

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 1: Reality

1. Has there ever been a season in your life when you looked at your circumstances and wondered if God really cared?
2. Give an example of a time when you realized some area of your life wasn't going to turn out the way you had hoped.
3. Do you ever get frustrated looking at other people's lives and thinking that life seems to be working for them and not you? How do you handle that frustration?
4. Which is a bigger problem for you—believing in God or dealing with the reality that God does exist yet so does a lot of pain and suffering?
5. What is your typical response when God doesn't show up for you the way you thought God was going to show up?

Chapter 2: Don't Run

1. Do you remember a time when all the circumstances of your life led you to believe a certain dream was going to become reality . . . only to have that dream shatter (or fizzle)?

2. Do you see any similarities between your life and the first half of David's story?
 3. When you feel as if God is not there and life is not turning out the way you had planned, how do you typically respond?
 - I tend to lean into God more than ever before.
 - I tend to try to take control by manipulating the circumstances so they'll come out as I think they should.
 - I try to minimize the circumstances and pretend it's not a big deal.
 - I'm often tempted to turn toward addictive behavior (overeating, alcohol, television, work) to minimize the pain.
 - I do something else, for example:
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4. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (NIV). Can you think of a time when perseverance and patience have paid off for you in the midst of a Plan B? Can you name a time when you think your perseverance and patience did not pay off? Why do you think this is true?

Chapter 3: The Illusion of Control

1. What do you think about the following statement: "The greatest of all illusions is the illusion of control"?
2. In what area of your life are you most tempted to try to control things (vocational, relational, and/or spiritual)? What are some of the ways you try to do this?
3. David comes to a place in his life where he understands that just because his will won't be done, that doesn't mean God's will won't be done. Have you come to the same conclusion in

- your life, or do your dreams, your desires, or your will still trump God's dreams, desires, and will?
4. Is complete and utter abandonment even a desire of your heart? What single step could you take in your life to assure moving in this direction?
 5. Can you think of a time when you responded to a disappointment or a shattered dream in one of the following ways?
 - With ongoing anger and bitterness.
 - By trying harder to control the situation.
 - By letting go and saying, "Not my will, but your will be done."

Why do you think you responded that way?
 6. In what area of your life do you find it hardest to say "I can't" or "let it be"? Why do you think control is such an issue for you in that area?
 7. Can giving up control ever be a form of irresponsibility? What determines the difference between a healthy "let it be" and an unhealthy refusal to take responsibility?

Chapter 4: Your Jordan

1. How have you seen different Plan B situations in your life stretch you and draw you closer to God? Have you ever had a Plan B situation that *didn't* do that? Why do you think that was?
2. Can you think of a time when God led you to do something you simply could not do apart from God—a time when it seemed like things moved from difficult to almost impossible? What did you do?
3. Name a time in your life when you were sure you were at a dead end with no answers . . . yet you were probably exactly where God wanted you to be?

4. “Everybody faces a Jordan. Every one of us faces a barrier that is keeping us from the life God has for us.” Is there a place in your life where you sense God is asking you to take a step of faith (finances, an addiction, a relationship that’s falling apart, forgiveness)?
5. Why do you think God often waits for us to take the first step before we see his power released in our lives?
6. Do you agree with the following statement: “Constant contact with the Creator is essential for transformation living”? What are some of the most effective ways to maintain contact with God?

Chapter 5: Paralyzed

1. What are you most afraid of in life? What kinds of fear tend to paralyze you?
2. What is your most common response to fear?
 - I run in the opposite direction.
 - I look fear in the eye and run right toward it.
 - I typically see fear as an opportunity to lean on God and to grow closer to him.
3. In what ways have you seen your fears establish the limits of your life?
4. Do you agree that we have all been inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear and worry? What are some of the ways that fear, worry, and stress can harm us?
5. Oswald Chambers said, “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.” In what ways have you seen that play out in your life?
6. What is one fear you feel you need to surrender to God or one area of your life where you need to seek God’s kingdom first?

Chapter 6: Whiplash

1. Have you ever walked into a situation thinking it was going to work out great, only to feel as if the rug had been ripped out from underneath you? Describe this situation.
2. When is the last time you asked (or wanted to ask), “Why me?”—or just “Why?”
3. Why do you think it’s so hard for us to imagine God is with us when we’re in the midst of a Plan B situation?
4. When was the last time you felt like Paul, stuck in Troas, not knowing what God wanted you to do next? How did you handle it?
5. What do you think someone who is in your exact circumstances would do if they were confident God was with them?
6. Rick Warren says, “God is more interested in your character than your comfort.” What about you? Are you more committed to your comfort or character? Are you sure?
7. Are you ever tempted to put your faith in what God does instead of who God is?

Chapter 7: What Have You Done for Me Lately?

1. In what ways/circumstances are you sometimes tempted to view God as a vending machine? Has this ever seemed to work for you?
2. Describe a time when you fell into temptation because your needs weren’t being met. What happened in this situation? How do you think you could have handled it differently?
3. Can you remember a time when you felt you were doing everything right but you were still “punished”? Can you remember a time when you really messed up but somehow got away with it? How did you react in either situation?

4. Have you ever felt completely abandoned by God? If so, how did this happen? If not, what circumstances would tend to make you feel that way?
5. What are some of the circumstances you are most grateful for in life? What are some circumstances that *don't* naturally evoke feelings of gratitude? How do you respond to the idea of receiving *all* of your life—even the hard stuff—as a gift? What would keep you from being able to do that?
6. Do you find it difficult to just “believe God is who he says he is”? Why do you think this is so hard for some people to do?

Chapter 8: Darkness

1. Have you always assumed, like so many others, that the Bible promises God will never give us more than we can handle? Why do you think the chapter calls this “whacked theology”?
2. Has God ever asked you to give up something you were clinging to, something that might have kept you from deeper intimacy with him? How did you respond?
3. Do you have a systematic way for remembering God’s faithfulness in your life? If not, what are some ways you can establish one?
4. Do you agree with the following statement: “God loves you enough to strip you of the things that keep you from him”? What are some specific “good things” in life that might keep a person from God? Have you ever known a situation like this—where good things actually hindered a person’s walk with God?
5. This chapter suggests that doubting can actually be an act of faith. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Chapter 9: Me Too

1. Can you think of a time when someone comforted you with the words “me too” (or similar words)? How about a time when you were able to comfort someone with those same words?
2. What constitutes the “winners’ circle” in your life? What is the “losers’ circle”? Do you agree that it is usually easier to find authentic community in a losers’ circle? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel about the following statement: “You can only be loved to the extent you are known”?
4. Have you seen how prideful, arrogant, judgmental attitudes have been destructive to community and ultimately your own spiritual growth? Describe how this happened.
5. Why do you think more people don’t feel comfortable to share their disappointments, hurts, and questions in the context of Christian community?
6. What are some specific ways you can follow Paul’s command in Galatians 6:2 to “help each other with . . . troubles”?

Chapter 10: The Anchor

1. Describe a time when you’ve felt you were at odds with God. Do you think it was because you didn’t really want God but wanted what you thought God could give you? Do you think this chapter makes an unfair accusation in this regard?
2. This chapter speaks of two jacked-up theologies, two inadequate mental frameworks that can result from an incomplete reading of John 16:33. What are these? Can you think of anyone you know who subscribes to each of these incomplete approaches? Which do you personally think is more dangerous or harmful?

3. What common mistake about Christianity does this chapter point out? How would this mistake affect the way we approach a Plan B situation?
4. What are some idols you have noticed the people in your life worshiping? What idols might be revealed if you were to follow the trail of your time, your affections, your energy, and your money?
5. What do you think about the statement, “We must be willing, if necessary, to abandon the life we’ve planned and dreamed of in order to receive the life that our God has authored for us”? Do you know anyone who has actually done that?

Chapter 11: Power and Hope

1. Have you ever thought about the emotions that were represented at the cross? As a follower of Christ, what emotions do you think you would have felt that day?
2. How do you typically respond to situations that feel out of control or that make you feel powerless? For instance, are you likely to work harder, to try to get things organized, to try to get away from the situation, or to lean more on God?
3. If you could have any superpower, what would it be? What do you think this says about your needs, your hopes, and your fears?
4. This chapter suggests that our desire for power is really a desire for hope. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
5. According to this chapter, what are the two kinds of hope? Which kind of hope is more dependable, and why?
6. What does it really mean to say that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is still available to us today? How would our lives change if we really believed that?
7. In what area of your life do you most need a miracle right now?

Chapter 12: Waiting on God

1. St Augustine said, “There are two things that kill the soul: despair and false hope.” Can you think of a time you had false hope?
2. Has there ever been a time you’ve felt God calling you to give him glory in a way you just weren’t excited about?
3. Do you tend to be a *quickaholic*? How have you seen that play out in your spiritual formation?
4. The Bible is full of example after example of people waiting on God. What do you think God is trying to teach you in the waiting these days?
5. Does it bother you that Jesus waited so long before going to be with Mary and Martha?
6. How do you feel about having to accept God’s timing along with his power?
7. Lewis Smedes said, “Waiting is our destiny.” How do you tend to respond to waiting? Do you consider yourself a patient person or an impatient person?
8. Psalm 62:5–6 says, “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.” What kind of comfort do you find in a verse like this?

Chapter 13: Transformation Through Tragedy

1. On a scale of 1–10, how busy do you think you are these days? Is there room in your schedule to live an “examined” life? In general, do you feel fulfilled in your life?
2. How do you respond to the idea that we may *need* our Plan Bs to rescue us from a busy or shallow life? Do you find that statement enlightening, insulting, confusing? Do you agree?

3. Peter Scazzero says, “Our culture routinely interprets losses as alien invasions that interrupt our ‘normal’ lives. We numb our pain through denial, blaming, rationalizations, addictions, and avoidance.” When you experience pain, how are you most likely to numb it?
4. At what stage of spiritual development (as described in this chapter) would you say you’re in right now? Do you think it’s possible to go back and repeat a stage?
5. What does this chapter say is the key to being transformed in a Plan B situation?
6. What do you think God might be saying to you in the midst of your Plan B right now? (If you’re not currently in a Plan B situation, try to recall some of the things you learned about God and yourself in a previous Plan B situation.)

Chapter 14: The Bow

1. On a scale of 1–10, how important is it to you to have things fixed, figured out, and nailed down? What do you tend to do when you can’t tie a bow on things?
2. Name some times when God showed his love and faithfulness toward you. Then name a time when you were painfully aware of the tragedy and suffering? How do you tend to reconcile the seemingly contradictory realities of a God of love who is all-powerful and a life filled with tragedy and suffering?
3. Can you think of an example from your life where you chose to believe in God more than the crisis or tragedy in your life? What was the outcome of that situation?
4. What are the choices we always have in a Plan B circumstance? What choices might we not have?
5. Somehow, mysteriously, when we receive the love of Jesus into our lives through suffering, when we decide to *choose* that

love and share it, we keep suffering from having the last word in our lives. What are some of the specific ways we can *choose* and *share* the love of Jesus in the midst of our suffering?

6. Have you ever had a moment in the midst of a crisis when God unmistakably communicated to you that he was still with you? How did this come about?
7. What does the cross of Jesus Christ communicate to you in the midst of your Plan B?