

Hope in the Hard Times

Table of Contents

Getting the Most out of this Study Guide	
Chapter 1 • When Hope is Hard.....	
Chapter 2 • My Heart, Christ’s Home	
Chapter 3 • A Quiet Rest.....	
Chapter 4 • Facing Our Dark Sides.....	
Chapter 5 • Developing a Spiritual Appetite.....	
Chapter 6 • Waiting in Hope.....	
Chapter 7 • Moving from Misery to Mission	
Chapter 8 • The Side Effects of Suffering.....	
Chapter 9 • The Fellowship of Suffering	
Chapter 10 • The Hope of Glory.....	

Getting the Most out of this Study Guide

We've designed this study guide to help you do three things:

1. Discover truth as you personally study God's Word
2. Draw upon the insights of selected writers
3. Discuss what you are learning with others

Each chapter follows a similar format. You'll begin studying a selected passage of Scripture using a process known as "inductive Bible study." This involves taking a careful look at a section of Scripture to observe what it says, interpret what it means and apply what you learn.

For each passage you study you'll be prompted to do five things:

1. The "W" Questions
2. Passage Summary
3. Word Study
4. Commentary Check
5. Application Action Plan

To give you a better feel for each of the five steps, we'll give you a brief explanation and an example of what's involved (based on Psalm 23).

The "W" Questions:

Closely read through the passage you've selected for study and briefly answer as many of the "W" questions as you can. Here's how you might answer the questions if you were studying Psalm 23.

WHO are these verses about?

David, the LORD, enemies

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

The Lord is shepherding David's life, guiding, providing and protecting him.

WHEN does this happen?

During David's lifetime

WHERE does this happen?

Various places in David's life. Some restful and some stressful places. David mentions the meadows, a valley, and a house (the house of the Lord).

WHY is this significant?

This psalm helps us understand God's provision and protection of those who belong to Him. It gives us confidence that we are under His shepherding care as we move through life.

Passage Summary:

Read through your passage using several different translations. You can find a variety of good translations at the following websites: *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*. Then answer the two summary questions:

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

The Lord as a Good Shepherd: providing, guiding, protecting

The Lord as a Gracious Host: preparing a table, anointing head, providing an eternal home

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

David, who worked as a shepherd and was later a king, reflects on how God was a Good Shepherd to him, caring for his physical, emotional and spiritual needs. God also was a Gracious Host who provided for David on earth and promised to welcome him into His eternal home.

Word Study:

Select a word that is crucial to the passage. Choose a word that stands out for being central to the emphasis of the entire passage. Sometimes this will be a word that is repeated. Sometimes it will be a theological term. Sometimes you may simply pick a word that is interesting or perplexing to you.

After you select a key word, use a concordance (online at *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*) and look up other verses where the word is found (aim for four to eight other verses). If your word is used many times in Scripture, focus your attention on other occurrences of the word in the same book of Scripture as you are studying.

Next look at verses written by the same author (i.e. David's Psalms, Paul's letters). Then broaden your search to include other parts of Scripture.

Use the chart provided to record how the word you are studying is used in other verses. Here's an example of a word study on "shepherd," a key term in Psalm 23:

Reference	Use of the Key Word
<i>Psalm 28:9</i>	<i>David prays that God would be a Shepherd for the nation of Israel and “carry them forever.”</i>
<i>Psalm 78:71</i>	<i>God took David from being a shepherd of sheep and made him shepherd of the entire nation. So David’s role as a king is compared to that of a shepherd.</i>
<i>Psalm 80:1</i>	<i>God is called the shepherd of Israel who leads His people “like a flock.”</i>
<i>Genesis 48:15</i>	<i>Jacob says God has been his Shepherd.</i>
<i>2 Samuel 5:2</i>	<i>David was promised by God that he would one day shepherd the nation of Israel by becoming its ruler. Once again, the king is pictured as a shepherd.</i>
<i>Mark 6:34</i>	<i>Jesus saw the crowds as “sheep without a shepherd.”</i>
<i>John 10:11</i>	<i>Jesus says He is the “Good Shepherd” who lays His life down for the sheep.</i>
<i>Revelation 7:17</i>	<i>Jesus (the Lamb) will be the Shepherd of His people in heaven, leading them to springs of water and drying the tears from their eyes.</i>

Summarize what you learn about the key word you studied:

A shepherd speaks of one who provides care and guidance for his sheep. The term is applied to human rulers (kings) who are to provide care and guidance for their people. This means God wants leaders to have the mindset of a shepherd. Jesus, who is the true “Good Shepherd,” cares for His people on earth and throughout eternity.

King David, who understood the characteristics of a good shepherd, saw God as his Shepherd. He trusted God for direction, protection and provision all through life and into eternity.

Commentary Insights:

After studying the Scripture for yourself, it’s often helpful to add to your learning by reading the writings of trusted biblical scholars. If you have a Study Bible, read the notes that correspond to the verses you’ve studied. You might also see what some biblical commentaries have to say about your passage. If you are looking to buy a good commentary set, we’d recommend *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (in book form or digital version). You can also access some good commentaries online (www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm or www.biblos.com). After reading the notes in a Study Bible or commentary, record insights that stand out to you.

Dr. Tom Constable (soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm) has this insight about the shepherd's rod and staff:

“The shepherd's rod (a cudgel worn at the belt) beat off attacking animals, and his staff (walking stick) kept the sheep away from physical dangers such as precipices. Likewise God comes to the defence of His people when our spiritual enemies attack us. He also prevents us from getting into spiritually dangerous situations that would result in our destruction.”
Matthew 6:13

Application Action Plan:

In this step you record what God's Spirit is putting on your heart to do in response to what you have studied from God's Word.

Here's a possible application for the study of Psalm 23:

I want to choose to trust God more fully as I walk through hard times in life (“the valley of the shadow of death”).

As a leader, I want to lead with a shepherd's heart, following the example of the Lord (the “Good Shepherd”) and king David. With God's help, I will seek to provide for and protect those I serve.

Read and Reflect:

To augment your study of Scripture, we've included some insightful comments by classical and contemporary Christian authors that relate to the topic you are studying.

The books and articles from which we've quoted were ones that were especially meaningful to us during the months spent in treatment and recovery. It's our hope that they will be both comforting and challenging to you as well.

Group Discussion Questions:

To get the most out of this study, discuss what you are learning with others. The questions provided at the end of each chapter can be used with your family members or small group. If you are not in a small group, please contact The MET church office (613-238-8182) for small group possibilities.

May God's grace give you ample hope in hard times!

• Chapter 1 •

When Hope is Hard

When Hope is Hard

Hard times are not what we hope for. They come unexpectedly. They come uninvited. They shatter our illusions of being in control, and in them we can lose hope.

The psalmist offers fresh hope in the hard times:

*My soul waits in silence for God only;
From Him is my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold;
I shall not be greatly shaken.
Trust in Him at all times, O people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God is a refuge for us.*

Psalm 62:1-2, 8 • NASB

When hard times hit, we need a refuge. We need someone to turn to. That someone, God Himself, is our hope in hard times.

Through this study, we are going to walk with you in finding hope in God in the midst of hard times. Our recent hard time has been cancer, the grief of loss, longing and overload. Your hard time may be financial or marital strain, or even the waywardness or loss of a child. Emptiness may have stolen the best hours of your sleep.

One thing is for sure: there is hope in the hard times, hope found ultimately in God alone. It isn't that people can't help us and support us: they do. But the ultimate healing to so many of our challenges, including cancer, is in the hands of God alone.

Can we encourage you as you pass through your valley: please don't neglect the hope that is found in the Bible. As Romans 15:4 reminds us: *"through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."* It's easy in a hard time to lose our bearings, but the compass towards hope always points through the Word of God. Hang in there, focusing your eyes on the words of hope found in the Word of God. It's there that you'll find the hope that we have found, even in the hard times.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Romans 5:1-5 (how we find hope in hard times)
- James 1:1-8 (why we have hard times)
- Hebrews 12:5-11 (why we have hard times)
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (why we have hard times)

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

Check the translations you read:

- NIV (New International Version)
- ESV (English Standard Version)
- NKJV (New King James Version)
- NLT (New Living Translation)
- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

In this first chapter, we suggest that you study the word “hope.”

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

I don't think people can live without hope. What oxygen is to the lungs, hope is to our survival in this world—and the Bible is filled with hope.

Billy Graham, *Billy Graham in Quotes*

What is the definition of Christian hope?

Answer: a confident expectation of good things to come (Hebrews 6:11).

So let's take the motto, "No pain, no gain," and turn it around and make our own little slogan: "No hope, no cope."

If it is true that the battle to cope with the daily temptations to disobey and throw in the towel on your responsibilities—if that battle to cope can only be fought with the weapon of hope, then never forget . . . that the battle to keep on hoping can only be fought with the weapon of the Scriptures.

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by the endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

John Piper, Sermon: *How Can I Keep on Hoping? The Scriptures*

Hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called "*The rejoicing of hope*" (Hebrews 3:6).

William Gurnall, Seventeenth Century English Pastor

He that lives in hope danceth without music.

George Herbert, Seventeenth Century English Pastor

Joni Eareckson Tada might be mistaken for a modern-day Job. Over four decades ago, a diving accident left Joni a quadriplegic. Today, she faces new battles: unrelenting pain and breast cancer. She also sees herself in a battle against *“powers and principalities that want us to despair.”* She sees God’s faithfulness in the little things. One night she might awake at 2:00 am in pain, unable to get comfortable. The next day she is sitting under a shady tree with a breeze blowing, overcome by the days’ beauty. “This is what it means that hope never fails. Last night I was ready to throw in the towel and give up. Today, it’s a beautiful day.”

The battle requires her active participation. She takes as her theme Hebrews 10:38: *“But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”* Her voice is emphatic: “I do not want to be one of those who shrink back. I don’t want to tarnish His name.”

When asked, “How can a good God allow such suffering in the world?” Joni responded: “When people ask that question – and I struggle with that question – we aren’t accepting the fact that this earth is wired to be difficult. The rule of thumb is that we experience much suffering because we live in a fallen world, and it is groaning under the weight of a heavy curse. If God being good means that He has to get rid of sin, it means He would have to get rid of sinners. God is a God of great generosity and great mercy, so He is keeping the execution of suffering. He’s not closing the curtain on suffering until there is more time to gather more people into the fold of Christ’s fellowship.

That answer suits me, and I think it would suit others if they stop and think: suffering is connected to sin; if God were to get rid of suffering, He’d have to get rid of sin, and then He’d have to get rid of sinners – and God is too merciful to do that.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, *Something Greater Than Healing*,
Just Between Us Magazine, Spring 2011

Group Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do you think people today need hope?
2. Read James 1:1-5, and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
From these verses, why do we have hard times?
3. What other insights did you gain from this week's study of the Scriptures? (Indicate both the verse and the insight that came from it.)
4. What truth in this week's study was most encouraging to you?
5. How does God want us to *respond* to trials and hard times?
6. It surely isn't easy to respond in these ways. How is it possible to grow through hard times or rejoice in them?
7. In small groups of 3 or 4, share with one another:
Are you currently going through a hard time?
If so, how can we pray for one another?

• Chapter 2 •

My Heart, Christ's Home

My Heart, Christ's Home

When hard times hit close to home, we are often left wondering what God is up to in our lives. Seasons of suffering can leave us with a host of unanswered questions. Why me? Why this? Why now?

Thankfully, the Bible gives us some answers that can help stabilize our souls. The Bible promises that God is up to something good even when life isn't good. *Especially* when life isn't good.

And the good that He's up to is all about drawing you closer to Himself and making you more like His Son (Romans 8:28-29). He wants the pressure of hard times to squeeze you in closer to His heart. He wants you to experience the reality of His strength in your weakness.

Shortly after being diagnosed with cancer, we made a trip to the West Coast. We spent a week at Mt. Hermon, a Christian conference centre in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The cabin we rented turned out to be owned by the family of Robert Munger. Dr. Munger had been a pastor and author for many years. He is best known for a small booklet he wrote in the 1950's entitled, *My Heart, Christ's Home*.

As we sat in the living room of his mountaintop cabin, we reread this booklet. It was perfectly timed to speak to our hearts. In a simple, creative way, Bob Munger explained how the heart of the spiritual life can be summed up in the words "*Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20).

Hard times can help this basic Truth become less and less theoretical and more and more experiential. Our desperation drives us to seek God's presence and His strength. We begin to learn what it means to live in union and communion with Christ.

In this chapter, you'll discover that developing closeness and conformity to Christ is a big part of what God is up to in the hard times of your life.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Galatians 2:19-21
- John 14:15-25

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

Check the translations you read:

- NIV (New International Version)
- ESV (English Standard Version)
- NKJV (New King James Version)
- NLT (New Living Translation)
- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

In 1954, Pastor Robert (Bob) Munger wrote a small booklet based on a sermon he had preached from John 14:23: *"If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*

In his booklet, Pastor Munger looks back at the time when he became a Christian. He reflects on how Jesus came to live in his life on the night he put his faith in Christ as His Saviour. Jesus made His home in Bob Munger's heart.

To help describe the changes that began when Christ moved in, he compares his heart to a home. He pictures himself showing Jesus around the various rooms, each room representing one aspect of life.

The first room they enter together: the study. This room represents the control center of life, the mind. Before Jesus moved into his life, he had never been self-conscious about the books on the shelves, the magazines on the table or the pictures on the walls. But as Jesus begins to survey the contents of the study, he began to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. *"Master,"* he said to Jesus, *"I know that this room needs to be cleaned up and made over. Will you help me make it what it ought to be?"*

Jesus promises to help transform the study. He instructs him to get rid of all that is not pure, good and true. The shelves of the study are to be filled with the truth of God's Word.

From the study, they visit a series of other rooms: the dining room, living room, workroom and rec room. Each room pictures a part of the heart. Each room is remodeled to accommodate the presence of Christ.

The story takes an interesting turn as Bob Munger describes an incident about a hall closet. Here's how he tells it:

One day I found Him waiting for me at the door. An arresting look was in His eye. As I entered, He said to me, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it's in the hall closet." As soon as He said this, I knew what He was talking about. There was a small closet up there on the hall landing, just a few feet square. In that closet, behind lock and key, I had one or two little

personal things that I did not want anyone to know about. Certainly, I did not want Christ to see them. I knew they were dead and rotting things left over from the old life. ...Reluctantly, I went up with Him, and as we mounted the stairs the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed to the door.

I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the living room, the rec room, the workroom, and now He was asking me about a little two-by-four closet. I said to myself, "This is too much. I am not going to give Him the key."

"Well," He said, reading my thoughts, "If you think I am going to stay up here on the second floor with this smell, you are mistaken. I will go out on the porch." Then I saw Him start down the stairs. When one comes to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense Him withdrawing His fellowship. I had to give in.

"I'll give you the key," I said sadly, "but You will have to open the closet and clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it." "Just give me the key," He said. "Authorize me to take care of that closet and I will." With trembling fingers I passed the key to Him. He took it, walked over to the door, opened it, entered, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting there, and threw it away. Then He cleaned the closet and painted it. It was done in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!

In time, Munger came to see that Jesus was not simply a guest in his home, He was the rightful owner. Racing to the strongbox, he pulled out the title deed to his home. Eagerly he signed the entire house over to Christ for time and eternity.

"Here," I said. "Here it is, all that I am and have, forever. Now You run the house. I'll just remain with You as a servant and friend."

What a difference Jesus' presence makes in a life. Pastor Munger finishes his book with the words: *"Things are different since Jesus Christ has settled down and made His home in my heart."*

For the complete story see:
Robert Boyd Munger, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, InterVarsity Press
(A children's version of the booklet is also available)

Group Discussion Questions:

1. If Jesus were to arrive on your doorstep, where in your home would you most likely invite Him to spend time with you?

A place you'd avoid?

2. What truths in this week's study were most encouraging to you? (Give the specific verses and insights from them).

3. Read John 14:15-25. The word "obey" is repeated four times. How is obeying God connected to loving Him and letting Him live in us?

How do hard times make us willing to obey in our closet areas of disobedience?

How does the Holy Spirit help us as He lives in us?

4. We can choose to dwell near God.
Consider these words by Albert Barnes: *The word translated "dwell" literally means "sitting in the secret place." The idea is that of calm repose, of resting; of sitting down – as one does in his dwelling...abiding where God abides. The idea is that of having one's home or residence in the most holy place in the tabernacle or the temple, and of sitting with Him in that sacred place.*

How can you choose to dwell near God at this time?

5. What do you still find confusing or challenging about making your heart Christ's home?

6. How can we as a group pray for you? (Since the Holy Spirit is our Counselor, please be careful not to give a lot of your own counsel.)

• Chapter 3 •

A Quiet Rest

A Quiet Rest

During the fall of 2010, Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 11:28 became a still, small voice calling to us: *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* Unfortunately, our pace of life didn't leave a lot of time for rest or unhurried times of listening to God.

After the cancer diagnosis, a seasoned friend whispered to Rick: *"Remember, He maketh me to lie down."* (Psalm 23:2, KJV) At times God steps in to slow us down in order to speak to us. He brings us into silence and solitude with Himself so that we will hear His voice and learn to wait on Him.

To choose to be silent isn't popular, and often it doesn't even seem possible. With advances in technology, we can be interrupted at any moment. We find ourselves uncomfortable with solitude.

But the entrance to any hospital room silences our cell phones and stills our voices. When we hear difficult news, we may put our hands over our mouths and find that there isn't anything to say.

During this journey with cancer, we became silent. We learned to rest and we intentionally chose some times of solitude during which we experienced the peace that comes from the presence of God. We learned the truth of:

*"My soul, wait in **silence**, for God only
For my hope is from Him."*

Psalm 62:5 • NASB

Seeking God with a quiet heart isn't intended to produce despair. It is actually intended to help us recognize the hope that is found nowhere else but in God. There is no one like God; and there is no other Saviour besides Him (Isaiah 43:11; Hosea 13:4). It is worth seeking Him for answers, especially in the hard times. In the midst of drawing near to Him in quiet rest, He provides the hope that we're longing for.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- I Kings 19
- Psalm 23
- Luke 5:16 ; Matthew 11:28-30

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

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- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

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Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

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Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

Increasingly we are shaped by distraction...the seduction of alternative virtual universes, the addictive allure of multitasking people and things, our near-religious allegiance to a constant state of motion: these are markers of a land of distraction, in which our old conceptions of space, time and place have been shattered. This is why we are less and less able to see, hear and comprehend what's relevant and permanent...We are on the verge of losing our capacity as a society for deep, sustained focus... We rarely are completely present in the moment or for one another.

Maggie Jackson, quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

But I am afraid, that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3 • NASB

We simplify, not just to be less busy, even though we may be right to pursue that. Rather, we simplify to remove distractions from our pursuit of Christ. We prune activities from our lives, not only to get organized, but also that our devotion to Christ and service for His kingdom will be more fruitful. We simplify, not merely to save time, but to eliminate hindrances to the time we devote to knowing Christ. All the reasons we should simplify should eventually lead us to Jesus Christ.

Donald Witney, quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

“The practices of solitude and silence are radical because they challenge us on every level of our existence. They challenge us on the level of culture: there is little in Western culture that supports us in entering into what feels like unproductive time for being (beyond human effort) and listening (beyond human thought). They confront us on the level of our human relationships: they call us away from those relationships for a time so we can give undivided attention to God. They challenge us on the level of our soul: in the silence we become aware of inner dynamics we have been able to avoid by keeping ourselves busy. They draw us into spiritual battle: in silence there is the potential for each of us to “*know that I am God*” with such certainty that the competing powers of evil and sin and the ego-self can no longer hold us in their grip. All the forces of evil band together to prevent our knowing God in this way because it brings to an end the dominion of these powers in our lives.

To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships for a time in order to give God our undivided attention. In solitude God begins to free us from our bondage to human expectations, for there we experience God as our ultimate reality—the One in whom we live and move and have our being. In solitude our thoughts and our mind, our will and our desires are reoriented Godward so we become less and less attracted by external forces and can be more deeply responsive to God’s desire and prayer in us.

I began to experience the ‘spiritual law of gravity’ that functions just like the physical law of gravity, and little by little I learned to trust it. When a jar of river water sits still, the law of gravity causes the sediment to eventually settle to the bottom so that the water becomes clear. We don’t have to do anything to cause that settling except to leave the jar alone for a while. The same is true of the spiritual law of gravity. When we sit quietly in God’s presence, the sediment that is swirling in our souls begins to settle. We don’t have to do anything but show up and trust the spiritual law of gravity that says, “Be still, and the knowing will come.”

Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Silence and Solitude*

Mark Buchanan, a Canadian pastor, answered the question: “What is your biggest regret in life?” He thought about his numerous blunders and losses, but honestly answered: “Being in a hurry...getting to the next thing without fully entering the thing in front of me. I cannot think of a single advantage I’ve ever gained from being in a hurry. But a thousand broken and missed things, tens of thousands, lie in all that rushing.”

Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*,
quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

Drop thy still dews of quietness
‘Til all our strivings cease
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier,
quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think it is becoming harder or easier to *“rest”* or *“be still and know that He is God?”* Why?
2. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture that speak to the importance of silence or solitude?
 - Luke 5:16
 - Psalm 23
 - I Kings 19
3. From these passages, what can we learn about hearing from God?
4. What do you find challenging about being *“still”* or quiet before the Lord?
5. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture that can help you attempt greater stillness and solitude with God?
6. What steps are you asking God to help you take to apply what you’ve learned this week?
7. Please pray together as a group for the ability to hear God’s still small voice in the quiet moments of life. Also pray for any other challenges that your family or group members are facing.

Facing Our Dark Sides

Facing Our Dark Sides

Jesus had a lot to say about darkness and light. He Himself was *“the true light that gives light to every man”* (John 1:9). Unfortunately, sometimes we don’t enjoy being exposed to the light. We’ve got some areas that, well, we’d just as soon keep hidden from others, God, and even from ourselves.

While our life as a Christian may reflect His light in many areas, some aspects of our character may still be dark, with hidden areas of selfishness and sinful desires.

God sometimes allows hard times to shake up our lives and expose our true beliefs and behaviors. It’s His desire to use the very trials we find so painful to bring us to a place of becoming *“mature and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:3-4). He actually wants us to rejoice in this. That’s because He is at work, bringing greater purity and maturity into our lives.

Jesus desires that we bring our lives fully into the light of the Gospel. The Gospel allows us to see the dark sides of our character (sin), and ask for His cleansing and forgiveness on the basis of the cross. His grace is so amazing that He’ll never condemn a true child of His (Romans 8:1). He then desires to transform our minds so that we’ll want to walk in the light in all areas of our lives.

In this week’s study, we’ll look at Scriptures that help us gain insights on our own dark sides. We’ll need to be honest about areas of darkness in our own character. We trust the dark sides of our character will be changed for God’s glory as we offer them to Him in the light. It’s all part of the hope we have of actually growing through the hard times.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Psalm 130
- John 3:16-21
- Luke 11:33-36

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

Check the translations you read:

- NIV (New International Version)
- ESV (English Standard Version)
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- NLT (New Living Translation)
- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

A dark side is a natural result of human development. It is the inner urges, compulsions and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion...or some other problem that causes us to search for a reason why.

It is never easy to admit and is something we work hard as leaders to hide. Like a hungry shark being careful to keep its dorsal fin just below the surface so as not to reveal its location to a potentially gratifying meal, we become adept at keeping our selfishness carefully submerged so as not to reveal our true motives.

Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima, *The Dark Sides of Leadership*

Essentially, time taken to be still is a gift we give ourselves, a needed 'time out.' Basketball teams take frequent time outs to rest, refocus and receive instruction. And so must we, for we need to stop and catch our breath and be sent off in the right direction (see Psalm 23:3).

I know that solitude poses challenges: one, to find the time and a place to be silent. Another is being still before God allowing Him to search your heart – this may be somewhat disconcerting. Without realizing it, this can be the reason that busyness takes over our lives, leaving us no time for solitude or time in God's Word. We would rather not have our sin, pain, unforgiveness or disobedience brought to our attention.

Cynthia Heald, *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity*

We can be sure that the development of a beautiful Christ-like character will not occur in our lives without adversity... we may think we have true Christian love until someone offends us or treats us unjustly. Then we begin to see anger and resentment well up within us. We may conclude we have learned about Christian joy until our lives are shattered by an unexpected calamity or grievous disappointment. Adversities spoil our peace and sorely try our patience. God uses those difficulties to reveal to us our need to grow, so that we will reach out to Him to change us more and more into the likeness of His Son.

Jerry Bridges, quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with Him and Him alone. Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. Solitude shows us the way to let our behavior be shaped not by the compulsion of the world but by our new mind, the mind of Christ. Silence prevents us from being suffocated by our wordy world and teaches us to speak the Word of God.

Henri Nouwen, quoted in *Becoming a Woman of Simplicity* by Cynthia Heald

What lies beneath the surface – of the ocean or of our lives – really matters. Whether I know something is there or not is in some ways irrelevant. My awareness of it or not doesn't make it any less real.

This is exactly what Moses did when he got a glimpse of the dark thing that had been lurking under the surface of his consciousness and was starting to surface so powerfully. ...Moses fled into solitude. Oftentimes it is the fear of being found out or the actual experience of being found out that alerts us to what lies beneath. It actually places us on a path of self-discovery and (hopefully) forces us to do whatever work we need to do to take more responsibility for the dark forces that have propelled our bad behavior.

Often it takes something of this magnitude...to move beyond mere dabbling in solitude to a more substantive experience. There is some behavioral pattern, something unresolved, something out of control enough, something destructive enough, that we say, "I must go into solitude with this." We must not ignore this moment when it comes.

Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*

Group Discussion Questions:

It's never easy to look into our inner life so please be careful with one another as we have this discussion.

1. What kinds of moments do you find reveal the “dark sides” of a person’s character?

How does this fit with God’s purposes in the hard times of life?

2. What do you find most difficult about considering the “dark sides” of your own character?

3. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture? (Indicate the verse and the insight)

4. It’s always easier to think that our problems, or even our trials, are the fault of other people. How can this study, encourage us to consider the darkness in our own lives?

5. What do you find most challenging or confusing about this topic?

6. Read Psalm 139:23-24. Is there any area of your life that you need to allow the Lord to search your heart and know His Truth?

7. What steps will you take to apply what you’ve learned this week?

8. Share one another’s burdens and pray together as a group. Remember: *“Let all you do be done in love.”* (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Developing a Spiritual Appetite

Developing a Spiritual Appetite

For most of my life, I (Rick) have had a sweet tooth. As a kid, I'd ride my bike to the neighbourhood store on a hot summer day to buy an ice cold Coke (ten teaspoons of sugar per can). If I had saved enough spare change, I might buy a Snickers, Big Hunk or Almond Joy candy bar to go with it.

I remember heaping teaspoons of white sugar on my bowl of Raisin Bran because it wasn't nearly as sweet as Frosted Flakes or Captain Crunch. I sprinkled icing sugar on my french toast before I poured on the Log Cabin syrup.

As I grew up, I lost my baby teeth but not my sweet tooth. Since I wasn't struggling with weight issues, I figured a little extra sugar was no big problem.

Then I was diagnosed with cancer. Early on in the journey, I learned that what I eat can either help or hinder my body from fighting the disease. And I discovered that sugar wasn't on the helpful list. In fact, many nutritionists contend that sugar feeds cancer.

So over the past few months, my diet has changed quite a bit. I've increased my intake of healthy foods and decreased my intake of sugars and fats. I thought this was going to be a difficult adjustment, but it's been far easier than I ever expected. Turns out God has created a host of healthy foods that both strengthen my body and satisfy my sweet tooth. Fruit juices and smoothies have made it relatively easy to give up Coca-Cola. There's even a natural sweetener made from cactus (agave nectar) that is big on taste and low on the glycaemic index.

I tell you all this because there is an important spiritual lesson to be learned. You see, it's easy for our spiritual taste buds to become addicted to the sugary confections our society has to offer. To satisfy our inner cravings, we can sometimes turn to the cotton candy pleasures of this world. We can try to sweeten our lives on a diet of novels, newspapers and network TV. As a result, we can lose our appetite for God's Word. What's more, we can forget the healthy pleasure that God gives to all who drink deeply of His living water and feast on His bread of life.

In this chapter, you'll learn how hard times can cause us to retrain our spiritual taste buds in healthy ways. You'll be reminded that God wants you to *"taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Psalm 34:8).

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- 1 Peter 1:22-2:2
- Psalm 34:1-8

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

Check the translations you read:

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- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

Christians feed on Scripture. Holy Scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body. Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son.

The metaphorical imperative arrives among us backed by the authority of St. John the Theologian...

I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter (Revelation 10:9-10).

...A voice told John to take the book from the huge angel, this God-Messenger preaching from his world-straddling pulpit. And so he did, he walked up to the angel and said, "Give me the book." The angel gave it to him, but then said, "Here it is; eat it. Eat this book. Don't just take notes on the sermon. Eat the book." And John did it. He put away his notebook and pencil. He picked up his knife and fork. He ate the book.

The imagery, as is all the imagery in St. John's Revelation, is complex, a fusion of images from Moses and the Prophets and Jesus. This vision of the preaching angel is full of reverberating resonances. But what appears most immediate and obvious is that the mighty angel is preaching from the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. The book that John ate was the Bible, or as much of the Bible as was written at that time. The word "book" (Greek *biblion*, which arrives in our language as "Bible") suggests that the message God gives to us has meaning, plot, and purpose. Writing a book involves ordering words in a purposeful way. These words make sense. We do not come to God by guesswork: God reveals himself. These scriptural words reveal the Word that created heaven and earth; they reveal the Word that became human flesh in Jesus for our salvation. God's Word is written, handed down, and translated for us so that we can enter the plot. We hold these Bibles in our hands and read them so that we can listen and respond to these creative and saving words and get in, firsthand, on the creating and saving.

The act of eating the book means that reading is not a merely objective act, looking at the words and ascertaining their meaning. Eating the book is in contrast with how most of us are trained to read books—develop a cool objectivity that attempts to preserve scientific or theological truth by eliminating as far as possible any personal participation that might contaminate the meaning. But none of us starts out reading that way. I have a granddaughter right now who eats books. When I am reading a story to her brother, she picks another off a stack and chews on it. She is trying to get the book inside her the quickest way she knows, not through her ears, but through her mouth. She doesn't make fine distinctions between ear and mouth—any opening will do to get it inside her. But soon she'll go to school and be taught that that's not the way to go about it. She'll be taught to get answers out of her book. She'll learn to read books in order to pass examinations, and having passed the exams, put the book on the shelf and buy another.

But the reading that John is experiencing is not the kind that equips us to pass an examination. Eating a book takes it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of our lives. Readers become what they read. If Holy Scripture is to be something other than mere gossip about God, it must be internalized. Most of us have opinions about God that we are not hesitant to voice. But just because a conversation (or sermon or lecture) has the word "God" in it, does not qualify it as true. The angel does not instruct St. John to pass on information about God; he commands him to assimilate the word of God so that when he does speak, it will express itself artlessly in his syntax just as the food we eat, when we are healthy, is unconsciously assimilated into our nerves and muscles and put to work in speech and action.

Words—spoken and listened to, written and read—are intended to do something in us, give health and wholeness, vitality and holiness, wisdom and hope. Yes, *eat* this book. (pp. 19-22)

Eugene Peterson, Pastor and Professor, *Eat This Book*, pp. 19-22
Best known for his paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*.

Group Discussion Questions:

1. In the introduction to this chapter, Pastor Rick mentioned having a sweet tooth. Just for fun – do you tend to like sweets or savouries?

How does eating a healthy diet sound to you?

How can we apply 1 Corinthians 10:31 to what we eat and drink?

2. What do you find most challenging about developing a spiritual appetite for the things of God, (example, reading His Word, prayer, obedience)?
3. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture that can help you in developing an appetite for God's Word and His will?
4. How did God use your study in Scripture this week to strengthen you in the face of your current challenges?
5. In what ways could you take measurable steps to increase your appetite for the things of God?
6. Pray together for an increased spiritual appetite and also for the challenges you are facing in life.

• Chapter 6 •

Waiting in Hope

Waiting in Hope

Some things don't come naturally to most of us. Like waiting. We're impatient when the receptionist puts us on hold. We overheat when construction turns the roadway into a parking lot. Our blood pressure rises when the doctor's office postpones our appointment.

Most of us hate to wait. Waiting can be irritating. Waiting can be deflating. Waiting can be excruciating. But in spite of that, the Bible says waiting is essential.

Over and over again in Scripture we read about people who had to *"wait for the Lord."* David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Paul had to wait for the Lord. Psalms 27:14 makes it clear that you and I will need to wait as well: *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."*

Since waiting doesn't come naturally to most of us, it will have to be learned. Paul once said that contentment was something he had to learn (Philippians 4:12). Evidently, we can put waiting in the same category.

One of the ways God teaches us to wait is by giving us a lot of chances to practice. He sovereignly and wisely orchestrates events in life to provide us with opportunities to wait on Him.

In this chapter, you'll discover why God wants us to learn to wait on Him. You'll see that waiting on God is more than just impatiently watching the clock slowly tick, more than just idling your emotional engines when you are stuck in circumstantial traffic.

In this chapter you'll discover the link between waiting and trust. You'll come to see how waiting relates to hoping. What you learn may not make waiting more enjoyable, but it will help it make more sense.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Psalm 40
- Psalm 62
- Psalm 130

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God’s truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

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- The Message

What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

For this week, we suggest you study the word “wait” (as in *waiting on the Lord*, or *hoping in Him*).

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

When the psalmist wrote in Psalm 130:5-6: *“I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for the morning; indeed, more than the watchman for the morning,”* he was comparing waiting expectantly on the Lord to the night guards of the city who watched the passage of time in anticipation of the coming dawn when they would be released from duty. The coming of the dawn was certain, but not without the passage of time. ...Waiting on the Lord inevitably means enduring the passage of time, but it means more, much more.

That waiting includes the concept of hope and is why the Hebrew word *quvah* is sometimes translated “hope” or “look expectantly,” and why [the Hebrew word] *yacha*, which means “to wait,” can mean either “wait” or “hope.” Waiting and hoping are wound together like the strands of a rope.

When we, like the guards of the city, wait for the morning, we are waiting for more than simply time to pass. We are waiting for the sun to rise and day to break, for the light to replace the darkness, and the cold to be replaced with the warmth of the sun.

Waiting involves an expectation of something special. Waiting means anticipation, expectation, confident hope in something that will take place. Ultimately, waiting on the Lord is like waiting on the sun to rise—waiting expectantly for the Lord’s answers to human needs as the sun brings the warmth of the day.

As the watchman waits for the sun because he knows it is reliable, so the psalmist waits for the Lord even more because he knows the Lord is more reliable than the rising of the sun. In other words, waiting is fundamentally wrapped up with knowing, trusting, and believing in the Lord and His person (His character) and in His promises.

The ability to wait on the Lord stems from being confident and focused on who God is and in what God is doing. It means confidence in God’s person: confidence in His wisdom, love, timing, understanding of our situation and that of the world. It means knowing and trusting in God’s principles, promises, purposes, and power.

J. Hampton Keathley III,
<http://bible.org/article/waiting-lord>

The place of waiting is ...a unique position where human beings hate to be but where the biblical God is always leading them. It is when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is when you are finally out of the way. It is when you are between your old comfort and any possible new answer. If you are not trained in how to hold anxiety, how to live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run....anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing.

Richard Buhr,
quoted in *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* by Ruth Barton

We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in You.

Psalms 33:20-22

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:30-31

.... when we set ourselves to wait on God we ought beforehand to resolve that it shall be with the most confident expectation of God's meeting and blessing us. We ought to make up our minds to this, that nothing was ever so sure, as that waiting on God will bring us untold and unexpected blessing. We are so accustomed to judge God and His work in us by what we feel, that the great probability is that when we begin more to cultivate the waiting on Him, we shall be discouraged, because we do not find any special blessing from it. The message comes to us, "Above everything, when you wait on God, do so in the spirit of abounding hopefulness. It is God in His glory, in His power, in His love longing to bless you that you are waiting on."

Andrew Murray, *Waiting on God*

Waiting on God is an expression of our hope and trust that He will show Himself faithful to His promises and supply the help we need in His time and way.

Rick Reed, *On the Way* blog post • March 23, 2011

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of a time when you had to wait a long time, but afterwards would say: "That was worth the wait"?
2. How is "waiting on God" different than waiting in general (waiting in line at the Post Office or waiting to get an appointment)?
3. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture that can help you in the area of waiting on God? (Indicate both the verses and insights that came from them).
4. Sometimes we may feel that waiting means doing nothing. How does Isaiah 26:8 correct this misunderstanding?
5. Read Psalm 131. How does the psalmist learn to rest in the midst of waiting? How can we follow his example?
6. What steps will you take this week to apply what you've learned?
7. Waiting isn't easy. Pray for one another in the areas where you are waiting for God to lead, provide and answer your requests.

• Chapter 7 •

Moving from Misery to Mission

Moving from Misery to Mission

Suffering has a way of focusing our attention on what matters most. We remember hearing the story of a man who learned his transmission needed major repairs. The repairs would cost several thousand dollars. He lamented his situation to a friend at work. His friend, who at the time was battling cancer, replied, "I've stopped complaining about anything that can be solved by simply writing a cheque." Those words put things into proper perspective.

God uses hard times to bring greater clarity to what really matters - and it isn't things. When people were worried about what they would eat or what they would wear, Jesus replied: "*Is not **life** more than important than food...or clothes?*" (Matthew 6: 25)

Life is fragile and eternity looms closer than many of us think. John Wesley understood this when he wrote:

*I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow...
a few moments hence, I am no more seen;
I drop into an unchangeable eternity.
I want to know one thing – the way to heaven and
how to land on that happy shore....*

Suffering should cause us to make certain our own souls are headed for heaven. In addition to that, we should have a growing concern for the destiny of others headed for an eternity apart from God.

Even while we are in the midst of trials, God is able to move us from misery to mission. Often, we'd like to wait until we "have it all together" but God makes His power "*perfect His power in our weakness.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9) In the midst of our cancer journey, we were most surprised at the many opportunities to share our faith. In fact, it seems our suffering often opens the door to opportunities to speak to others about our living, eternal hope in Christ!

In this week's study, we'll take a fresh look at how we can be attentive to the moments of mission when we can pass on hope - even in the midst of hard times.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Luke 24:44-49
- John 4

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God's truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

Check the translations you read:

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What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

- www.biblos.com
- www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm

Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

These words by Joni Eareckson Tada set an example for all of us in moving from misery to mission:

In John 14, Jesus says, “Anyone who has faith in Me will do...even greater things than these.” We tend to think Jesus was talking about miracles, as if Jesus were saying...one day you’ll do more miracles than me.

The thing that Jesus was doing wasn’t necessarily the miracles. He was spreading the Gospel; He was advancing His kingdom; He was reclaiming the earth as rightfully His. When Jesus gave that promise, He was saying, “I’m going to give you a job to do, and I promise you’ll have everything you need to get that job done, and you’ll do an even better job than Me.” Jesus ministered for three years, and at the end, He had a handful of disciples who half-believed in Him. After Jesus went to heaven and the Holy Spirit came down – my goodness. Peter preaches one sermon and thousands believed. That’s the greater thing that God wants us to do.

That’s what I have been seeing this past month. Every x-ray technician, every nurse, every doctor’s secretary, every clinician, every person I meet in nuclear medicine and at the MRI – it’s amazing how many opportunities I’ve been given to see people hungry and thirsty for Christ. I knew that was true before, but there seems to be something special that is accompanying this diagnosis. I’m just so amazed by people asking me, “How can you approach this breast cancer with such confidence in a God who allows it?” And I’m being given the chance to answer.

The greater thing is not the miracle; it’s the advancement of the Gospel; it’s the giving of the kingdom; reclaiming what is rightfully Christ’s.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, *Something Greater Than Healing*,
Just Between Us Magazine, Spring 2011

In his book, Radical Together, Pastor David Platt talks about how the church must not only bring the Gospel to its own community but also to the unreached peoples who have yet to hear of the Gospel. As David puts it, the church must seek to reach Bob (the guy nearby) and also seek to reach Baruti (the guy far away):

We are going to live and plan and strategize and organize and work so that Baruti hears and receives the Gospel.

This doesn't mean we neglect ... Bob or anyone else who is right around us. Indeed, we are going to reach Bob and all kinds of other people in our community. But as they come to Christ, we are going to encourage them to spend their lives spreading the Gospel to Baruti. We're going to teach them to pray for Baruti and the billion other people like him who don't have the Gospel. We're going to train them to know God's Word so they will be ready to share it on the spot in our culture and in other cultures. We're going to encourage them to stop using their resources for more comforts in Birmingham and start using their resources to get the Gospel to people like Baruti. We're going to dream with them about how they can leverage their businesses, their relationships, and the positions, possessions, influence, wealth, gifts, and talents that God has given them for the sake of God's glory in Baruti's life. We're going to mobilized them to make disciples in simple, reproducible, cross-cultural ways here that will one day impact Baruti over there.

Bob and Baruti are equally valued by God and equally lost without God. They both need the Gospel. But if the church I lead focuses only on Bob, then even if we are successful in reaching Bob, we will ultimately be disobedient to Jesus' command to get the Gospel to all people groups, including Baruti's people group. Therefore, I want to make sure that the church I lead has its sights set on Baruti, not to the exclusion of Bob, but to the inclusion of Bob and everyone else in Birmingham. And once we reach Baruti together, we will equip Baruti to reach still other unreached people. And we won't stop until the word *unreached* is no longer applicable to any people group."

David Platt, *Radical Together*

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever watched someone else go through a hard time in a way that left an imprint on your life? If so, who, and how did they impact you?
2. Often we want to wait to share the Good News of Christ when our lives are “perfect” and when life seems less challenging. When have you noticed opportunities to share the love of Jesus in the midst of hard times?
3. Jesus saw the needs of people and he took these opportunities to share the Gospel. It’s likely that the disciples hadn’t noticed the woman at the well – they were thinking about lunch! (John 4:31). Jesus urged them and us to consider the spiritual harvest fields.

What insights did you gain this week from your Scripture study about Jesus’ concern and call to mission? (Indicate the verse and the insight).

4. What do you find most challenging about sharing your faith with others?
5. How can God use all that we’ve studied this week to strengthen you or encourage you as you “move from misery to mission?”
6. As you go through this coming week, pray for eyes to see the opportunities that are before you. Pray for courage to step into these opportunities with the Good News (that’s what “Gospel” means) even in the midst of the hard times that you may be facing.

• Chapter 8 •

The Side Effects of Suffering

The Side Effects of Suffering

For most of my life, the term “side effects” has had negative connotations. When I think of the side effects of medications, I think of unwanted complications. The same goes for my view of the side effects of surgery or radiation. I vividly remember what my surgeon told me about the potential, long-term side effects I would be facing. It was rather sobering.

Suffering has its negative side effects. When hard times hit, they inevitably bring some unwelcome secondary consequences. For example, the loss of a job can trigger a number of unwanted side effects—inability to pay the rent, a sense of inadequacy, or maybe a need to relocate to find work. A protracted illness can carry a host of negative side effects as well: loss of a sense of normal, a growing sense of despondency, disruption of future plans.

But there is an upside to side effects. Suffering actually brings us side effects that are positive. That was one of the major surprises we discovered as we journeyed through a season of suffering.

Actually, the fact that suffering has positive side effects shouldn't have come as such a surprise. The Bible contains many assurances that suffering is meant for our good. In this chapter, you'll have a chance to discover that for yourself as you study God's Word.

Elizabeth Elliot loves to say, “Suffering is not for nothing.” God has a purpose in the pain He allows to enter our lives. As Romans 8:28 reminds us, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”*

Since hard times can hit us at any time, you'll want to pay close attention to what the Bible has to say about the positive side effects of suffering.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- 1 Peter 4:1-6
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God's truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

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What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

If you have a Study Bible, read the study notes for this passage. If possible, read what a Bible commentary also has to say. (You can look at two if you have time.) Record the main insights you gain.

Online commentaries are found at:

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Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

John Bunyan was a man who came to understand that suffering, while painful, can be profitable. It can enlarge a believer's soul and widen his or her ministry to others.

In 1660, Bunyan was arrested for preaching without an official church sanction. For most of the next twelve years, he remained in prison, separated from his wife and children. After twelve years in the Bedford jail (sixty miles north of London, England), a change in government policy (the 1672 Declaration of Religious Indulgence) led to his release. Bunyan was reunited with his family and his congregation. Later, he would again be arrested and spend another two years in prison.

While in prison, Bunyan studied and meditated on the Scriptures, finding strength for his soul. In time, he began to record what insights gained, sending his writings to the believers at the Bedford Church.

Bunyan became a prolific writer, completing over 50 books before his death in 1688. His best-known work is *The Pilgrim's Progress* (which is often ranked as the second-best selling book ever, only surpassed by the Bible). The famous evangelist, George Whitefield, once said of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "It smells of the prison."

When it comes to reflections on the benefits that come from times of suffering, Bunyan's most fruitful work may well be his *Advice to Sufferers*. In this work, Bunyan presents insights gleaned from a careful study of 1 Peter 4:19 combined with seasoned reflections on his own experience in prison. He builds a strong case that God sovereignly ordains suffering for the good of His people. As a result, Christians can "*entrust their souls to a faithful Creator*" (1 Peter 4:19) and wait for Him to accomplish His good purposes in their lives. In *Advice to Sufferers* he writes;

We are apt to overshoot, in the days that are calm, and to think ourselves far higher, and more strong than we find we be, when the trying day is upon us. We could not live without such turnings of the hand of God upon us. We should be overgrown with flesh, if we had not our seasonable winters. It is said that in some countries trees will grow, but will bear no fruit, because there is no winter there.

Bunyan found strength to endure suffering by devoting himself to studying God's Word. Scriptures came alive to him in new ways during his years in prison.

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now [in prison]. Those Scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen Him and felt Him indeed. ...I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world. ...I have seen that here that I am persuaded I shall never, while in this world, be able to express. ...I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all times and at every offer of Satan to afflict me, as I have found Him since I came in hither.

Shelly Esser wrote these words about her friend, Lisa Elliott, in an article Treasures in Darkness in the Summer 2011 issue of Just Between Us Magazine [Lisa (and Dave) Elliott are related to many Elliott families at The MET]:

Two years ago, I received a manuscript from a woman whose son was battling leukemia. He was in the early stages of the disease and Lisa shared their journey up to that point. Immediately my mother's heart identified with the words on the page and the anguish only a mother knows as she helplessly watches her child suffer. At the time my own daughter was battling an illness and so began a friendship, a treasure that the darkness in both of our lives gave us.

Isaiah 45:3 says, *"I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord."* We never think, especially at the time, of treasures coming out of the dark places in our lives to make something incredibly beautiful. In fact, it is in these various dark places of brokenness, heartbreak, and loss that God brings forth His light so that even the darkness is illuminated. And it's not only illuminated, it's full of treasures and riches in extraordinary abundance.

Shelley Esser, *Treasures in Darkness*,
Just Between Us Magazine, Summer 2011

Group Discussion Questions:

1. All of us have gone through some “hard times” that are now past. As you look back at those times, what positive side effects do you now see?

2. Note these words of a song by Jill Phillips, entitled *All the Good Things*

*If I could see like You do, from Your perspective view
The fires I'm walking through would look much different
I'd see those difficult days, for who they made me become,
and I would count them among, all the good things.*

Why is it so hard to see the good things in the midst of hard times?

3. What Scriptures assure us that God is working for good, and that He does have good intended for us, even in hard times?
4. How does this make it possible to “rejoice” even in our sufferings? (see Romans 5:3; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16)
5. From the Scriptures you studied this week, what most impacted you? How did God use your study in Scripture to strengthen you?
6. What is still most confusing or difficult in understanding the positive side effects of suffering?
7. What steps could you take to apply what you’ve learned this week? (Take into consideration the sermon and the Scripture we’ve looked at as a group). Close in prayer, asking for God’s wisdom and help in time of need.

• Chapter 9 •

The Fellowship of Suffering

The Fellowship of Suffering

Hard times can actually bring people together. Ask any group of people who have cleaned up after a catastrophe, weathered a war, or suffered through a similar situation. We actually deepen our friendships as we go through hard times with others. We've experienced this firsthand; as we walked through this cancer journey, deep bonds of friendship were formed with others who had also gone through cancer.

Winston Churchill knew that facing a war together could actually strengthen Great Britain as a country. He asked his citizens to let that war be "our finest hour." It's possible for a very challenging situation to strengthen a marriage, pull a family together, or bond a church community. While difficult circumstances are not good in themselves, facing them together can produce good results. Hard times provide opportunities to speak words of encouragement or to openly express our hearts. They also open wonderful doors for serving the needs of others.

We personally will always be grateful to those who blessed us with cards, calls, flowers, meals or a helping hand during this time of cancer treatment. Our children have now said: "You have so many friends." We were so enriched by the love that was shown to us. Through the fellowship of God's people our family was richly blessed, bringing us hope in the midst of a hard time.

Suffering also deepens our fellowship with Christ; as Paul wrote, "*I want to know Christ...and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings*" (Philippians 3:10). Perhaps we'll never really know Him until we identify with His sufferings (Isaiah 53).

This week, we'll look at how we can bless others who are suffering with our friendship and prayers. We'll also consider the great benefits that are part of being in a "fellowship of suffering."

We hope you're on this journey with a community of friends and believers; you are needed in the fellowship!

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- 2 Corinthians 1:1-11
- 2 Corinthians 5:4-7

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God's truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

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What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

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Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

Sometimes we just don't know what to say to someone who is hurting. Sometimes what we say just makes it worse. Here's some great counsel from Randy Alcorn from his book Giving Comfort to Hurting People:

People need to feel loved. A hurting child needs to feel his father's arms around him. When the father is away, he may have written words of love, as God has in His Word. But he may also call in the child's older brothers and sisters to express his love to his child.

To ignore someone's pain is to add to that pain. Instead of fearing we'll say the wrong thing, we should reach out to hurting people. Many times it's better just to put our arms around someone and cry with them; people almost always appreciate it when you acknowledge their loss. Yet so long as your heart is right, saying something is nearly always better than saying nothing.

There is a time for silence, to just sit and listen and weep with those who weep. We often condemn Job's friends, but we should remember that they started well. When they saw his misery, they wept aloud. And then for seven days and nights they sat with him, in silence, wordlessly expressing their concern for him (see Job 2:11-13). Later, when they began giving unsolicited advice and rebuke, Job not only had to deal with his suffering, but with his friends' smug responses, which added to his suffering.

When someone in pain expresses raw emotions, we shouldn't scold them. Friends let friends share honest feelings.

Darrell Scott told me that after his daughter Rachel was murdered at Columbine, people often quoted Romans 8:28 to him. He wasn't ready to hear it. How sad that a powerful verse, cited carelessly or prematurely, becomes a source of pain when it should offer great comfort. **Think of God's Truth like tools.** Don't use a hammer when you need a wrench. And don't use either when you need to just give someone a hug, a blanket, or a meal – or just weep with them.

Don't disappear or avoid your friend who needs you now more than ever. If you find yourself not wanting to make a phone call when you hear about someone's crisis, remind yourself that any expression of concern is better than none. When people lose a loved one, they don't want to "move on" as if the person never existed. Even if doing so makes them cry, usually they want and need to talk about them.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15) We tend to do better at rejoicing. Because we don't like to feel pain, we tend to ignore others' pain. But they need us to become the arms of Jesus to them. If we're not there for them, who will be?

Randy Alcorn, *Giving Comfort to Hurting People*,
Eternal Perspectives Magazine, Summer 2011

Jesus' Words:

Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me, sick and you visited Me.

...When did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? Truly I say to you, to the extent you did it to one of these brothers of mine...you did it unto Me.

Matthew 25:31-40

I keep thinking about 1 Peter 2:21, *"To these hardships you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example you should follow in His steps."* Those steps most often lead Christians not to miraculous, divine interventions but directly into the *"fellowship of suffering."* In a way, I've been drawn closer to the Saviour, even with this breast cancer. There are things about His character that I wasn't seeing a year ago or even six months ago. That tells me I am still growing and being transformed. 1 Peter 2:21 is a good rule of thumb for any Christian struggling to understand God's purposes in hardship.

Joni Eareckson Tada, *Something Greater Than Healing*,
Just Between Us Magazine, Spring 2011

Group Discussion Questions:

1. *“Two are better than one...If one falls down, his friend can lift him up. But pity the man who has no one to help him up!”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9) When have you experienced the blessing or the support of a friend or a group?
2. What have you found most challenging or difficult about being part of “the fellowship of suffering?”
3. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture? (Indicate the Scripture verse and insight.)
4. What verses reminded you to pray or support those who are suffering or to accept help in your own time of need?
5. In what particular ways did God use your study of Scripture this week to encourage you?
6. What steps could you take as a family or as a group to apply what you have learned this week?
7. Be sure to take some time to pray together for the needs of your group. Is there anyone missing you need to pray for and contact this week?

• Chapter 10 •

The Hope of Glory

The Hope of Glory

A number of years ago, Linda and I received a letter from a professor who had been influential in both our lives during our university years. He had just been diagnosed with an aggressive, advanced cancer. This man had always been a stellar example of a spiritually-vibrant Christian. He had taught us much about worship during our years with him.

In his brief letter he taught us something about heaven. He closed his letter with this thought: “For the Christian, home is not where we are from but where we are headed.”

One of the positive side effects of suffering is to remind us that we are not home yet. As wonderful as life is, we were made for something more. C.S. Lewis was making that point when he wrote, “Our heavenly father has provided many delightful inns for us along our journey, but he takes great care to see that we do not mistake any of them for home.”

When life is going well, we are tempted to act as though we are already home. We lose the eternal perspective that reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21), we are still “*strangers and aliens*” (1 Peter 2:11) and we are still waiting for the “*redemption of our bodies*” (Romans 8:23).

Hard times shatter our illusions of living forever here and spur us on in the journey to our eternal home with Christ. Suffering keeps us from mistaking the inns we live in now for the home Christ is preparing for us.

In this final chapter, you’ll discover how the hard times in your life help keep your focus from becoming too short-sighted and time-bound. You’ll learn that suffering motivates you to get ready for glory.

Select one of the following passages for study and reflection:

- Romans 8:18-25
- 1 Corinthians 15
- Philippians 3:20-21

For the passage you selected, do the following exercises:

The “W” Questions:

Read the entire chapter in which the passage you selected is found. Answer as many of the following questions as possible.

WHO are these verses about?

WHAT is going on and what can we learn?

WHEN does this happen?

WHERE does this happen?

WHY is this significant?

Passage Summary:

Reading Scripture prayerfully and repeatedly (some suggest four times per passage) is life transforming as it renews our minds to God's truth. Read and reread your selected verses using different translations (see *Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*). Write out a summary that captures the flow of thought and main ideas of your passage.

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What are the main ideas emphasized in the passage?

In one or two sentences, summarize the overall flow of thought in the passage?

Word Study:

Using a concordance (*Biblegateway.com* or *Biblos.com*), look up other occurrences of a key word from your passage (often a word used more than once). List some of the references you examine, noting how the word is used in each passage. Think about how these other verses help you understand the word or concept more clearly.

Reference	Use of the Key Word

Summarize what you learn about the word you studied:

Commentary Insights:

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Commentary Name: _____

Insights gained:

Application Action Plan:

Write out what you sense God is prompting you to do as a result of your study of this passage. Be as specific as possible.

Read and Reflect:

None of us, in our culture of comfort, know how to prepare ourselves for dying, but that is what we should do everyday. Every single day we die a thousand deaths. We don't just walk through the valley of the shadow of death when we get a medical report or when we survive a stroke. We go through the valley of the shadow of death every time we say no to our selfish desires. When we say yes to the grace of God, we are learning how to die.

This past weekend, I was singing hymns with my friends. One of my favorites is *"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"* but the words in the hymnal we were using had been changed. They took out the verse on death: *"Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side."* They exchanged the wonderfully rich, pithy, deep, hard words with something vague like: *"Help me through until the other side."* They extricated those words about death and hell's destruction. Why do that? We need to learn how to die every day. Suffering does that. It prepares us. Every time we go to sleep, it's a rehearsal of the day when our eyes will ultimately close and we wake up on the side of eternity.

Joni Eareckson Tada,
Just Between Us Magazine, Spring 2011

Since my Sunday school days I have known the end of Moses' story: he got to see the Promised Land but he didn't get to go in. Back then I accepted this as the consequence for Moses' sin and allowed myself only a vague sense that perhaps it seemed a little harsh.

It has taken me a long time to really face this part of Moses' story and look at it unflinchingly because it brings up a painful possibility—the possibility that this could happen to me. That I, too, could work hard and serve long—straining towards some goal or dream—and that God might someday say to me, *"You can look, but you can't go in. You can long for it, but someone else will take it across the finish line...the rest of the way."* For anyone who has dreamed dreams and seen visions, this possibility is almost too much to bear.

This part of Moses' story does speak to the fact that when you choose the spiritual life the stakes get higher and higher. Behavior and attitudes that were good enough last year may not be good enough this year. A level of integrity that was good enough for one level of spiritual leadership disappoints others and yourself as you move into greater responsibility. ...There is a price to be paid for leadership, and I think somehow Moses knew this and had accepted it.

Even so I have read and reread the book of Deuteronomy looking for some evidence of an inner struggle, some indication that Moses argued with God one more time on the side of the mountain. One thing we can feel pretty certain about is that if Moses felt like arguing, he probably would have! But I don't think he did. It is as if everything Moses had gone through had prepared him for this moment. Whatever letting go he had done in order to leave the house of Pharaoh to find God—and himself—this wilderness prepared him for this final letting go. Settling down by the well in Midian and being content to be a soul in God's presence had prepared him to sit on the side of this mountain content, once again, to be a soul in God's presence. He no longer needed any role or responsibility or task to define him... All of his experiences of discerning and doing the will of God had brought him to the place where he knew, down to the bottom of his being, that the will of God was the best thing that could happen to him under any circumstances.

Every time I read about Moses' relationship with God I am filled with longing, and it is not the longing to get somewhere—although there are always new places to get to. It is the longing to be a certain kind of person. A person who knows God. A person who is faithful against all odds and does not shrink back. A person through whom God can perform whatever deeds need to be done—mighty or otherwise—but also a person who can be just as content settling down beside a well or sitting on the side of a mountain in God's presence. Someone whose face shines because she has been talking to God. Someone whose every move is a result of an attempt to listen to God and then do what he says. Someone who, when God says, *"It's time to go; it's time for you to come home,"* easily lets go and rests in the arms of the One whom she has grown to love and trust with her very being.

Ruth Haley Barton reflecting on the life of Moses,
Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership

Group Discussion Questions:

1. The glory waiting for us on the far side of death is far beyond comparison and all God has prepared for us is beyond what our eyes and ears can imagine (Romans 8:18).

Why do you think we don't speak more about the "*hope of glory*?"

2. What insights did you gain this week from your study of Scripture that illuminates the glories of our salvation and of heaven?
3. What do you still find challenging or confusing about heaven or the hope of glory?
4. Which Scripture verses did God use this week to encourage you?
5. How can we begin to prepare now for the "*hope of glory*?"
6. What next steps do you need to take from what we have learned this week?
7. If you're musical, sing these words from *My Jesus I Love Thee* together:

*In mansions of glory and endless delight,
I'll ever adore Thee in mansions so bright;
I'll sing with a glittering crown on my brow,
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus 'tis now.*

*Thank you for being part of this series with us!
It's been a journey of hope taken together.*

Close in prayer for one another in your small group or family.