a calling – and not just one calling, but many."

There are relational callings, to God, but also to family relations and to roles (e.g. caretaking or parenting). Although we are each unique, "never-to-be-repeated stories of grace, born with innate passions and proclivities" (184), that uniqueness can be suited for various vocations which may change over our lifetime. For example, while we might not be born to be something as specific as an 'industrial architect,' the unique way we are made by God to love design might make us perfectly suited for designing skyscrapers or websites. Our unique design may have various applications.

As you explore upper and lower case callings, may you help apprentices notice the graces God has given for their whole beings to be at rest in who God designed and then created them to be ~ exactly as He intended.

*"May you see in what you do the beauty of your soul."*

~ John O'Donohue

#### WELCOME (2 minutes)

Express your gladness to be with your group of apprentices!

Invite them to rest in God in how He has called them  
to live and move and have their being.

End your welcome by saying:

*What an incredible truth that you are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.*

*You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. You are made for God. You are forgiven. You have been made alive!  
You have been made holy. You have a sacred story. And you are called.*

#### CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

A synopsis of the book *Queen of the Dark Chamber* by Cornerstone Curriculum:

Born the 18th child of a ruling Buddhist family, Christiana Tsai relates her journey as a follower of Christ in a time of heavy persecution in China. This retelling of her life story brings hope and comfort as she meets the Infinite-Personal God of the Bible! After beginning a ministry to reach other Chinese, Christiana is struck with a devastating case of malaria that leaves her bedridden and so sensitive to light that she is forced to remain in a darkened room. Shockingly, however, her ministry to the lost and broken flourish more from the midst of her trials, as Tsai grows to understand the adequacy of Christ. Billy Graham writes "Miss Tsai has discovered the secret of spiritual refining. In her dark chamber of infirmity she has found the Light of the World."

Though Christiana is sequestered in a dark room, she has a dynamic prayer ministry of hope to other suffering Chinese Christians. Her seclusion does not prevent her from her primary Calling as one in whom Christ dwells and delights, nor of her vocational calling to minister to those suffering out of her own suffering.

Never underestimate how God might use your sufferings and trauma in your own story, for your joy and for God's glory!

#### 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

*Silence is settling.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

#### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*"O God,  
who out of nothing  
brought everything that is,  
out of what I am  
bring more of what I dream  
but haven't dared;  
direct my power and passion  
to creating life  
where there is death,  
to putting flesh of action  
on bare-boned intentions,  
to lighting fires  
against the midnight of indifference,  
to throwing bridges of care  
across canyons of loneliness;  
so I can look on creation,  
together with you,  
and, behold,  
call it very good;  
through Jesus Christ my Lord."  
Amen.*

~ by Ted Loder ~

#### SOUL TRAINING (15-20 minutes)

Please share in your large group or break into small groups of three.

1. *How was it to listen to the verbs of your life?*
2. *Would you like to share your list of 15 verbs, 7 verbs, or your final 3 verbs?*
3. *What were the sentences or phrases you crafted?*

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25-45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. *The author states that there are two callings, an Upper case “C” and a Lower case “c.” What are your thoughts about these two callings, and about how they are related?*
2. *What are the two parts of Buechner’s famous formula for discerning your calling? Do they shed any light on your vocational calling? Have you found any other helpful principles or tools in your own discernment process that you’d like to share?*
3. *The story of Ray Anderson concludes with the idea that our destiny can be found in discovering the thing we would like to do until our final day on earth. Have you been able to discover your own destiny?*
4. *How has your story shaped your calling?*
5. *What is the seasonal dimension to one’s calling? Please share if you have experienced seasonal shifts in your calling.*

~ BREAK if you choose ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 - 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud:

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, to create artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, so that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, so that they may make everything that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, the ark of testimony, the atoning cover that is on it, and all the furniture of the tent, the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, the woven garments as well: the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, *with which* to carry out their priesthood; the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place, they are to make *them* according to everything that I have commanded you” [Exodus 31: 1-11; NASB].

1. *What do you notice about vocational calling in this passage?*
2. *How is Bezalel's "filling" described? Is there any comfort or encouragement to you in this aspect of Bezalel's calling? Please explain.*

## EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

Option #1: Examen of My Calling to Be in Relationship with the Trinity (15 – 20 minutes)

Supplies: Handouts for each apprentice.

*The Soul Training Exercise at the end of chapter 10 focuses on our "small c callings," our unique passions and proclivities. So for the exercise in class, here is an Examen of our "capital C calling."*

There are various ways to pray the Examen. Apprentices are invited to use these steps from the website: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/the-steps-of-the-examen/> focusing on their relationship with the Trinity. Either print and use the Handout below, or have apprentices write their responses to numbers 2 – 5 in their journals.

1. *Ask God for light.*

*Invite everyone to pray this simple prayer with you:*

*Search me oh God and know my heart today.  
Illumine my spiritual eyes that I might see my life as you see my life.  
~ Amen*

2. *Give thanks.*
3. *Review the day.*
4. *Face your shortcomings.*
5. *Look toward the day to come.*

*"God is not remote from us.  
He is at the point of my pen, my pick,  
my paint brush, my needle –  
and my heart and my thoughts."  
~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

~ Please give time for sharing reflections after the experience. ~

HANDOUT TO PRINT

Chapter 10 , Option #1 – EXAMEN OF MY CALLING TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRINITY

**1. Ask God for light.**

*Pray in unison:*

Search me oh God and know my heart today.

Illumine my spiritual eyes that I might see my life as you see my life.

~ Amen

**2. Give thanks.**

Thank God for Calling you to be in union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in your own words, or use the Scriptures below to express your gratitude:

(option: your own words) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Thank God that “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13; NASB).
- Rejoice in Jesus’ prayer to the Father: “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and You loved them, just as You loved Me (John 17:23; NASB).

**3. Review the day.**

(Choose today - so far - or yesterday.)

What was your connection to God like throughout the day in general? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Upon rising? \_\_\_\_\_

During meals? \_\_\_\_\_

At work? \_\_\_\_\_

At play? \_\_\_\_\_

While alone? \_\_\_\_\_

While with others? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other times? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank God for the times you were living  
in union with the Trinity!

**4. Face your shortcomings.**

Choose one activity or time of day from your review in Step 3 where you would like to live in deeper union with the Trinity. Talk to God about it.

**5. Look toward the day to come.**



<https://pixabay.com/photos/hills-india-nature-kodaikanal-2836301/>

- VISION: What would living in closer fellowship with the Trinity in whatever area you chose in Step 4 look like? \_\_\_\_\_

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- INTENTION: Set your intention to live into the grace God gives you to walk closer to him in the area you chose in Step 4. Write your intention: \_\_\_\_\_

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- MEANS: What graces is God already giving me to live in deeper union with the Trinity, which is my primary Calling, in the area you chose in Step 4? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Ask God for the additional graces that you need to walk closer to him tomorrow in the area you chose in Step 4. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Finally:* Thank God that he will be with you tomorrow as you intentionally access God's grace to live more deeply out of your union with the Trinity.

*"God is not remote from us.  
He is at the point of my pen, my pick, my paint brush, my needle –  
and my heart and my thoughts."  
~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*



Option #2: Listening to the Callings of My Life (20 – 25 minutes)

Supplies: Copies of the megaphones handout, markers, pencils and pens.

You can choose for the whole class to complete either #1 or #2 below. Or you can allow each member to choose their favorite to complete.

1. *Please reflect on the different callings you have had throughout your life. These can be actual “job” callings, callings of relationship or deeply felt callings from God.*

*Write words or draw symbols to represent those various callings on or around the megaphones on the handout. The different sizes of megaphones can reflect either the intensity of that calling, or its importance in your life. You may express your various callings as creatively as you choose.*

2. *Please reflect specifically on your calling to be apprentices of Jesus. Again, these can be whispers from God or loud and clear calls, and the different sizes of megaphones can reflect either the intensity of that calling, or its importance in your life. You can express your callings as creatively as you choose. You could also create images of how you are living out those callings.*

After all have finished, have apprentices share as much or as little of their creations as they like. After they share, you may want to ask questions of the group, such as:

*~How difficult or easy was it for you to hear your callings?*

*~Which callings were most important or meaningful to you?*

*~How have those callings impacted the direction of your life?*

*~Are there any callings you would like yet to hear from God?*

HANDOUT TO PRINT  
Chapter 10 , Option #3 – LISTENING TO THE CALLINGS OF MY LIFE



Option #3: Lectio Divina about Our Union with the Trinity (20 – 25 minutes)

Supplies: Use the Handout on Lectio Divina from Chapter 1 to lead apprentices in Lectio Divina on the passage where Jesus pours out His heart to God the Father about apprentices entering into Trinitarian fellowship: John 17: 20 – 26. Use the version of your choice. This will further delve into our uppercase “C” Calling.

GO IN PEACE

*You are invited to take a few minutes of silence to notice how God has filled you and equipped you for your relational and vocational callings. Be sure to include your relationship with the Trinity under the relational callings, as it is your first and primary calling.*

~ 4 minutes of silence ~

*May you go in peace,  
knowing that the Divine Forming Mystery  
has designed you uniquely and perfectly to flourish  
in whatever He calls you to.*

FOR THE COMING WEEK

*In chapter eleven the theme is that you will be glorified.  
The Soul Training Exercise of Celebration will sanctify some time, space and matter  
to help you rejoice with gladness over God and his goodness.  
[Would anyone like to bring a reflection to share next week?](#)*

## CHAPTER 11: YOU WILL BE GLORIFIED

### CHAPTER CHALLENGE

*As the author says “...we are unceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe. It is challenging for us to believe this, but it is what Jesus has promised” (211). The idea of being glorified with Him can still be difficult for all to embrace. As leaders, we must patiently walk with those who struggle with their destiny, reminding them that humans didn’t plan this reality, God did.*

*“The God who has not failed us in the past, the God who is faithful to us in the present, is the same God who will not fail us in the future—on this we can rely” (202). We can embrace our future because of the God we love. He has always walked with us and has never left us without His power, strength and peace. Why would He abandon us at death?*

*It also may be helpful to see that glorification is the culmination of a myriad of interrelated aspects of a person in Christ, not an isolated event. Notice in our book that being glorified is the culmination of “a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person, with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God” (211). In Romans 8: 29 – 30 [NASB] it is described as the end of a sequence of God’s grace: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”*

*Glorification is the last step in a progression that God initiates and completes. Paul said that the God who began His work in us will make sure that it goes to completion (Phil. 1:6). Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith, which extends into eternity. Hallelujah!*

*Whether heaven will be paved with gold, have beautiful music or be full of pets, we cannot know for certain. However, as Dallas Willard responded when asked the question of what heaven will be like, “Well, I don’t know for sure, but I do know what God is like and that God is good, so whatever it is like I am certain we will all say, “This is a great idea!”” (208). We, too, can trust with that certainty.*

### WELCOME (2 minutes)

You might say this or whatever words of are in your heart:

*Relationships are eternal.*

*I look forward to another time of knowing and growing together with you all,  
today ~ and forever.*

End your welcome by saying:

*How wonderful to get to our last chapter with you who are no mere mortal,  
but a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.  
You, my friends, have a soul. You have a sacred body. You are desired.  
You are loved. You are made for God. You are forgiven. You have been made alive!  
You have been made holy. You have a sacred story. You are called.  
And you will be glorified.*

CENTERING MOMENT (5 minutes)

Invite an apprentice to share a reflection  
or the following could be read prior to the silence:

*Jesus said, "At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes" (Matt. 19:28 NIV). Renewal is one of many re-words in the Bible: redemption, regeneration, restoration, reconciliation, resurrection — words that speak of reclaiming what was lost.*

*In Creation Regained Albert Wolters wrote,*

*God hangs on to his fallen original creation and salvages it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands — in fact, he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project. (Albert M. Wolters, Creation Regained [Eerdmans, 1985], 58)*

*What do we find in the last two chapters of the Bible? A return to the first two chapters, only far more and far better. The river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God, and the tree of life, now a forest of life, growing on both sides of the river (Revelation 21:1–2). That's a picture of the New Eden, located in the heart of the New Jerusalem.*

*In Genesis, the Redeemer is promised; in Revelation, the Redeemer returns. Genesis tells the story of Paradise lost; Revelation tells the story of Paradise regained. In Genesis, man and woman fail as earth's rulers; in Revelation righteous humanity rules the new earth, under King Jesus. Satan and sin will not thwart God's plan!*

~ by Randy Alcorn ~

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/c-s-lewis-on-heaven-and-the-new-earth-gods-eternal-remedy-to-the-problem-of-evil-and-suffering>

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE (5 minutes)

*Silence lets the swirl settle.*

*Let us take 5 minutes of silence to quiet our hearts before the Lord.  
I will end the silence with a prayer.*

### PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

Thank you, Jesus, for your words of hope  
that my heart does not need to be troubled.  
That You are preparing a special place for me in Your Father's house.  
That You will come for me and take me to that place  
where I will be with You forever.  
Thank you.

### SOUL TRAINING (15 – 20 minutes)

If your group is large you may wish to break into small groups of three, or not.

1. *How did you celebrate? What were the highlights?*
2. *How did the future enter into your present through your celebration?*

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER (25 – 45 minutes)

[Note: Be sure to note which questions you especially want to discuss.]

1. What does the author mean when he says, "Non-existence is unconscionable"?
2. How do miracles foreshadow the general resurrection?
3. O'Donohue says that there must be "joy in bringing the bright essence of a life's harvest into eternity." Revelation 21: 24 says that "the kings of the earth will bring their splendor" into the New Jerusalem (heaven come down to earth). What harvest from your life, what splendor can you imagine that you would bring into eternity?
4. How does your heart connect with the inconsolable secret?
5. The author states that "glorification frees us from the *presence* of sin." And also that "God designed you and me with incredible capacities to dream, imagine, and create." If you add your God-created, incredible capacities with the freedom from the presence of sin, what do you get? Please share some possibilities. What do you hope God assigns you to do?

~ BREAK (if you choose) ~

### ENGAGING SCRIPTURE (10 - 15 minutes)

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud:

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we

believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died" [1Th. 4:13-14]

"So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" [2 Cor. 4:16-18]

"you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory" [Col. 3:3-4].

1. *Paul informs us that we grieve with hope. (Remember Bonhoeffer said that God leaves the emptiness [grief] "precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve -- even in pain -- the authentic relationship," but that our lovely memories are "but a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain" [hope].) How is it that we experience both grief and hope at the same time?*
2. *What is the basis for our hope amidst our grief, even as we face our own death?*
3. *What image comes to mind when you think of being revealed in glory with Christ? Can you describe what you see?*

## EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

Option #1: 10,000 Years (15 minutes)

*The last verse of Amazing Grace fills our soul with wonder!*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.*

*Eternity will be the fulfillment of what God originally planned for the human race: caretaking, flourishing, exploring, creating, glorifying God in a myriad of ways. If you aren't a singer, it might not sound great to be an angelic choir member for eternity. If you got to work without the curse of thorns and thistles, do you wonder what life would be like? With what you've learned of the good and beautiful YOU, what might you be doing in 10,000 years??*

*Dallas Willard said that Identity means that "You are a never-ceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. It's important to think about what you'll be doing in 10,000 years and to prepare for this now!"*

*So let's imagine what we'll be doing in 10,000 years.*

*Please take 10 minutes to think and pray and dream and ask God what you might be doing in 10,000 years. Let your imagination have some fun!*

Open the floor for sharing after the 10 minutes.

Option #2: Re-Checking Your Soul Needs Thermometer (25 minutes)

Supplies: Thermometer Handouts from Chapter 1

1. Have apprentices review their “soul needs thermometers” from chapter 1. They can re-draw their fulfillment levels of the 10 thermometers, noting any changes from when they did this exercise in chapter 1.

Apprentices can share their responses with a partner or with the group, as they are comfortable.

2. Or you can have apprentices answer the following questions silently:

1. *Was anything surprising to you as you re-look at your thermometers now?*
2. *Which one(s) had the highest percentages of fulfillment?*
3. *Which one(s) had the lowest percentages of fulfillment?*
4. *Which “soul areas” do you hope to keep improving as you continue to be an apprentice of Jesus?*

~ Give apprentices time to share what they noticed. ~

Option #3: Storytelling: The Transition (20 minutes)

Supplies: Large screen to cast image of the painting below for all to see.

*Many hospice nurses have amazing stories about the “crossing over” of their patients. Here is a true story that a hospice nurse told at the funeral of a man in whom Christ dwelled and delighted on earth, and still does beyond the veil!*

You might put this painting up on a big screen while you tell the story (below) to the group to get their juices flowing before they begin their own storytelling.





*"I was a hospice nurse for a man named Fred. As he got closer to death, he was more and more filled with longing at the expectation of being in God's presence. Fred knew that I was an artist, so he asked me to paint a picture of what he was 'seeing.' I got my paints and painted him on a bench in the field, as he described, waiting to go Home. What Fred saw was an angelic creature in the midst of the brightest light he had ever seen. He kept saying 'no, brighter, brighter!' No matter how much brighter I tried to get it, Fred was never happy that the painting was as bright as what he saw. Fred did eventually get taken from his bench. He crossed over with great joy having his hope of glory fulfilled."*

*The floor is open for the sharing of stories.*

#### GO IN PEACE

*You are invited to ponder this truth about you: "You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe." Let your heart swell with joy as you ponder in silence.*

#### *3-4 minutes of Silence*

**Blessing:**

*May you go in peace, knowing that "You are no mere mortal. You are a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person, with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God... You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights" (211).*

*May you be comforted and strengthened by the certainty of a good future.  
Just as you are and are becoming the good and beautiful you in this history,  
you will also be and be becoming in the new heavens and the new earth,  
the good and beautiful you!*

#### THE COMING WEEK

*Next week we will celebrate together the completion of  
The Good and Beautiful You!*

## Final Week: COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Please plan a group celebration to end your group study of *The Good and Beautiful You*. The Soul Training Exercise at the end of Chapter 11 suggests different ways to celebrate that might give you ideas. No one will have done them all. It could be as simple as a decorated cake or as full-orbed as a Thanksgiving dinner or as fun as an outing to a choral performance or play. What would mean “celebration” to your group? Ask them!

The purpose is to enjoy/celebrate together the COMPLETION of your book study together. It will multiply everyone’s joy to celebrate together!

Your group may want to include one or more of the following  
before or after any meal or snacks:  
Reflection and/or Blessing

### A. SOME FORM OF REFLECTION

#### Option #1: Laying the Altar

Just as we laid the altar at our opening session as all were looking forward to the community book study of *The Good and Beautiful You*, now we are looking back and reflecting on our time with each other and with God.

Instructions for Apprentices:

**Reflect on your experiences as part of this group study over these past few months. What were you and God doing together in these past few months? How were other apprentices contributing to your journey?**

**Then do a walk-about your home, your yard or a nearby park, together with God, and find some item that expresses your reflection on the group study just completed.**

**Please bring the one item that symbolizes something about your time of study and experience. The item you bring should be simple, not elaborate, and not larger than a 12” X 12” X 12” so that all will fit nicely on the altar. As you lay your item during the meeting, you will share briefly about the meaning of your object.**

**Here are some possible items to get your juices flowing, but don’t let them limit you: a stone; a candle; a stick; a pressed flower; a photo; a printed quote; a glove or scarf; a cup; a paintbrush.**

## Set-up

Please have an “altar” set up in the middle of a circle of chairs. Usually a rectangular table works well. Please make it sacred (set apart for the purpose of offering one’s expectations and intentions to God as a community) with a tablecloth spread. Also have a cross and a candle/matches ready to set on the table during the reading. Have a chair ready to add to the circle to acknowledge Jesus’ presence among you.

## Laying the Altar Experience

### PRAISE & THANKSGIVING

Ask a reader to help you read aloud the part in bold following the word: **Reader.**

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very dark, God said: “Let there be light.”*

**Reader:** *And there was light.*

[The sign of light—a candle—is lit on the ‘altar.’]

**Leader:** *In the beginning, when it was very quiet, the Word was with God.*

**Reader:** *And the Word was God.*

[The sign of Christ—a cross—is placed on the table.]

**Leader:** *When the time was right, God sent his Son.*

**Reader:** *He came among us and was one of us.*

**Leader:** *And Jesus is still among us when we gather in His name.*

[A chair for Jesus is set in the circle between two apprentices.]

—adapted from Iona Abbey Worship Book (Wild Goose Publications, 2001), 171.

SING together (Acapella) The Doxology, or any familiar worship song or chorus.

- You will need to determine how much time each person will have when Laying the Altar and guide them in that.
- This sharing is best done from their seats in the circle so that they are facing everyone. (As they move toward the altar, someone is behind them.)
- Ask each apprentice to show the object that they brought and tell the group how the object symbolizes their experience of this community book study of *The Good and Beautiful You*.
- Lastly, have them place their object on the altar.

~Pause for a minute of silence after the last person lays the altar.~

### End with Gratitude

Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
for every holy moment,  
for every sacred illumination,  
for every tear dropped and dried,  
for every ray of hope,  
for every mercy shown,  
for every transformative touch  
by Your good and beautiful hand.  
Amen.

## Option #2: Questions for Reflection

Please answer these questions about your study of *The Good and Beautiful You*, either on paper to give to the leader, or as a part of a group reflection time.

1. What are your favorite memories/highlights of our apprentice journey together?
2. What were the most meaningful chapters to you?
3. What soul trainings were especially helpful for you? Will you continue any of them?
4. What class exercises were especially meaningful to you?

## B. SOME FORM OF BLESSING EACH OTHER

### Option #1: Simply Bless

- Draw each other's names out of a hat and bless that person by saying: [The name drawn], you have been a blessing to me ....[verbal affirmation of uplifting words that reflect that person's unique "perfect design," and how that member has been a blessing to you and to the class]. Be sure to look right at the person you are blessing and give them eye contact.
- Instead of drawing names, bless the person to your right or left in the same way described above. Go around the whole circle till all have received a blessing.

### Option #2: Blessing Bundles

Supplies: Blessing handouts and pencils

Celebrate each person's perfect design by creating a "Blessings Bundle."

1. The Blessings Handout can be completed during class time or given as homework to be shared at the group celebration.
2. Have each apprentice complete the sentences for each person: "\_\_\_\_\_ has been a blessing to me," writing as much or as little as they like. They may sign their name or not. Their job is to reflect on how each apprentice has been a gift to them personally, as well as to the class. Their uplifting words should reflect each member's unique, "perfect design."
3. Completed papers can be cut and be assimilated into a "Blessings Bundle" for each person (stapled or paper clipped). The top paper of each "Bundle" will

be the Saints Blessings Covers from the handout with each member's name written or typed after the word, "Saint." These "Bundles" can be as ornate or as simple as you choose. If you have an artistic apprentice in class, they may want to volunteer their talents to help with this project. The words for the handout covers are found on p. 211.

4. When the "Blessings Bundles" are completed, apprentices may read their own Bundles silently, or each of the Bundles can be read aloud by another class member. Comfort levels of the class should be taken into account, but something very meaningful can occur when others speak aloud the words describing our goodness.

## HANDOUT TO PRINT - BLESSING BUNDLES

Either the leader or the apprentices will fill out the names of each group member.

\_\_\_\_\_ has been a blessing to me...

\_\_\_\_\_ has been a blessing to me...

\_\_\_\_\_ has been a blessing to me...

\_\_\_\_\_ has been a blessing to me...

*Saint*

*You are a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God. You were perfectly designed before the foundation of this world to do great works that give glory to God. And you are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights. And you will live forever in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God. May you sing and dance with the joy of a child in the knowledge of God's unending love.*

*Saint*

*You are a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God. You were perfectly designed before the foundation of this world to do great works that give glory to God. And you are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights. And you will live forever in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God. May you sing and dance with the joy of a child in the knowledge of God's unending love.*

*Saint*

*You are a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God. You were perfectly designed before the foundation of this world to do great works that give glory to God. And you are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights. And you will live forever in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God. May you sing and dance with the joy of a child in the knowledge of God's unending love.*

*Saint*

*You are a divinely designed, deeply loved, fully forgiven, fully alive, sacred person with a sacred story of grace, a sacred body, and a holy longing for God. You were perfectly designed before the foundation of this world to do great works that give glory to God. And you are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. You are one in whom Christ dwells and delights. And you will live forever in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God. May you sing and dance with the joy of a child in the knowledge of God's unending love.*

## Final Note to Leaders

Dear Leader,

It has been our great joy to create this guide and we hope you have found it helpful. We are grateful that you answered God's call to take on the leadership of this book study. You have given your time, your love and your dedication to lead your apprentices closer to God. And, you got to walk alongside them as they did!

Your time with your Apprentice group is now at an end. You are probably experiencing elation and sadness at the same time—elation at the growth you have witnessed and the community that has been made through this book study, as well as the sorrow of that beauty coming to its conclusion.

If your group wants to stay together, you may consider facilitating the study of the other books in the Apprentice Series, *The Good and Beautiful God*, *The Good and Beautiful Life* and *The Good and Beautiful Community*. There are Leader's guides written wonderfully by Matt Johnson that will aid you in those endeavors.

If your group chooses not to continue, please be at peace. Your apprentices will live forever in your heart, as you will be in theirs.

You are marvelous in our book.

With much love and thanks,

Betsy McPeak and Vicki Price