



*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees
and be careful to keep my laws.*

Ezekiel 36:26-27

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Some Scripture quotations have been modified to make them gender inclusive or to fit the context.

MORPH: BUILD CHARACTER

A RELEVANT FAITH

Some say faith is irrelevant. Let's be honest. From a certain vantage point, they're correct.

Faith is irrelevant when nothing changes. There's no gain from church involvement, reading Scripture, prayer, or engaging experiences like *Morph*, when we have no intention of being any different from our engagement. Why go through the motions if we lack distinction from the world around us? Christ said as much: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Matthew 5:13, TNIV).

We could leave it at that if irrelevance, salt that isn't salty, was the only weakness of professed faith. Unfortunately, it is not. There is a second condition that may be more destructive. This is the professed faith that dramatically changes a person's life, but the change is not for the better; it is for the worse. They were jerks before they professed faith, then they got religion, and now they're jerks armed with doctrine. They'll gladly unload their newfound convictions on anyone within earshot. Pity their neighbors. They're in for a ride.

So yes, from a certain vantage point, faith is often perceived as irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst. And yet, you know this, and you're reading this page. Why? Why pursue something often misapplied, if applied at all? Why not get on with your life, chalk this up as something you tried but didn't work, and do something different? You alone can answer this question, but it's hoped that you're here for the richest of reasons. Yes, from a certain vantage point faith is irrelevant, but there is another vantage point, and from this perspective, faith is profound.

There is a rich and resonant faith inspired by authentic love for God. This is the faith that brings liberation and transformation—it builds character. The addict gains self-control. The bitter become forgiving. The greedy abound in generosity. The fearful grow in courage. The weary rest peacefully. The self-absorbed discover the people around them. The anxious display uncommon degrees of patience. The despondent develop joy. The soft gain fortitude. The harsh grow in gentleness. For these reasons, this module was created.

With that said, a distinction must be made. *Morph: Build Character* is not about change. In fact, if it were about change one would rightfully question if this module was informed by Scripture. Contrary to popular opinion, the emphasis of Scripture is not an emphasis on change. Change is not central to Scripture's message nor central to this *Morph* experience for the very simple reason that change is impossible. We can try to change, but it doesn't work. We may get excited for a day or a week, but in time, we're back to old patterns and nothing has really changed.

Scripture does not call us to change.

Scripture calls us to die.

We die to an old life so that “*just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*” (Romans 6:4). For some, this distinction seems trivial, a play on words. The objection is understandable. How is it that we’re not about change or teaching change when we talk about change on nearly every page of this book? Dig into life and dig into this experience, and you will discover not a mere play on words, but a profound reality that must be seen in context. This reality is very different, and even opposed, to simply applying a new method to change oneself. Authentic change happens not by tweaking our exterior, but by recognizing and living in accordance with the miraculous work of God in our interior. We change because he changes us.

So central to this experience is an experience with God. This is not a self-help study. This is an experience to further inspire and equip an authentic relationship with God for the purpose of experiencing his transformational presence.

Which leads to an important reality.

Most important to this *Morph* experience is not the readings, not the exercises, and not the topic of any particular week. Each of these meets a critical purpose, and if they were not important, we would not do them. But most important to this *Morph* experience is acquiring or increasing your taste for God. If through this experience you acquire or increase your passion for the presence of God, this experience will be exceedingly worth the effort.

And, yes, God is an acquired taste.

Describing God as an acquired taste may sound odd, but it’s an accurate description of a common experience. Tastes that are acquired are often met with confusion. *Why would anyone like this?* we think. Little by little our tastes then change. In time, the taste is acquired and we wonder how we ever lived without it. Most don’t instantly take to God. Those who acquire the taste, though, thirst for God in ways they did not previously expect. This is not to say everyone’s experience with God works this way, but the experience is common enough to acknowledge it for consideration.

Acquiring and increasing this passion for God can happen anywhere through this experience, but one place we are most explicit about it is through the Conversations with God. As with *Morph: Love God*, throughout this module you will be asked to engage God on a daily basis. These conversations are more than just information. They are intended to be relational, you and God talking together in a manner that honors your unique design. There is no perfect template that applies to everyone, so the template provided is intended to give plenty of breadth for personalization. You are asked and encouraged to make these moments reflective of your unique design and the current realities of your life. And more specifically, you are asked to listen for God’s voice through a letter written nearly 2,000 years ago.

ROMANS

If reading ancient mail sounds irrelevant to the current realities of your life, know that it can be. It can be a complete waste of time. To make matters worse, most of us lack time to keep up with our own mail and e-mail, so it’s understandable that we lack inspiration to read someone else’s mail who has long since died and who knew little to nothing of our fast-paced culture. And yet, for some reason, Paul’s letter to the church in Rome has been read countless times, again and again, down through the ages. It is heralded as deeply profound and unique to other letters written from the very same pen. Yes, he knew nothing of handheld computers and airplanes traveling at supersonic speeds, but by revelation from God’s Spirit, Paul’s letter offers piercing insight into the reality of our souls.

Why Romans? Consider a seemingly passing thought in this letter’s opening. It’s easily missed but key to understanding the unique opportunity before us...

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) (Romans 1:13, TNIV).

Why does it matter that Paul intended many trips to Rome, but as of this writing, had yet to make it? Is there any benefit from his frustrated plans? Actually, yes. Consider this: Paul's letter to the church in Rome is the only letter written by Paul to a church he had yet to visit. The result? The frustrated plans of this most passionate apostle serve a magnificent purpose. Because he had yet to teach them in person, Romans is the most comprehensive and in-depth scriptural teaching on the transformative power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In this letter, we not only discover how transformation happens, but we discover a deeply loving God who has gone to great lengths to rescue us from destructive living. Other letters from Paul are both deep and profound, but their teaching is narrowed, in all likelihood, because he'd taught them in person. Not so in Romans. In this letter, he begins by introducing himself to a church he had yet to meet, and from there he launches into an unfolding of God's astounding plan to rescue humanity.

With that said, know this: Despite the richness and profundity of Romans, your reading of this letter could *still* be a waste of time, depending upon your approach. You are given Scripture cards with a simple reading plan that breaks Romans into very doable daily readings (along with the website and weekly introductions). This reading plan comes with checkboxes to track your progress. Yes, this tool is helpful, very helpful, but if your reading of Romans becomes an obsession to just get through it, to check each and every box, the impact will be minimal at best. The purpose of this exercise, and the very passion of Romans itself, is the accessibility of God. God is here. By grace, he is with you and in you. Talk with him. Bring your thoughts from Romans into his presence. Let him know your trials and your triumphs. Listen for his voice. If you let this exercise inspire a deep and personal conversation with the God who loves you more than you will ever comprehend, then these Conversations with God will be exceedingly significant, deeply transformative, and an unmatched use of your time and energy.

One more comment on Conversations with God. These exercises continue to encourage the Read, Memorize, Meditate format introduced in *Morph: Love God*. Scripture memory is often viewed as optional in experiences like *Morph*. In truth, this whole experience is optional. You don't have to do this. But if you are doing this, to make the most of it, you will want to do the roll-up-your-sleeves work of Scripture memory. As Romans itself exhorts us, we are "*transformed by the renewing of our minds*" (Romans 12:2). Underneath that word *transformed* is the Greek word *metamorphusthe*. To morph, to truly change, renewing the mind is essential and Scripture memory is a powerful discipline toward this end. If you engaged Scripture memory in other *Morph* modules, and have yet to complete the other passages, you're encouraged to simply begin where we are and memorize two verses each week. You can always step back to previous passages at a later date, but for most, to do more only creates frustration.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

A few important practical suggestions.

To the Newcomers

Morph: Build Character works very much like *Morph: Love God*. If you did not complete *Morph: Love God* before engaging this experience, you will want to complete the *Love God Primer* downloadable on the *Morph: Build Character* online group. This primer gives the essentials for this experience and is important to orientate you to what you will experience in this module. Yes, it will take added investment of time and energy, but make the investment. It's important to this experience.

Daily and Weekly Rhythms

Morph: Build Character is both a daily and a weekly experience. On a daily basis, the above-mentioned Conversations with God are encouraged. If you're new to *Morph*, or if it's been a while, be sure to

INTRODUCTION TO MORPH: BUILD CHARACTER

read over the Week Two section of the *Love God Primer* (downloadable on the *Morph: Build Character* online group) to better understand the Read, Memorize, Meditate format encouraged in this experience.

On a weekly basis, there is a brief online video, a reading, and a Morph Me exercise to apply the reading.

Affirmations

A uniqueness of this module is the creation of affirmations. Greater explanation of affirmations will be given throughout this experience, but for now it's important to know how these work with the above-mentioned Scripture memory. As part of *Morph*, you are encouraged to memorize twenty-five passages with each of the four modules (*Love God, Build Character, Love People, and Be Christ's Body*). With that said, in this module, you will find twenty rather than twenty-five Scripture cards. This is to accommodate affirmations. In brief, affirmations are personalized applications of Scripture to our lives. We affirm what we know to be true about ourselves, our God, or other important realities related to building character. Because these affirmations are based on Scripture, you are encouraged to memorize related passages of Scripture coupled with your affirmations. You may end up creating more or less than five affirmations, so view these five open pages either as places to include affirmations or simply passages you would like to memorize.

Running Partners and Small Groups

Morph is an experience that cannot be completed alone but must be done in community. If you're reading this on your own, simply recruit a friend or two, and go through this module together. As with other *Morph* modules, you're encouraged to meet each week, but with groups of five or more, you're encouraged to meet every other week as Running Partners (two to four people) and every other week as a Small Group (five or more people). If your group is four or fewer people, simply meet as a group every week. The conversation guides at the end of each week reflect this rhythm.

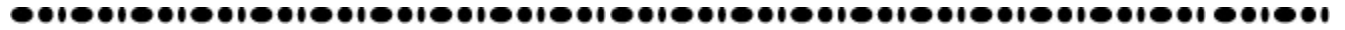
Adding New People to Your Group

Because *Morph* is a four-module experience, it's natural to think newcomers can't join your group until all four modules are complete. Such thinking, though, can damage your group. Newcomers are encouraged and can be assimilated in a number of ways. If the number of people you're assimilating is small compared to the number of people in the existing group, simply have them read the *Love God Primer* and jump in. If you're assimilating a group of people that is comparable to the number of people already in the group, consider subgrouping during your group meeting times. If you do so, subgroups can be in the same or different *Morph* modules, it doesn't matter. If they're in different modules, simply bring the group together for times of prayer and community, but have different people facilitate the multiple conversations.

MORPH: BUILD CHARACTER

This *Morph* module is intended to inspire and equip authentic transformation. Those interested in an irrelevant faith, to be pulled out only when convenient, need read no further. Engage this experience not to discover new ways to change your old self, but to discover how to live by grace in the newness of Christ. This kind of change, change from the inside out, is both powerful and profound, and carries not just into the realities of this life, but into the realities of all eternity.

GUIDANCE FOR SMALL GROUPS AND RUNNING PARTNERS



GUIDANCE FOR GROUPS WITH FIVE OR MORE PEOPLE:

- ▶ **Small Group Rhythm**
Meet as a Small Group every other week.
- ▶ **Running Partner Rhythm**
Meet as Running Partners every other week (opposite the Small Group week).
- ▶ **Running Partner Numbers**
An ideal size is three people (no more than four).
- ▶ **Conversation Guides**
At the end of each week's material is a conversation guide. Use this guide for both Small Group weeks and Running Partner weeks. The material is designed so that week one is Running Partners, week two is Small Groups, and then alternating in that rhythm.
- ▶ **Mixing It Up**
Where possible, mix Running Partners up with each of the eight-week *Morph* modules.

GUIDANCE FOR GROUPS WITH TWO TO FOUR PEOPLE:

- ▶ **Weekly Rhythm**
Meet as a group each week.
- ▶ **Conversation Guides**
At the end of each week's material is a conversation guide. Each guide is titled either "Running Partner Guide" or "Small Group Guide." This titling is for groups of five or more. Ignore the titling and simply use each guide for each week.

SMALL GROUP AND RUNNING PARTNER GUIDES

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

INITIATE MEETING

- ▶ Despite the fact that you've yet to experience this module and won't fully know how to answer this question, answer it anyway...

How do you hope your life might be different once you complete this *Morph* module?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ What do you think of when you hear the title *Morph: Build Character*?
- ▶ What is one thing you would like to be true of your character that is not true today?
- ▶ How have you approached character change in your life?

SCRIPTURE

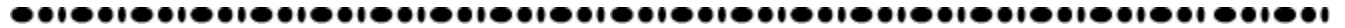
- ▶ As a group, read Psalm 1 aloud.
- ▶ What does this passage say about building character?
- ▶ What does the metaphor of a tree planted by a stream have to do with building character? Have you done this in your life? How yes or how no?

RUNNING PARTNER GROUPS

- ▶ If your group has five or more people, break up into Running Partner groups—subgroups of two to three people (preferably three when possible). If your group has four or fewer people, stay together to discuss the following:
- ▶ If you do not yet know each other well, spend some time introducing yourselves.
- ▶ Read the Running Partner Values (page 11) aloud.
 - Which of these values will come naturally for you?
 - Which values will stretch you?
- ▶ Decide on a regular meeting time and make a note of it on page 9.
- ▶ Close your time together by praying for each other in light of the conversation you just had. Pray that each of you will have a personal and powerful experience over the next eight weeks.

SMALL GROUP AND RUNNING PARTNER GUIDES

CONTACTS AND MEETING INFORMATION



GROUP CONTACT INFORMATION

NAMES	PHONE	E-MAIL
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____
8. _____	_____	_____
9. _____	_____	_____
10. _____	_____	_____
11. _____	_____	_____
12. _____	_____	_____

SMALL GROUP

MEETING PLACE	MEETING TIME	DATE OF FIRST MEETING
_____	_____	_____

RUNNING PARTNERS

MEETING PLACE	MEETING TIME	DATE OF FIRST MEETING
_____	_____	_____

SMALL GROUP AND RUNNING PARTNER GUIDES

Week Zero

RUNNING PARTNER VALUES

BE A LISTENER

Scripture calls us to “*be quick to listen, slow to speak*” (James 1:19). We will resist the impulse to fill the air with hollow words. If we have nothing to say, we will say nothing.

BE GRACIOUS

Scripture exhorts us to “*forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you*” (Colossians 3:13). We will extend grace to each other, resist comparisons, and seek to encourage each person in his or her current season of life and maturity.

BE TRUTHFUL

Scripture tells us that Christ came “*full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). We will offer truth with sensitivity, but we will not shrink from exhorting each other truthfully, and we will not encourage perpetual falsehoods in each other’s lives.

BE SENSITIVE TO GOD’S SPIRIT

Scripture tells us that God’s Spirit will “*guide you into all truth*” (John 16:13). We will not take this to presume upon God’s Spirit or assume all we say or think is from God’s Spirit, but we will listen for God’s guidance and God’s voice in each other and in our inner-persons.

BE GENTLE

Scripture tells us that when assisting a brother or sister struggling with sin, we are to “*restore them gently*” (Galatians 6:1). We are aware of our own shortcomings and will not expect perfection from each other. When needed, we will work gently with each other to point one another toward a better way.

BE MULTIPLIERS

Scripture tells us we are to take what we’ve discovered and “*entrust it to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others*” (2 Timothy 2:2). As Running Partners, we will multiply. We will expand our influence by expanding and multiplying our relationships.

BE SENSITIVE WITH SENSITIVE INFORMATION

Scripture tells us “*a gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret*” (Proverbs 11:13). This is not some sort of secret society, but we will handle sensitive information sensitively. We will guard each other’s privacy and be trustworthy with each other’s vulnerability.

SMALL GROUP AND RUNNING PARTNER GUIDES

Week One

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 39)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 1-2</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Psalm 19</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 1:1-7 Day 2: Romans 1:8-17 Day 3: Romans 1:18-32 Day 4: Romans 2:1-16 Day 5: Romans 2:17-29 Day 6: Psalm 19</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>Ezekiel 36:26-27</u> "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." <u>Galatians 5:22-23</u> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 15)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 25)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 43)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out</p> <p>RELATED RESOURCES</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community</p> <p>SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS</p> <p>(visit website)</p>

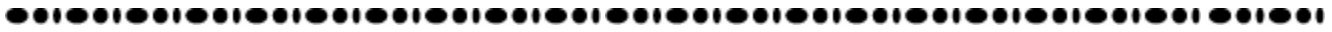
WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 1, p. 14

Week One
Reading

GROAN



THE GROAN

Let's quiet ourselves, if just for a moment...

Listen closely to the world around you. It clashes and crashes from one day to the next. There's clutter and clanging and it's seemingly nonstop. Listen closely to this world, but don't listen to the noise; listen through the noise. Listen for something you hear every day and yet may never have heard at all. Tune your ears, and you will hear it. It's a constant behind the noise. It's common, yet we tune it out. Either way we hear it, but we don't hear it. It's there, but it's not. Listen closely.

Listen for the groan.

The groan comes from the most unlikely places. We expect the groan in back alleys and war-torn countries, but the groan is far more pervasive. The groan is heard on both Main Street and Wall Street. It's heard in the halls of academia and on the athletic field. The groan comes from young and old. It's everywhere. It's the constant hum behind the clatter and the clanging of the day.

Mail stacks on top of mail.

E-mail stacks on top of e-mail.

Voice mail stacks on top of voice mail.

The telephone rings. The doorbell rings. The alarm clock rings.

The co-worker has a question. The child has a question. The boss has a question.

The friend needs help. The family needs help. The neighbor needs help.

The baby cries for food. The child cries for comfort. The adult cries for direction. The aged cry from loneliness.

Get in the car.

Get on the plane.

Get the deal.

Get back in the car.

Get back on the plane.

Get back home and do it again the next day.

Don't rest.

Don't evaluate.

GROAN

Don't think.

Just keep going.

Just don't quit.

Just go.

It's the waiting, the worrying, the wishing, the wanting.

It's the groping, the griping, the grating, the grappling.

It's the groaning.

We groan.

Why?

THE PERFECT HOUSE

The real estate agent opens the door to what may be the perfect house. You step across the threshold and are awed by what you discover. It's everything you'd ever hoped for but could never really describe. The brick, the wood, the stone—it's all right where you'd want it to be. The rooms are spacious but warm. The layout is interesting and thoughtful. The view is spectacular. The yard is pristine. The neighborhood reflects the house. You mentally place furniture you have or would like to have in each of the rooms. The couch you recently purchased seems made for this house. The table you inherited will fit right where a table should fit. You'd like a piano, and there's a place seemingly made for one.

"This house has character," you quietly comment to yourself.

As you move from room to room, you notice an odd look on the face of your agent. At first you don't say anything, but in time you must. You don't get it. Your enthusiasm, although initially echoed in her voice, is increasingly not mirrored on her face. *This is the house, you think. Why is she not all over this? She's done her job. Why is she not pleased?*

And so you ask.

She pauses before responding.

"Be quiet for a moment. Do you hear something? Listen closely," she says.

Listen? you think.. *Listen for what? The house is empty.*

You pause and listen. You hear a truck turning around a nearby corner. You hear neighborhood children laughing from a yard across the street. A dog barks in the distance. None of it seems significant. It's a little noise, yes, but it's all within the range of normality. *What's she getting at?*

"Do you hear it?" she asks.

"Hear what, that truck?"

"No, not the truck. Listen again."

You listen again. You wait before commenting. And then you hear it. You're surprised you didn't hear it before. How did you miss that? In the enthusiasm for the exterior you missed something coming from the interior of the house. Not the interior rooms where you stand but the true interior, the

GROAN

frame, the foundation, the inner-workings of the house sealed off by drywall, brick, and tile. Now that you've heard it, you wait, and you hear it again.

The house groans.

You've heard creaks in houses before, but there's something about this that's ominous. It's not constant. It comes and goes, but you definitely hear something. The agent points to an area in the corner. There's a crack from the joint to the base of the outside wall. She then takes you to the rooms upstairs. The doors do not fully shut because the frames are not square.

"Is this normal settling?" you ask. "Or is there a deeper problem?"

Your real estate agent shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders. She's seriously concerned but evidently doesn't want to dash all hope. You both walk outside to look at the foundation. When you do, the concern heightens. This house that looks externally fantastic has a foundation that appears patched in numerous places all around the base. Something's off—very off.

"Expansive soil," she says. "They're supposed to test for it before they build, and no doubt they did, but somebody messed up. This house is stunning, but it's seriously flawed. No wonder it's priced so well. It may be dangerously overpriced, though. We'll get answers, if you'd like, but in the meantime let's keep looking."

The house you'd just noted for character lacks true character. It's aesthetically appealing and practically appalling. Maybe someone can fix it, but it sure feels like a good firm push would unleash the powers of gravity to finish it off. So much was invested above the ground, why would they not have invested in what went below the ground?

WISDOM

So what's with the groan? Christ gives insight.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matthew 7:24-27).

Christ said that the house falls with "a great crash," not a groan. The groan precedes the crash. The groan is present when the house is painted, the lawn is manicured, and the furniture is creatively displayed. Ignore the groan, suppress the groan, and the crash will follow, albeit delayed. The groan is not delayed. Other signs increase with time: cracks in the walls, doors that don't shut, floors slightly off level, which all intensify the groan. The groan emanates from what we know instinctively and what the signs display.

Instinctively, we know we're vulnerable, so we groan. Even more, the realities of life push against the house giving very real stress and strain on the foundation and all supporting aspects of the house. The extent of the groan, the depth of the groan, the urgency of the groan, depends upon the foundation. Deep down, below the surface, there is a foundation. We know this, and we instinctively wonder if it's going to hold. Will this life hold together? Will this house endure the next wind? Will this life I'm building amount to something I want, something worthwhile? Will I get hit with a health scare, a financial blunder, relational hardship, vocational struggle, or something else that brings it all down? Cracks in the walls support our instincts. We wonder. We worry. We groan.

GROAN

So now what? Scripture gives important wisdom.

The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty (Proverbs 22:3, TNIV).

Like most wisdom, it seems obvious, but applying wisdom is different than knowing wisdom. Applying wisdom is recognizing a faltering foundation and taking action. But this kind of action is consistently neglected. Digging up a foundation is costly. It gets pushed off to another day. *Surely it won't all really crash, we think. Surely it will all be okay. It looks good enough. It will hold.*

But what if we were different? What if we were wise? What if we were a people willing to unearth faulty foundations, soft spots, expansive soil, and shifting sand? What if we did this and built our lives on top of a foundation worthy to be a foundation? What would life be like? What would life feel like? What kind of a life might we build? What if our efforts were not put so much toward external character but depth of character? What would come out of our lives? Who would benefit from the security of our "homes"?

If this sounds familiar, it should. Let's briefly consider where we started.

THE HEART

What was our starting place? It's been awhile...

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23).

The heart: that epicenter of existence, that place from which all else flows. What do we desire? What do we trust in? What do we hope in? Most of all, what do we love? When speaking of good and evil, Christ said, *"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Luke 6:45). The mouth is no loner. It is a reflection of our hearts. Even more, life itself is a reflection of our hearts.

There's more. Again, it's been awhile. What did we read?

We don't just want it. We want IT.

So what happens? Life can get quite ugly.

She was crafted with eternity in her heart. She claws and climbs higher and higher on that corporate ladder...the next rung...the next box above...the next win...that will be IT. An addiction is born, because she is never quite satisfied. She struggles and strives to get higher and higher, because it is never quite IT.

But it was never meant to be IT...just it.

He is crafted with eternity in his heart. He gropes and gripes from one high to another...the next drink...the next fling...the next one will be IT. An addiction is born, because he is never quite satisfied. He takes good things and puts them on steroids. He struggles and strives as his life is buried by buzzes that are never quite IT.

But they were never meant to be IT...just it.

She is crafted with eternity in her heart. She squeezes and squirms from one relationship to another...the next one...the next relationship...the next encounter...that one will be IT. An addiction is born, because she is never quite satisfied. She cries and craves to get the one that will finally be IT.

But he is never meant to be IT...just it.

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It all came down to two words: Love God. It is a commandment, not just *about* love, but driven *by* love. To love another above God is to make that other into a god. The other may make a great gift, but the gift was never intended for godlike status. Let gifts be gifts and God be God. To worship the gift not only endangers the gift, but it robs us of life.

Let's go back to houses.

ROCK AND SAND

Christ compared two builders. One built on sand. The other built on rock. He stated that building on rock is done by one who "*hears these words of mine and puts them into practice*" (Matthew 7:24). That's interesting. It's interesting because we previously discovered Christ's affirmation that the greatest commandment, the most important command we could put into practice, is the commandment to love God. Put this together and great clarity is gained. The foundation upon which we build is God himself. It's another way of getting after the same truth. To love God with great heart and soul is to have God be the foundation upon which we build.

But we know this, right? We went after it fully. Let's move on to something else. Let's get after a new idea, a new thought.

Not so fast.

Here's where it gets interesting.

THE QUESTION

A question has been lingering. It went unaddressed in our first module. It must be addressed here. We must go toe to toe with a reality. God squares off with this reality. Scripture squares off with this reality. We must do the same.

The reality?

Our hearts are deceptive.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Consider the quagmire...

We started with this...

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23).

So the very thing we are to guard "*above all else*" (Proverbs 4:23) is the very thing that is deceitful "*above all things*" (Jeremiah 17:9). The *above all* language found in both passages is not unique to English but is in the original Hebrew, as well. Even more, if it sounds like an impossible task, there's an additional assessment. Not only does it seem that we are to guard, *above all else*, that which is deceitful, *above all things*, but the very next phrase declares the heart *beyond cure*.

What do doctors do when someone is *beyond cure*? Are they aggressive with the frail, elderly man with cancer throughout his entire body? Not typically. Do they labor for this man *above all else*? Not usually. The more typical and usual approach is to bring comfort, not cures, while preparing the family for the inevitable.

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PESSIMISM

Some are put off by this pessimistic view of the heart. Surely the condition's not *that* bad. Surely the heart's not totally *beyond cure*. After all, doesn't Scripture call us to guard it? Would Scripture call us to give ourselves to a hopeless cause? Even more, people do "good," don't they?

The teenage boy steps away from his rowdy friends to help an elderly woman across the street.

The multibillion dollar corporation dedicates a portion of profits to fight the AIDS epidemic.

The long-lost friend sends a note when she hears life has not gone according to plan.

The talented graduate who could demand six figures chooses to dedicate his life to the work of a nonprofit.

Yes, we know evil, but we also know "good." Don't we?

Sure. There's good. But we know there's more to it than that. Scripture describes the heart as *deceptive*. That's interesting. Deception is the difference between appearance and reality. Truth-be-known, at times it's difficult to know what's going on in the heart. Scripture states that "*As the heavens are high and the earth is deep, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable*" (Proverbs 25:3).

The heart is both deep and deceptive. It is vast and sly. That's a deadly combination, which no doubt leads to the *beyond cure* assessment. It's just so vast and deceptive that it's terribly difficult to understand, to comprehend, to tame, to guard.

The young man who helps the elderly woman across the street...genuine love or a setup to bum a buck for smokes?

The multibillion dollar corporation dedicating profits to fighting the AIDS epidemic...genuine concern or good marketing?

The long-lost friend sending a note upon learning life has not gone as planned...true concern or hidden delight in showing her prom queen "friend" that she knows?

The talented graduate capable of top dollar at the top firm but chooses a nonprofit...a good cause or good positioning for a political career?

That tricky heart—it can be so terribly deceitful.

What's true between people, those we see and touch, is ever so true between people and God, whom we don't see and touch. God's statement, recorded by Isaiah, needs no explanation: "*These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me*" (Isaiah 29:13).

We know that.

We've seen it.

We've experienced it.

Dare we admit we've done it?

Lip service is cheap and meaningless. A heart genuinely dedicated is of greatest value and God's true desire.

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GUARD IT?

So now what? Is it just *game on? Fight for it! Do the best with what you've got!*

That might appear wise if it weren't for that one despairing statement. It's been noted. The heart is said to be *beyond cure*. That's cause for pause.

The fifty-year-old man steps into the office of his cardiologist. He's been through a battery of tests. Despite his efforts to read the faces of the technicians, he's not been able to discern the results. Now it's time to get the facts. The doctor seems young to him, in her late thirties, but she's brilliant with a bunch of letters after her name. He enters her office with complete trust in the assessment he is about to receive.

She gives it straight.

"It's bad news. You have severe heart disease. Your heart is *beyond cure*."

She goes on from there. He doesn't hear much. He heard what he needed to hear in those two words *beyond cure*. Questions roll through his mind. What does one do with a heart that is *beyond cure*? How does one live with a heart that is *beyond cure*? He knows the answers. Finally he asks a different question.

"Can I get a transplant?"

The doctor offers a sobered but realistic response. "Maybe."

He learns of lists and requirements. He's willing to do whatever it takes. His current heart is *beyond cure*. Maybe he can get a new heart, a new life, a second chance.

GOSPEL

Scripture speaks of something we call *gospel*. It's a dusty old word with a variety of connotations. Unfortunately, the English word *gospel* fails to capture the saltiness of the Greek word it represents. The Greek word for *gospel* is made of two parts. The first part is *Eu* translated "good." We use this in words like *eulogy*, a good word said at a funeral. The second part is *angelos*. By itself we transliterate this as "angel." An angel is a being who acts as a messenger. *Angelos* is translated "message" or "news." So the word beneath *gospel* is pregnant with meaning. It's good news...very good news...a good message.

BAD NEWS IS GOOD NEWS?

Our friend in the doctor's office hopes for *gospel*, for good news. He doesn't get it. He gets bad news, really bad news, the worst news he could imagine. His heart is *beyond cure*. The doctor is forthright and direct. He appreciates this. In her final comments she says something that doesn't communicate at first. He revisits the comment later as he roles the conversation around his mind.

"I know I've given you bad news today," she says. "The only thing worse than bad news is living with a bad condition and not knowing it. There are countless people out there with your exact condition. They don't know it. Their first known clue will be when their heart stops."

It's an odd form of encouragement, but there's truth in it. The man's grateful to know the bad news. It takes him awhile to recognize the substance of this encouragement. In time, he identifies it clearly...

Knowing bad news enables him to recognize good news.

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It may be a long shot, but a solution could come along. Without awareness of the bad news, he's not even looking for good news. Self-awareness is powerful.

THE UNFOLDING MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE

Not all, but a good portion of Scripture's earliest writings, the portion we refer to as the Old Testament, is intended to bring awareness of the problem, the bad news. It's a messy book. There's murder and rape and war and theft. There are people who pretend to be something but are truly something else. There's gossip and slander and adultery and bitterness. It's ugly. It's rough.

It's a lot like today.

Clearly something is wrong.

In the midst of Scripture bringing increased awareness of the bad news, periodically we hear a drumbeat. At first, it is heard in the distance. Over time, it increases in frequency and boldness. The drumbeat is the march of good news. Over time, this small drumbeat of good news increases in volume and ultimately reverberates from page to page.

With that in mind, consider a relatively early drumbeat, an announcement of the coming good news...

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

That's *euangelos*.

The heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh.

Awareness of the bad news helps us recognize the good news.

It's profoundly good news. God gets to the heart of the matter. This is no bandaid solution. This gets after the wellspring of life. This is hope in the midst of a story that appears hopeless. Where, after all, is hope when the wellspring of humanity is *beyond cure*? The only hope is for a power beyond us to perform a kind of surgery we could never perform on ourselves. No way, absolutely no way, could our friend look at his doctor and tell her, "You've been very helpful. I'll take it from here. I'll find a new heart, take out my old heart, and put the new one in myself. You've been great, but I don't need you anymore." That's sad and laughable. He's fully dependent upon another person's ability to give him a new heart.

And so are we.

Don't miss this...

Foundational to transformed living is a supernatural experience.

Engaging this supernatural experience is the purpose of this module.

DIGGING DEEP

Some would prefer an ivory tower experience. They'd wish for long hours of mind-bending thought. They'd study God but not worship God. They'd study Scripture but neglect the God of Scripture. They'd talk about life but ignore real living. Yes, God is God of the ivory tower, but God is God of the streets. He not only calls us to deep thinking, but he calls us to passionate living. Loving God does not just address below-the-ground realities. Loving God works its way into all aspects of life, all aspects of

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the house. Loving God addresses cracks in the walls, doors that don't shut, floors slightly off level, and maybe most of all...

Loving God addresses the groan.

There's much more to it than knowing what it means to love God. There's a working out of this reality that translates into transformed lives. We must not just point to the above-mentioned words of Christ and explain that loving God is having God as the foundation of our house, our lives. Rather, we must do the difficult. We must roll up our sleeves and renovate. We must not be content with external character. We must be a people who build true character.

BUILD CHARACTER

Building true character will at times mean addressing above-ground realities. We'll discover aspects of our lives out of line with the foundation we have established below the surface. At other times, building true character will involve below-ground realities. We'll discover soft spots in the foundation. We may have experienced the grace of Christ and committed to having God as our God, but over time we will discover aspects of our lives still resting on false gods. Unearthing these soft spots is challenging, but it is also something else.

It's liberating.

Christ said as much when he said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32). Living by false gods is enslavement to the groan and to the inevitable crash. But when we become a people who bring God's presence into all aspects of our lives, we become a people set free. We are ever-increasingly free from the groan, and we are freed to walk a new trajectory, a trajectory that does not involve the house of our lives ending with *"a great crash"* (Matthew 7:27).

So that is where we are. We are at a place of hope and healing. Our passion is to unearth soft spots and to experience the resonant character of a life entrusted to God. To do this, we must be willing to engage the Scriptures, engage each other, and engage our Creator. The days and weeks to follow are designed to help us do exactly that.

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FRUIT OF MY GOD



FRUIT OF MY GOD

Let's break a rule. We've been talking houses and foundations. Let's mix metaphors. Let's talk roots, dirt, and fruit. Scripture puts it like this...

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:22-26).

Scripture uses multiple metaphors describing the same reality. The different metaphors highlight unique aspects of these realities, giving us needed insight and clarity. Describing the foundation of our lives as either rock or sand gives us important insight into where we gain strength for life's storms. But for a multifaceted view of character, and for a description of how our character grows from what's rooted in our hearts, this second metaphor takes us further.

Consider fruit for a moment. Fruit is the result of a tree or plant. Put apple seeds in the ground, cultivate those seeds, and one day there will be trees producing apples. These apples are a result of the trees that produce them. They are above-ground expressions growing from below-ground realities. Healthy apple trees produce healthy apples. Unhealthy apple trees produce unhealthy apples, if they produce anything at all.

The description "*fruit of the Spirit*" is both interesting and insightful. Maybe it's new or maybe we've heard it before, but to read over it too quickly is to miss something important. Clearly, the Spirit referenced is the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. So when we say "*fruit of the Spirit*," we are effectively identifying the fruit in a person's life when God is their God. Put the Spirit of God in a person's life, this says, and new fruit will be seen above the ground.

As noted in Morph's *Love God* module, when alternate gods are considered, depth of insight is gained. What is the *fruit of the financial god*? Will we have peace and joy if financial gain is our god? Possibly. When the stock market is up, we may experience a higher degree of peace and joy. We're bowing down to a particular god, and at that moment, the god is serving us. The peace and joy will certainly feel vulnerable, though, so it's not a secure kind of peace. It's a peace that may celebrate the wins of a particular day, but anxiety will present itself when considering the volatility of tomorrow's market.

Fruit of the Spirit is a different kind of fruit. It's the kind of fruit that can endure the realities of life, because they are rooted in the Spirit and not the whims of false gods. There is the very real presence of the Almighty leading, guiding, comforting, challenging, teaching, and encouraging us. This presence does not evaporate when life's realities turn against us. The Spirit is ever-present and fully interested in our leaning fully into him.

HONEST ASSESSMENT

Time to roll up our sleeves. It's one thing to read a list of character traits, nod at their appeal, and conveniently turn the page. It's quite another to look for those character traits in specific areas of life. Do we have love? Let's not answer the question generally. Let's answer the question specifically. Let's consider specific situations to discover love or lack of love, peace or lack of peace, patience or lack of patience.

The exercise that follows is a fruit of the Spirit assessment. You will be asked a series of questions about specific situations to which you simply circle your degree of agreement or disagreement. Importantly, this assessment is not a personality assessment. Personality traits are uniquely tailored to individuals. No one person displays all personality traits. Spiritual fruit is different. A person with a genuine love for God will want to grow in all fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. This assessment gives insight into where this is or isn't yet happening.

Throughout this module, we will build on this initial assessment. Strengthened by self-awareness, we'll seek God for supernatural transformation and fruit of his Spirit. That is to say, don't rush this exercise; it will play a role in later weeks. A thoughtful experience here will set you up for more thoughtful experiences later.

To make the most of this exercise, thoughtfully follow these simple steps:

- 1) Answer the questions—Simply circle your response to the degree that you agree or disagree with the statement.
- 2) Asterisk—As you go through the questions, place an asterisk (*) by questions you find most revealing. If, for example, under *love* you find questions related to *forgiveness* most penetrating, then place an asterisk by these. These asterisks may offer greater insight than the overall assessment done through step three.
- 3) Tally and Summary—Use the final page to tally and summarize your responses. This will serve as an important guide in your upcoming Running Partner conversation.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT LOVE

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I enjoy personal success but enjoy watching others succeed as well.	1	2	3	4	5
I work toward forgiveness when others wrong me.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not insist on getting my own way and am flexible with my preferences.	1	2	3	4	5
I am a good listener.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not replay offenses of others in my mind or fantasize about revenge.	1	2	3	4	5
People do not feel judged by me but respected and enjoyed.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy winning but am gracious when I lose.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not nag those around me but give guidance and direction when truly needed.	1	2	3	4	5
I am happiest when those around me are happy, even if my wishes are not fully met.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not have any lingering unresolved relational conflict in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I rejoice when others rejoice.	1	2	3	4	5
I mourn when others mourn.	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to see the good in other people, even when their actions don't always show it.	1	2	3	4	5
I am genuinely understanding when other's needs get in the way of my own desires.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not hold resentment toward anyone in my life right now.	1	2	3	4	5
I eagerly look for ways to help others reach their own potential.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not jealous of others when they are moving ahead in life and I am not.	1	2	3	4	5
I welcome relationships with those who are different from me.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not try to "fix" people; rather I accept them in their process.	1	2	3	4	5
I consistently consider other people's needs when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT JOY

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I bring a positive presence to the people around me.	1	2	3	4	5
I like to laugh and do so regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
I naturally motivate people by my enthusiasm for a project.	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to brighten the mood of a room when I enter.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy play and recreation and don't consider it a waste of time.	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to smile and greet people warmly, even in passing.	1	2	3	4	5
Children enjoy playing with me.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy playing with children.	1	2	3	4	5
I passionately pursue my goals with vigor and excitement.	1	2	3	4	5
I approach my work with energy rather than apathy.	1	2	3	4	5
I naturally find the silver lining in even the darkest of clouds.	1	2	3	4	5
I am content, even through challenging circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not battle with depression.	1	2	3	4	5
I rarely complain, even when I am uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy God.	1	2	3	4	5
I like myself.	1	2	3	4	5
My default disposition is generally optimistic.	1	2	3	4	5
At times, I engage in certain activities just for the fun of it.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a strong sense of adventure in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I have interests I engage apart from my main responsibilities in life (work, family, etc).	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT PEACE

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I welcome silence and do not need constant noise (car radio, TV, cell phone).	1	2	3	4	5
I do not easily get anxious, even in challenging circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not get overly worried when finances are tight, but trust that all will be well.	1	2	3	4	5
I sleep well.	1	2	3	4	5
I am comfortable being myself with others.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not fear the unknown, but rather embrace it with openness and curiosity.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm comfortable listening or talking and do not fill the air with constant chatter.	1	2	3	4	5
I am content with my material possessions.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not hide my weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
I rest from my work and am not controlled by a need for constant progress.	1	2	3	4	5
When with people, I'm truly with them and not thinking about what's next.	1	2	3	4	5
I check e-mail, but not obsessively.	1	2	3	4	5
I may be physically tired, but my inner-person is not tired.	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to work methodically and do not scurry through my days.	1	2	3	4	5
I welcome unscheduled days and do not fill them with pointless activity.	1	2	3	4	5
I am open with my struggles with trusted friends and family.	1	2	3	4	5
My life is not filled with unproductive striving.	1	2	3	4	5
I am unusually calm when facing challenging life circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not question God's forgiveness of my wrongs, past or present.	1	2	3	4	5
I have forgiven myself for my past wrongs.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT PATIENCE

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I live my life at a doable and healthy pace.	1	2	3	4	5
I drive safely and not aggressively.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not easily agitated by unexpected traffic jams.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not annoyed when others answer a phone in my presence.	1	2	3	4	5
When frustrated, it is within proportion to the cause. I do not overreact.	1	2	3	4	5
I bring a calming presence to people around me.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not interrupt people or finish their sentences for them.	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to work or play with others at their level (like children or newcomers).	1	2	3	4	5
I will gladly explain things more than once to those sincerely interested but confused.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not easily irritated by circumstances or people (flight delays, breakdowns, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
I do not enjoy complaining and only do so for constructive purposes.	1	2	3	4	5
I am taking time with this assessment and not rushing through it.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not overly bothered by having to wait for news (like results from a job interview).	1	2	3	4	5
I am not bothered by long lines at the grocery store.	1	2	3	4	5
I eat slowly.	1	2	3	4	5
People can relax around me.	1	2	3	4	5
When my computer crashes or runs slowly, I do not yell at it or bang on the keyboard.	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to be interrupted when doing things I enjoy (watching football, reading, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to be interrupted at work.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy a good story and do not hurry people to their point.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT KINDNESS

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I consistently serve others even when it goes unnoticed.	1	2	3	4	5
I loan things to others and don't feel put out by it.	1	2	3	4	5
My words are not critical but edifying.	1	2	3	4	5
I see gift-giving for birthdays and Christmas as an opportunity not a burden.	1	2	3	4	5
I compliment others frequently.	1	2	3	4	5
I know my neighbors by name and look for ways to serve them.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy encouraging others even when they're succeeding where I'd like to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
When possible, I will gladly help others move.	1	2	3	4	5
I think of people less fortunate than myself and look for ways to help them.	1	2	3	4	5
When friends need a ride to the airport, I welcome the opportunity to help.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy giving gifts and work to give gifts that others will truly appreciate.	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly volunteer to serve when a disaster leaves people in need.	1	2	3	4	5
I look for ways to edify my spouse, my kids, my roommates or others close to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy encouraging others with thoughtful words, greeting cards, or timely gifts.	1	2	3	4	5
I consistently consider other people's needs and desires when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly volunteer to serve with a charity, church, or other nonprofit organization.	1	2	3	4	5
I am generous with my money.	1	2	3	4	5
I am generous with my time.	1	2	3	4	5
I am generous with my material possessions.	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly do unassigned chores at home or work to give others a breather.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT GOODNESS

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I am careful to do the right thing, even when no one is looking.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not lie, even when I know the truth might be upsetting to others.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not lie, even when the truth might get me in trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
My priorities are healthy. Lower priorities do not overrun higher priorities.	1	2	3	4	5
I bus my tray at fast-food restaurants and don't leave a needless mess behind.	1	2	3	4	5
I let others experience the consequences of poor decisions if it's in their best interest.	1	2	3	4	5
I make wise choices.	1	2	3	4	5
I have good boundaries and can say "no" to others' requests when necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not cheat (on exams, taxes, card games, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
I tell people what they need to hear, even when it's hard to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
I will say "no" to requests that are not truly good for the person asking.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not take things that do not belong to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not hide things from my friends and family.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not cut corners at work or in my responsibilities at home.	1	2	3	4	5
I make decisions that are best for everyone involved, not just for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
I own up to and accept the consequences of my mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not attempt to blame others when something goes wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
Others consider me a man or woman of integrity.	1	2	3	4	5
I am being honest in answering these questions.	1	2	3	4	5
When someone accidentally overpays me, I return the difference.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT FAITHFULNESS

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I keep my promises, even at great cost.	1	2	3	4	5
My friends know that I'll do what I say I'm going to do.	1	2	3	4	5
I am generally on-time and don't keep people waiting on me.	1	2	3	4	5
I am appropriately hard-working in whatever I do (job, studies, family, home, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
I am trustworthy in my responsibilities (family, studies, vocation).	1	2	3	4	5
I take good care of myself physically.	1	2	3	4	5
I take good care of myself spiritually.	1	2	3	4	5
I take good care of myself mentally and emotionally.	1	2	3	4	5
When I borrow money, I always pay it back promptly and in full.	1	2	3	4	5
Others consider me a disciplined person.	1	2	3	4	5
Others consider me a dependable and trustworthy person.	1	2	3	4	5
My friends and family ask me to take care of their things (house, car, pets) while away.	1	2	3	4	5
I always follow through with the commitments I make.	1	2	3	4	5
When I start a project, I do not leave it unfinished but work hard until it is completed.	1	2	3	4	5
I am a good steward of things that have been entrusted to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a financial budget and it guides my spending.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not behind on paying my bills.	1	2	3	4	5
People trust me not to share their secrets.	1	2	3	4	5
My car is free from clutter.	1	2	3	4	5
My home and surroundings are generally in order.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT GENTLENESS

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I may be forthright and firm, but I avoid speaking abrasively to others.	1	2	3	4	5
I don't yell or raise my voice in anger.	1	2	3	4	5
I am sensitive to other people's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not manipulate people to get my own way.	1	2	3	4	5
I am careful with my words in sensitive situations.	1	2	3	4	5
I give meaningful and appropriate touch to those around me.	1	2	3	4	5
I remain calm, even in disagreements with others.	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly consider others' feelings when I make decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy spending time with and tending to the elderly.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not exert my opinion over others' opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
I let others' voices be heard, even when I am confident in my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not look down on other people or their ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
I am kind to animals.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not try to control people with my words or actions.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not overly forceful in making my point in a conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
I am careful not to offend people unnecessarily.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not overpower people with my strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not hard on others but give them grace and room to grow.	1	2	3	4	5
I am good with babies.	1	2	3	4	5
Children like to be around me.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT SELF-CONTROL

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
I do not overeat or eat a disproportionate amount of unhealthy foods.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not obsess over coffee, tea, chocolate, or other consumables.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not use tobacco products.	1	2	3	4	5
I have healthy drinking habits. I do not get drunk.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not abuse drugs (illegal, prescription, over-the-counter).	1	2	3	4	5
I am free from addictions.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not view pornography or sexually suggestive images and entertainment.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not entertain inappropriate sexual thoughts of those I know or don't know.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not entertain inappropriate romantic thoughts of those I know or don't know.	1	2	3	4	5
I watch healthy amounts of television and do not obsess over passive entertainment.	1	2	3	4	5
I may use the Internet, but I'm not an Internet junkie.	1	2	3	4	5
My recreational outlets enhance my life but do not overrun my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not have credit card debt.	1	2	3	4	5
I wait for good deals and good purchases and do not need to "buy now"!	1	2	3	4	5
I am thoughtful with my words. I speak when there is something to say.	1	2	3	4	5
My emotional responses are proportionate to the events that give rise to them.	1	2	3	4	5
I can say no to things that are not good for me, even when I really want them.	1	2	3	4	5
I am calm and level-headed when handling last-minute changes or the unexpected.	1	2	3	4	5
When angry, I do not vent to uninvolved parties. I speak to those involved.	1	2	3	4	5
When angry, I do not lash out at the offending party.	1	2	3	4	5

* Before moving to the next page, place an asterisk by questions that are most revealing.

SUMMARIZE AND TALLY

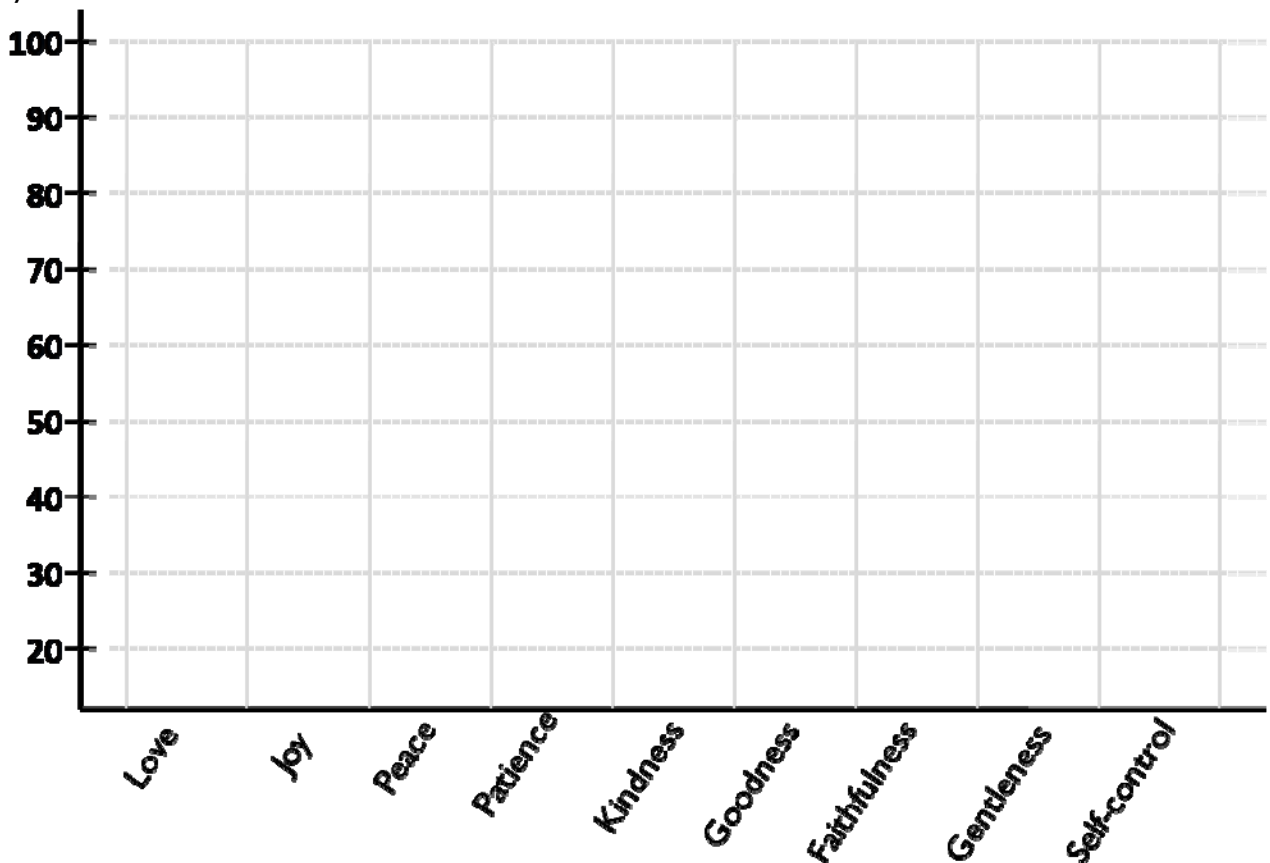
TALLY

To tally each fruit of the Spirit, simply add the total score of each page. So when you answered 5 add five, 3 add three, and so on down the page, giving how you scored on the page entirely.

	Total Score
▶ Love	_____
▶ Joy	_____
▶ Peace	_____
▶ Patience	_____
▶ Kindness	_____
▶ Goodness	_____
▶ Faithfulness	_____
▶ Gentleness	_____
▶ Self-Control	_____

GRAPH

Mark your scores on the graph below and shade in each column to see a visual comparison of each of the fruits in your life.



FRUIT OF MY GOD

FRUIT OF MY GOD

Week 1, Morph Me, p. 38

Week One

Conversations with God

ROMANS 1–2

***Reminder: The daily rhythm of READ-MEMORIZE-MEDITATE is not new to this module. This highly personalized approach to engaging God through Scripture and meditation was introduced and practiced in Morph: Love God. If you have not experienced Morph: Love God, or if it has been awhile, you are encouraged to read the Week Two section in the Love God Primer before beginning these exercises. The Love God Primer is downloadable in the Morph: Build Character online group.

READ

Two metaphors are used in this week's *Morph* Reading and Morph Me exercise: a house and its foundation, a tree and its fruit. The two metaphors display Scripture's passion for God to be our God. If God is our foundation, the house need not groan. If the Spirit of God is in our root system, healthy fruit will grow on the tree. Now we turn to Romans.

Romans is raw.

Yes, illustrations and metaphors are used along the way, but it is in Romans where we get the raw truth of the gospel—the *euangelos*—the good news. This raw truth goes deep, very deep, but to get there one must unpack the language and concepts of this letter. In these opening chapters, for example, we come into two words critical to understanding Romans: faith and righteousness. At first glance, many assume to know the meaning of these words, and in truth, many do. But words are slippery and assumptions are dangerous. Context shows that the word *faith*, for example, when used by Paul, is slightly different than his contemporary James' use of the word. Discerning these differences will greatly enrich your reading of Scripture.

Let's start with righteousness.

Righteousness

Righteousness is a loaded word in our day. Most commonly, it is used to describe the self-righteous, the arrogant, those who lack self-awareness but are overly aware of the problems in others. If not that, righteousness is commonly considered to be synonymous with morality. If you play by the rules, you're considered righteous. Neither of these influences makes the concept of righteousness particularly inviting. We don't like words that sound self-righteous, even if they're not, and we're not overly excited about a list of rules.

Righteousness in Romans, though, is most emphatically not self-righteousness. Even more, to say righteousness in Romans is synonymous with morality is an understandable perception, but only partially true. This limited definition of righteousness lacks the heart, soul, and gravity of the concept. Righteousness in Romans is seen from several vantage points which gives depth and breadth to our understanding. Interestingly, though, the initial vantage point is not a description of what righteousness is, but in the first several chapters Paul describes the opposite of righteousness: unrighteousness. It is in this description that we get to the heart of both righteousness and unrighteousness. Very early,

ROMANS 1–2

before we get any specific descriptions of sin, Paul goes deep. Consider the following statement carefully.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles (Romans 1:21-23, TNIV).

So “they knew God” existed, but they did not “glorify him as God.” Instead, they worshipped gods. They “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” of other things. If this sounds familiar, it should. It is this exchange from God to gods we carefully consider throughout the *Morph* experience. In this week’s *Morph* Reading, you read (or will read), “To love another above God is to make that other into a god. The other may make a great gift, but the gift was never intended for godlike status. Let gifts be gifts and God be God. To worship the gift not only endangers the gift, but it robs us of life.” Through Romans, you will see the implications of the exchange of God for gods, the problems this has created for us, and the astounding solution offered in Christ. This leads to a clearer picture of righteousness in Romans.

In Romans, we don’t just discover the problem—that we have exchanged God for gods, but we discover the solution. How can we be righteous when we’re not? It’s this question Paul sets up in these first two chapters and then addresses in the chapters that follow. To get there, though, a second concept must be carefully considered.

Faith

In the opening chapter of Romans we read this:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17, TNIV).

Righteousness, we are told here by Paul, comes “by faith.” The righteous will “live by faith.” Clearly this is an essential concept in Paul’s letter. What is meant by the word *faith*?

English translations commonly use two words, belief and faith, to translate one word in Greek, *pisteuo*. The English words *belief* and *faith* are commonly understood to mean that a person believes in the existence of God or believes a certain set of doctrines are true. *Pisteuo* in Romans is much more than this.

Another translation of *pisteuo*, one with greater depth but a bit more clumsy, is the English word *trust*. Trust is more than belief. People can *believe* an airplane can fly, but it is when they step onto the plane that they are *trusting* in it. It is this kind of *trust* that puts God at the center of a person’s life, and as we will see in Romans, is the impetus for bringing full righteousness to those who lack it.

As you talk to God this week, consider the relationship between an authentic trust and fruit of the Spirit. How might God be calling you to trust him more deeply? How might this trust manifest itself in fruit of the Spirit?

MEMORIZE

This week’s memory verses:

ROMANS 1–2

Ezekiel 36:26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 1–2

ROMANS 1–2

Week 1, Conversations with God, p. 42

Week One
Conversations with People

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE



INITIATE MEETING

- ▶ Designate someone to pray. Before praying...
 - Read the *Running Partner Values* (page 11) aloud.
 - Sit silently for thirty seconds to individually pray and to slow yourselves down.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Which fruits of the Spirit did you assess highest? Is this accurate? Why are these fruits more prevalent in your life?
- ▶ Which fruits of the Spirit did you assess lowest? Is this accurate? Why are these fruits less prevalent in your life?
- ▶ What statements did you asterisk? Were there statements that were particularly revealing?
- ▶ How would your life be different if you were able to live out all of the fruits of the Spirit?
- ▶ What do you think blocks you from living a life filled with the fruits of the Spirit?

BIG PICTURE QUESTION

- ▶ What excites you about the next seven weeks? What scares you about the next seven weeks?

SCRIPTURE READING AND MEMORY

- ▶ How have your Conversations with God gone so far?
- ▶ Have you started to memorize any of the Scriptures on your memory cards? If so, practice reciting them to each other.

PRAYER

- ▶ Pray for each other. As you do, pray for the realities in each person's daily life, but be certain to pray for each person in light of the conversation you just had. Pray for the fruit of the Spirit to grow in each person's life.

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE

Week 1, Conversations with People, p. 44

Week Two

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 67)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 3–4</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Acts 10</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 3:1-8 Day 2: Romans 3:9-20 Day 3: Romans 3:21-31 Day 4: Romans 4:1-12 Day 5: Romans 4:13-25 Day 6: Acts 10</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>2 Corinthians 5:17</u> “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”</p> <p><u>Colossians 1:21-23</u> “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 47)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 57)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 71)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out</p> <p>RELATED RESOURCES</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community</p> <p>SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS</p> <p>(visit website)</p>

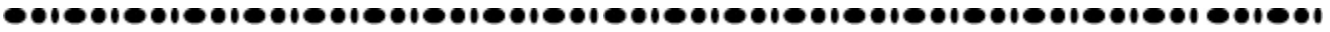
WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 2, p. 46

Week Two
Reading

IMPOSSIBLE



IMPOSSIBLE

That's insane.

What's insane?

To *love God*. To *build character*.

It's insane to love God?

Silence...No response...Mental wheels spinning...An honest thought is finally given.

That's not what I said.

Yes, it is.

No, it isn't.

You said it's insane to *love God*.

It's not what I meant.

Say what you mean.

To be *insane* is to think you can do things you simply cannot do.

You can't love God? You can't build character? You can't ever-increasingly experience fruit of the Spirit?

Nope.

So it's insane to think you can?

That's right.

Why can't you?

I don't know.

You don't know.

I don't know. I just know I can't. Looks good on paper; doesn't work in the streets.

What doesn't work?

I don't work.

You don't work?

IMPOSSIBLE

That's right. I don't work.

What do you mean?

I can want to love God, but I won't really do it. I can want to build character, but I'm stuck in my ruts and routines. I can want fruit of the Spirit, but I'm not counting on tomorrow being much different than today. It just won't happen.

What won't happen?

I won't happen.

Why not?

I already told you. I can't. Great intentions; terrible follow through.

REALITY

Let's talk reality.

We're not into pretending to be something we're not. We're not into conformity. We're not into acting as if we want to live a certain way, but internally wishing to live otherwise. We can pretend we don't have these objections. Many do pretend. They skip across the top of life pretending all is well. They give the right answers to the right questions and feel very right about it. All is well because externally all is very pretty.

What a sad life.

It's sad to have external conformity without internal passion. Who wants to live like that? Who wants to go through life living one way on the outside but wanting something very different on the inside? It's a sad reality that religious circles are notorious for promoting such plastic and conflicted lives. Christ held a very different perspective. One example speaks boldly:

You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

Note Christ's distinction. It's essential to this entire experience:

Adultery is external.

Lust is internal.

Christ didn't do all he did so people wouldn't commit adultery even though they really wish they could. He came with a much more powerful message. It's the message of *transformation*. It's not just about forcing oneself to refrain from adultery or any other external action. It's about becoming the kind of person who genuinely doesn't want to commit adultery. Although at times necessary, forcing external action without genuine internal desire is a frustrating way to live. When internal passion matches the external reality of what we know to be good and healthy, there's a resonance that's nothing short of *life*, and *life* is very much what Christ came to bring: "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (John 10:10).

Lust and adultery are simply one example. There are countless others.

Consider generosity.

IMPOSSIBLE

What if we became the kind of people who didn't give out of obligation but gave out of passion? We've tasted such passion and long for more. We don't enjoy greed. It's a miserable way to live. The only more miserable way to live is to be greedy but pretend that we're not.

Consider self-control and discipline.

What if we were ever-increasingly the kind of people, who from the inside, exercised self-control with our thoughts, with our words, with our appetites? What if we exercised greater discipline in both our work and our play? Life requires both work and play, but frustrated is the life that *plays* internally when *work* is needed or *works* internally when *play* is needed.

Consider kindness.

What if we were genuinely kind people externally and internally? Yes, we experience kindness flowing from us; and yes, it is at times genuine. But we also know times when that kindness comes with an agenda, when we're leveraging it as a tool to get something we want. We know what it's like to offer acts of kindness, but hollow are those actions when they're simply a veil for insecurity or selfishness or greed. We've tasted true kindness and genuinely thirst for more.

We could go on. What about internal rest, the kind of rest available in the midst of activity and inactivity? Frustrated is the life swinging in a hammock while internally rifling through the mental checklist of needs pressing down upon us. Or how about courage? Sure, we can put on a courageous front, but what would it be like to ever-increasingly face life's challenges with genuine and resonant courage? Yes, a measure of success can be achieved in all of these by outward conformity, but internal realities have a way of making themselves known.

If we are going to build authentic character, we must dig more deeply into the supernatural work of Christ. What did Christ bring? What did Christ teach? What does Christ do for us today? As we consider our own encounter with Christ, let's eavesdrop on another's encounter with Christ.

A NEW REALITY

Nicodemus was a religious man...in the worst sort of way.

He aligned himself with the Pharisees. Pharisees were notorious for outside conformity without inside transformation. Christ boldly challenged this. He called them whitewashed tombs. Tombs look elegant and refined on the outside; they're made of marble and are often ornate, but open the door and you'll quickly discover death on the inside. To say the least, Christ's word picture made it clear he wasn't too excited by this form of religion. With that in mind, it's fascinating to eavesdrop on a conversation between Christ and Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is intrigued. He comes to Jesus after hours under the cover of darkness. He strikes up a conversation. He compliments Jesus. He calls him Rabbi. He admires his miracles and clear workings of God.

Jesus, clearly unaffected by the compliments, tells it like it is.

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he experiences a new birth (John 3:3).

Nicodemus' response reveals his surprise, maybe scoffing, at this idea.

No one can enter a second time into his mother's womb! (John 3:4)

He doesn't get it. He misses the point. He isn't aware of the good news unfolding right before his eyes. Nicodemus has missed critical drumbeats along the way. This Messiah standing before him would

IMPOSSIBLE

usher in change, but this change would not be just another addition to Nicodemus' growing list of religious activities and things to do. This change would involve an entirely new reality. Once seen, once embraced, this new reality changes everything. It could be stated many ways, but if we are to experience transformation, we must not miss two observations:

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing person. Christ insisted he become a new person (the new birth).

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing reality. Christ referenced a new reality (the kingdom of God).

These give cause for pause. It's as if Christ is saying, "Making changes to your existing person will not work. Making changes to the existing reality will not work. You must become a new person living in a new reality. Anything short of this will simply be yet another program that comes and goes."

And we know this.

We know it because we've experienced it: two steps forward, three steps back, three steps forward, two steps back. Christ's plan is far more radical than making changes to existing realities. Christ does not ask Nicodemus to simply change a few behaviors and offer self-management tips to make the changes stick. Rather, Christ cuts through the chaos and insists upon a new reality, a new person, a new birth.

Let's dig into the new birth this week and the kingdom of God next.

MURDERERS

Scripture can be confusing. Isolated texts can seem out of character. We read something, and we think, "Does it really mean *that*?" At times, questions linger, and we don't honestly know the answers. Other times, passages that initially produce great confusion later bring tremendous comfort. The following, a seemingly straightforward statement, is no exception.

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him (1 John 3:15).

At first blush maybe it makes sense: Murderers don't get eternal life. That sounds reasonable. For one person to take the life of another is a serious offense. There's justice in the statement. We shouldn't be surprised at the thought that murderers don't get eternal life.

Or should we?

For starters, the passage states that to hate one's brother runs on the same tracks as murder. Who among us hasn't experienced hate? Even more, since when is murder the unforgivable sin? It sounds terribly out of character for Scripture and even hypocritical. Three of Scripture's most noteworthy writers were murderers or accomplices to murder. Moses murdered an Egyptian. David arranged the wrongful death of Uriah, the husband of a woman with whom he had an affair. Paul participated in the stoning of Stephen and probably other early followers of Christ. If murderers are categorically out, then these three men are out.

What's with that? Are murderers categorically rejected by God?

When we dig deeper, the shocking answer is: Yes, murderers are categorically rejected by God. We can say with biblical authority that murderers don't go to heaven. God sees this grievous offense and does not shrug it off. Scripture is abundantly clear: There will be no murderers in heaven. Murderers are out. And actually, more than just murderers. Consider the following:

IMPOSSIBLE

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Now it gets offensive. It's one thing when it was just murderers; now we're talking everybody. If the previous passage associates hate with murder, we can assume attitudes that run on the same tracks of acts mentioned here associate with those acts as well. Not all have been male prostitutes, but most have experienced twisted lust. Then there's mention of greed and slander. Those right there could encompass pretty much all humanity. It's a bleak story. It's an offensive story. It's bleak and offensive right up to the very next line—one of the more stunning statements of Scripture.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11).

There's something in this statement we must not miss. Yes, we've heard of forgiveness in Christ. Forgiveness in Christ is profound, but our understanding of forgiveness is often shallow. We must not miss that first line: "And that is what some of you were."

This tells us that the person who was once categorized and labeled *murderer* is no longer categorized and labeled *murderer* when that person has experienced the washing of Christ. The *euangelos* is not just the reality that the offense is no longer held against a person. The *euangelos* is that the murderer is no longer a murderer. The adulterer is no longer an adulterer. The thief is no longer a thief. John can tell us that "no murderer has eternal life," and he can mean this literally. Murderers will not go to heaven. They are categorically out. But when a person experiences the washing of Christ, that person is not just forgiven. That person becomes a new person. Might the person experience earthly consequences for past offenses? Of course. The murderer may be in prison, but if he has been washed by Christ then he is no longer a murderer. He is a new creation. He is forgiven from his past, and his past is considered by God to be another person, the old person who was then crucified with Christ. Consider the following:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

We must not view forgiveness as just saying, "I'm sorry," and God saying, "That's okay." We must view forgiveness as the gift of becoming a new person no longer associated with the old person. God declares the old person gone, and so must we.

NAMES

Consider a childhood lie...

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

We know better. How often would we prefer a stick or a stone to the words thrown our way? Words are powerful. The child on the playground slumps back to class believing she's worthless. The employee in the office slumps back to his desk believing he'll never get it right. The wife in the car slumps down in her seat convinced she's intrinsically displeasing. These degradations need not come by actions, but simply words, accusations, and names.

Scripture knows the power of words. And yes, at times these words are strong. To a group of religious hypocrites, one of Christ's earliest followers cries out, "You brood of vipers!" (Matthew 3:7). Christ himself was known to shoot straight with words. We noted previously his reference to Pharisees and Sadducees as "whitewashed tombs" and "blind guides." Such statements underscore

IMPOSSIBLE

Scripture's disdain for flattery. Christ would not refer to a group of leaders as "*blind guides*" if he were not interested in their recognition of reality. Christ shot straight. He would not puff them up with statements that were not true to make them falsely feel good about themselves. Such is not the way of Christ, and such is not the way of Scripture.

Which makes the following statement from Scripture worthy of careful consideration. It's a statement we barely read, a simple introduction to a multipage letter. We read it as little more than, "Dear so and so," but the wording is far more profound. To the church in Ephesus, Paul writes...

To the saints in Ephesus... (Ephesians 1:1).

Saints? This must be a letter to a special class, just to the leaders, just to the inner circle. If so, why does Paul then speak directly to husbands, wives, children, and slaves? If by "*saints*" Paul means a special class of people who have attained a high degree of maturity, would he not speak *about* these people rather than *to* these people? The letter, from beginning to end, is fully intended for the entire church and to be read to the entire church, which makes that brief introduction something to behold.

He calls them saints.

Lift the hood on that word, *saint*, and discover the Greek word *hagios*, meaning "holy." One could translate this introduction: "*To the holy in Ephesus...*" Similar introductions are found in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Colossians. In search of a name for his recipients, Paul commonly refers to them as "*the holy*." That's profound.

And it leads to a question we must each ask ourselves.

The question is simply this...

What would I name myself?

Or put another way...

Would I give myself the name "holy"?

Forget for a minute that it sounds odd. Simply touch that emotion that instinctively doubts that it's true.

I'm not holy. To call me holy is flattery.

Or is it?

FREE FROM ACCUSATION

In another place Paul writes this:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:21-22).

We're given a stunning view of the future. One day, because of Christ, we will stand before God "*holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*" Let that soak.

Holy in his sight.

Without blemish.

Free from accusation.

IMPOSSIBLE

Where this stunning statement becomes a show-stopper is when we pause long enough to realize that this holy and blemish-free reality is not based on something that will happen in the future but is based on something that has happened in the past. What did Paul write? “*Once you were alienated from God... But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death.*”

Once you were alienated.

But now...

The reconciliation does not happen later. The reconciliation has happened. For this reason, in another place, Paul writes:

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (Romans 5:1-2).

It is not, “*to those who will one day have peace with God.*”

It is “*to those who have peace with God today.*”

It is not, “*to those who will one day stand in grace.*”

It is “*to those who stand in grace today.*”

Translation?

To the saints in Ephesus... (Ephesians 1:1).

It is not, “*to those who will one day be holy.*”

It is “*to those who are holy today.*”

FIRST IMPERATIVE—RECOGNIZE THE REAL ME

Throughout this module we will address seven imperatives. These imperatives are essential to transformed lives. They will provoke thought and discussion. But, most importantly, when embraced, they will provoke transformed living.

The first imperative comes in response to a question. The question is this...

What’s my perception of reality?

Or more specifically...

How do I perceive myself?

What’s real about me?

All of this leads to an essential, an imperative: the first of seven. Simply put, it’s this:

I must recognize the real me.

Christ’s work was revolutionary. He did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his current person but insisted he become a new person. If by grace Nicodemus did in time experience this new birth, how odd it would have been for him to view himself as his previous self. To view the old self as the current self is a warped view of reality. To live in reality is to embrace that which is real.

We all have a perception of reality. We are part of that perception. We view ourselves in a certain manner. The *perception* of our own reality may or may not be *genuine* reality. We may view ourselves as dirty and dead, but when *in Christ*, our reality is holy and alive. The false perception of ourselves is

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an affront to the gospel, an offense. It is calling into question the very good and powerful work God has accomplished in Christ.

When Paul wrote the church in Rome, he exhorted them to recognize their new reality when he stated plainly: “*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11).

Count yourselves...

view yourselves...

perceive yourselves...

dead to sin and alive to God.

Consider another bold statement: “*We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died*” (2 Corinthians 5:14). That’s astounding. Christ is not the only one who died on the cross. By grace our old self died with him. How odd it would be to view our current self as the self that died with Christ. For that reason, this bold statement is followed by another bold statement: “*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view*” (2 Corinthians 5:16). In short, the real *me* is not the *me* who died on the cross with Christ. The real *me* is the *me* who rose with Christ from the grave (Romans 6:4).

I must recognize the real me.

TRAGIC

Peter, one of Christ’s earliest followers, spoke of lives that are “*ineffective and unproductive in their knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:8). What a sad observation. He sees lives that could be filled with passion and purpose. These are lives where old patterns of destructive living could be broken, and even more, these are lives that could be influencing others toward new realities in Christ. And yet, they are “*ineffective and unproductive in their knowledge of Christ.*” Where his statement gets most fascinating, though, is in what follows. He couples this ineffective living with a disassociation from a person’s own reality. They have forgotten something critical. He puts it like this...

They have forgotten that they were cleansed from their past sins (2 Peter 1:9).

They have forgotten.

It’s not that they didn’t know it. They knew it. They just forgot about it. They were cleansed from the “old me,” and they forgot about it. To miss this new reality is not only to embrace a warped view of reality—it’s tragic. What happens when we view ourselves as our old selves? What happens when our perception of reality is that we may be forgiven, but we’re certainly not new? What happens if we view ourselves as devalued and damaged goods?

In short, we live in accordance with that old reality.

Consider the person who believes she’s wearing a fake diamond. She found it tucked away in a little black box and was certain it was nothing. Why take care of the diamond? It’s not worth much. It’s little more than glass. Fling it on the dresser, drag it through the mud, or lose it in the carpet. Who cares? It’s worthless. Or is it? One day she opens the family lockbox to discover a note written by her grandmother describing a multi-carat diamond she’d left in a small black box.

Perception influences action. The person who believes his car is trashy will treat that car in a trashy manner. The person who believes her house is dilapidated will treat that house in a dilapidated manner. Tragic is the life lived with a warped view of self. This new heart we have been given will beat for the greatest and grandest of things, the love of God. If, though, we deny this new heart and assume

IMPOSSIBLE

the old heart, we will, no doubt, live in accordance with our old self, our old heart. If Christ has done a revolutionary work, we must recognize this work and deny old perceptions. To miss this will influence our actions, and even more, it will dishonor God.

HONORING GOD

Some offer an understandable objection to this imperative. It goes something like this: If I'm to *recognize the real me*, then I'm making a big deal out of me. I don't want to make a big deal out of me. I want to make a big deal out of God.

Fair enough, but consider this: As we gaze upon the painting, and as we affirm the richness and creativity of the painting, which gets the honor – the painting or the painter? Or put another way, as we walk through the magnificent new home, as we consider the creativity and interest of the design, the thoughtfulness of the layout, which gets the praise – the house itself or the designer of the house?

To celebrate the creation is to honor the Creator. We are told by Scripture, that “*we are God's workmanship*” (Ephesians 2:10). As we affirm and “*recognize the real me*,” the purpose is not self-worship. This would be a gross misapplication of this imperative. Rather, our aim is eternally greater. By recognizing the painting, we praise the painter. By celebrating the craftsmanship, we honor the craftsman.

And, of course, the opposite is true. If we define ourselves by our struggles and wounds, not only are we denying the very real work of God, but we dishonor God by demeaning his work. To belittle the creation is to belittle the Creator. To celebrate the good work God has done in our lives is not arrogance; it is humility because it is inspired by the good, mighty, and loving work of God. Scripture does not define us by our old self. Scripture defines those who genuinely follow Christ as “*the holy*.”

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Back to where we started. Is change impossible? Will it always be two steps forward followed by three steps back? Nothing here is meant to imply struggles cease. We instinctively know there's more to it than that. Rather, our aim is to recognize this regeneration of self and to live in accordance with who we truly are, not who we used to be. Yes, there's more to come, much more, but as a simple starting place, we must carefully consider the astounding nature of grace. Why grovel in our old selves when we can revel in our new selves? Why diminish this work and consequently diminish the God of this work? Far greater is the life lived in accordance with the mighty and gracious work God has already accomplished in Christ.

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Week 2, Reading, p. 56

Week Two Morph Me

MISPERCEPTIONS

MISPERCEPTIONS

Consider a question...

If the *real me* is holy and blameless, why didn't I get a perfect score on the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment?

Or put another way...

If the *real me* is truly a saint, then what's with all the struggle?

These questions are not only honest, they're important. Yes, we are new people, but we don't always live as new people. Why? Even more, what can we do about it? How can we ever-increasingly experience fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives?

Before we rush to explanations, consider physical fruit. Physical fruit spoils for many reasons: low sunlight, poor soil quality, limited water, and more. Similarly, a number of explanations can be given for a lack of spiritual fruit in our lives. Throughout this *Morph* experience, we'll explore potential causes for poor spiritual fruit that surfaced through the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment. This week, we focus on one particularly damaging cause—particularly damaging because it so often goes unnoticed.

Consider again this brief paragraph from the reading...

Perception influences action. The person who believes his car is trashy will treat that car in a trashy manner. The person who believes her house is dilapidated will treat that house in a dilapidated manner. Tragic is the life lived with a warped view of self. This new heart we have been given will beat for the greatest and grandest of things, the love of God. If, though, we deny this new heart and assume the old heart, we will, no doubt, live in accordance with our old self, our old heart. If Christ has done a revolutionary work, we must recognize this work and deny old perceptions. To miss this will influence our actions, and even more, it will dishonor God.

Put succinctly: Perception influences fruit.

The Morph Me exercises of this week and next week work together. This week, you'll work to uncover harmful misperceptions about the real you. Next week, you'll address these misperceptions by developing affirmations, based on Scripture, about the real you.

Because misperceptions are inherently self-deceptive, this week's exercise comes in three stages and is done in small increments throughout the week rather than a single sitting. These are the stages:

First Stage: Self-Reflection

What is already stirring in you about misperceptions? Maybe something. Maybe nothing. The

MISPERCEPTIONS

questions in this stage are designed to help you self-diagnose areas of potential misperception.

Second Stage: Conversations

Because self-diagnosis is limited, this stage is designed to help you listen to both God and others for areas of potential misperception. You'll be asked to question God and one or two others over the next week.

Third Stage: Summary

Based on your own self-reflection and based on conversations with God and others, you'll summarize your thoughts in this final stage and clarify areas of misperception.

As with all exercises, you will get out of this what you put into it. Yes, it will be very tempting to just do the Self-Reflection and skip the conversations. Before taking this route, consider carefully the danger of misperceptions. Identifying misperceptions could bring significant and lasting change to your life. You're encouraged to make the most of this exercise.

FIRST STAGE SELF-REFLECTION

First Impressions

As you read this week's reading, you may already know areas where you are not yet recognizing the real you. Before considering questions to provoke your thinking, what are your first impressions? How might you be viewing yourself in a manner inconsistent with the way God views you? Feel free to not only write fully mature thoughts but also little inklings to explore further.



MISPERCEPTIONS

Preliminary Findings

Based on your self-reflection so far, what misperceptions have you identified about yourself?

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTIONS

SECOND STAGE CONVERSATIONS

By their very nature, misperceptions about self are ripe for self-deception. While the self-reflection of the First Stage is essential, it must not be done in isolation. This Second Stage is conversational.

Three things to know:

- ▶ This stage is done as you go about your next week and not in a single sitting.
- ▶ You are asked to listen to both God and people.
- ▶ You are asked to take the Observations sheet (the page that follows) out of the binder and carry it with you.

Four steps to follow:

1. Ask God to reveal misperceptions you have about yourself.

Either audibly or in written form, talk to God, and simply ask him to speak to you about any misperceptions you are carrying. Ask that you would have eyes that see and ears that hear.

2. Ask one or two people the following question:

Do I carry any misperceptions about myself, positive or negative, that you can see in my life?

Before you begin, you might want to explain to them that you are doing an exercise for an experience called Morph. If need be, explain that part of the experience is developing a healthy view of yourself and weeding out misperceptions. Make a copy of this week's Reading and give it to them if they're interested.

3. Listen for God's voice.

God may speak to you through the people you ask. Or God may speak to you through other means. Have an open ear for God's voice. You may be in a meeting, for example, and find yourself wondering why you're talking so much. Is God speaking to you through this wondering? Watch and listen for these moments.

4. Reflect on what you've learned by simply writing your observations on the following page and summarizing misperceptions in the final stage of this exercise.

MISPERCEPTIONS

Observations

Carry this with you for a week or so. Write important insights from the conversations you have or other moments of insight. What misperceptions might you be carrying about yourself? What influences do you need increased clarity around? Is God speaking to you through any moments or thoughts? If needed, use additional paper.



MISPERCEPTIONS

THIRD STAGE SUMMARIZE

Summarize any critical observations that you made through this Morph Me exercise.



In the following box, state potential or actual misperceptions as succinctly as possible.

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

MISPERCEPTION:

Finally, look back once more at your summary results for the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment on page 36 and consider how the misperceptions that you identified in this week's Morph Me exercise might be contributing to any areas of lacking spiritual fruit. Record your thoughts below.



MISPERCEPTIONS

MISPERCEPTIONS

Week 2, Morph Me, p. 66

Week Two

Conversations with God

ROMANS 3–4

READ

Consider wise advice given to an employee about the new boss: “Get to know him. Find out what makes him tick.” Or on a different front, consider similar advice given to a young husband about his new bride: “Study your wife. Discover what makes her happy.”

Now consider Paul’s exhortation to the church in Ephesus.

Find out what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:10).

Assumptions are dangerous, especially in relationships. It’s dangerous to assume one knows what another wants. Far wiser is the person who asks, who seeks, who investigates the pleasures of another. Down through the ages many have assumed God’s pleasure. As with people, though, assumptions are dangerous.

Among other things, Romans is an exploration of God’s pleasure. Basic understanding of three concepts will greatly enhance this exploration in this week’s readings: Jews and Gentiles, law, and justification.

Jews and Gentiles

At its most basic level, Jews are those whose lineage traces back to Abraham through his son Isaac, and Gentiles are everybody else. The Old Testament is in large part an unfolding of the Jewish story. Why is this significant? Clarity is gained when combined with understanding of the second concept.

Law

In Romans, law refers to the “do’s and don’ts” of the Jewish community, but with an emphasis on the external law. Yes, Jewish law exhorted people of faith to “*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*” (Deuteronomy 6:5), but by the time of Paul’s letter to Rome, common perception of Jewish law was more like a religious checklist. This included laws like circumcision, dietary restrictions, resting on the Sabbath, and celebrating religious festivals like Passover. Such laws were sacred to the Jews. They were also impossible to keep with perfection, which leads to the third concept.

Justification

In Greek, justification and righteousness are essentially the same word. To be justified is to be declared righteous despite the reality of unrighteousness in a person’s life. A person’s history might be dark, twisted, and insufferable, but justification is available to them.

Why do these concepts matter? Clarity is gained when they are put together.

ROMANS 3–4

The Importance of These Concepts

Consider where last week's Romans reading left off.

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God (Romans 2:28-29, TNIV).

This is an epic-making statement to first century ears. Many thought they knew what pleased God. God had taken special interest in the Jewish nation. Clearly, to please God one must be a descendant of Abraham and then abide by the written requirements of the law. Gentiles who disregarded these laws, even if they didn't know them, were displeasing to God. Paul now challenges this view. It's not about ethnicity, and it's not about external performance. Something deeper is at stake.

In this week's chapters, Paul expounds. For starters, Paul establishes the common problem shared by all humanity, both Jew and Gentile.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:22-23, TNIV).

All humanity has departed from initial glory, not just Gentiles, as was commonly thought by those who strictly observed Jewish law. All were initially created in the image of God—glorious—but due to sin now fall short of that glory. Paul then goes on to tell us that not just the problem, but the solution is also not unique to one ethnicity over another. Both Jews and Gentiles are...

justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).

How does this happen?

We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Romans 3:28, TNIV).

Justification, the declaring of a person as fully righteous, happens by *faith*, or as we established last week, by *trust*. The mechanism of trust is profoundly simple, and although initially counterintuitive, it also makes sense. To trust God is to look to God for help. When Scripture tells us justification happens by faith, it is telling us that God will be trustworthy to those who trust him. He will provide a means for healing, or put another way, a means for justification. That means is the work of Christ on the cross.

As you read Romans 3 and 4 this week, talk to God about your own assumptions. What do you feel you must do to please God? Do you have your own external checklist that you must strictly adhere to in order to experience the pleasure of God? Your checklist may differ from the Jewish checklist, but is it an external checklist, or are you getting to the heart of the matter by entrusting yourself to God's goodness in Christ?

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Colossians 1:21-23, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through

ROMANS 3–4

death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 3–4

Week 2, Conversations with God, p. 70

Week Two
Conversations with People

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



OPENING QUESTION

Have each person in the group answer the following question.

- ▶ Think of a defining moment in your life. When was this moment and what happened? How has this moment shaped who you are today?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - What do you think it means to “recognize the real me”?
 - Who is the old you? Who is the new you?
 - In quiet moments, do you identify yourself more as the old you or as the new you? Why?
- ▶ Morph Me
 - What misperceptions about “the real you” did you identify?
- ▶ Conversations with God
 - What insights did you gain from Romans 1–4?
 - Which Scripture memory passage has meant the most to you so far? Why?

PRAYER

- ▶ As a Small Group, or in Running Partners, discuss the latest in your lives and pray for each other.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Week 2, Conversations with People, p. 72

Week Three

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 93)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 5–6</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Colossians 3:1-17</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 5:1-6 Day 2: Romans 5:7-11 Day 3: Romans 5:12-21 Day 4: Romans 6:1-14 Day 5: Romans 6:15-23 Day 6: Colossians 3:1-17</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>2 Corinthians 10:3-5</u> “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”</p> <p><u>1 Corinthians 10:13</u> “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”</p>
MEDITATE	

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
VIDEO (visit website)	●	READING (page 75)	●
		MORPH ME (page 83)	●
			CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE (page 97)

WEB EXTRAS	
Check out RELATED RESOURCES (visit website)	Online Morph community SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS (visit website)

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 3, p. 74

Week Three
Reading

THE BATTLE

THE BATTLE

There's a battle going on.

A battle?

Yes, a battle. Consider two scenes:

Scene #1: The sky is blue. The sun is shining. A child is heard laughing in the park. A dog barks. A couple strolls hand in hand down the street. An older man leafs through the newspaper. A young girl rides her bike. The little league team takes the field.

Scene #2: The sky is dark. The sun is hidden. A child is heard crying in the park. A dog snarls. A couple walks coldly and silently side by side. An older man reads of tragedies in the newspaper. A young girl rides her bike dangerously close to a busy street. The little league team is filled with jealousy and selfish pride.

No doubt we recognize the battles of the second scene. We know dark days. We know struggle. We know of snarling dogs and relationships on ice. We've flipped through newspapers and have been appalled by the tragedies. We know of hardship for both young and old. We know this. We live this.

But there's more to it than that.

What about the blue-sky battles? What about the battles when the sun is shining, children are laughing, and the day seems so tremendously bright? Is there a battle then or has the battle ceased? What's really going on? What do we experience? What do we feel? What do we deal with? What about life on *good* and *normal* days?

Let's consider a day in the life.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Start with the thoughts that greet us in the morning. What's the typical disposition at the beginning of a day? Do we wake with encouraging thoughts, thoughts that strengthen us, thoughts that inspire us? Not typically. Are we alive and inspired, feeling good about ourselves, good about the day before us, and good about our God? Not exactly. Morning challenges are not reserved for those lacking morning passion. Even early risers are greeted by varying degrees of funk: the quiet thought that belittles us, the mild fear of the afternoon meeting, the unaddressed but ever-present wound that looms over our lives. It can be extreme; it can be mild. Either way, the battle greets us in the morning.

Fast-forward to the middle of the day. What's been the experience so far? Did the conversations, information, and circumstances naturally inspire us to love God, to live courageously, to be kind to

THE BATTLE

those around us? Did the voice mail and e-mail bring internal peace? Did the external chaos from work, family, or friends usher in healthy thoughts toward the people that surround us? What message did we internalize? What do we carry with us? What rolled off? What stuck with us? Was it major? Was it minor? Either way, the battle continues throughout the day.

Now it's evening. We lie in bed and reflect on our day: the conversation with the friend; the phone call (or lack of phone call) from a family member; the meeting with the co-worker, the boss, the principal, the client; the book we read; the show we watched. It all weighs in. Then there are the whispers, those quiet whispers now increasing in volume as we attempt to drift off to sleep. *Why did I do that? Why did I say that? What was I thinking? If I could only have that day back, that season back, that year back. The money is going to run out. She thinks I'm a fool. I am a fool.*

And that's just a day, maybe even a blue-sky day, which is the critical insight from the two scenes above. There's a battle going on. It's not a physical battle or a political battle. It's a spiritual battle, and it's raging. This spiritual battle presents itself in many ways. Without a doubt, though, this spiritual battle is primarily a battle of deception, which makes those blue-sky days terribly confusing. Circumstantially, life may be going well, but this does not mean the battle is being won. A very thin veil covers reality.

If we are to be transformed and if we are to rise up, we must gain insight, deep insight, into this raging battle. To gain this insight, we must go back to Christ.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We noted previously Christ's two observations in his conversation with Nicodemus:

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing person. Christ insisted he become a new person (the new birth).

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing reality. Christ referenced a new reality (the kingdom of God).

We addressed the new birth. Let's address the kingdom of God.

We don't use "kingdom" language much in our day. We speak of countries or governments. Kingdom language is a bit of a throwback, but careful thought gives enough clarity for discussion. A kingdom is simply the area over which a king reigns. One could argue that God's kingdom is everything. God made it all and is sovereign over all of it. That's true; but when speaking of the kingdom of God, Scripture seems to speak not so much of his universal reign of all things, but the area over which God's reign is celebrated. Which leads to an important distinction from worldly kingdoms.

In the physical world, a kingdom is defined by geographical borders, but even in these physical kingdoms, there can be people within the borders disloyal to the king. Their bodies are inside the kingdom, but their hearts, it could be said, are outside the kingdom. History shows this holds potential for tremendous strife. Christ's plan is profound. His early emphasis on the heart is the beginning of a kingdom. This kingdom will not be just physically loyal. Christ's kingdom starts from the inside and works itself to the outside. He came to bring a kingdom where external conformity without internal loyalty simply will not happen. His kingdom starts with the heart and grows to full presence in eternity. Which is why it's not hard to understand that God's kingdom is happening both today and will happen more completely in eternity. It's happening today in a manner that does not have geographical borders but through the hearts of those who love the King.

THE BATTLE

So what are the implications? Consider a scenario:

The phone rings. It's a government official. You're asked to take part in a covert operation. You will be taken to a foreign country. The country lives by a different, and even hostile, value system. You will quietly live in this country. Your mission is to live in this land, not by their values, but by the values of your home country. These values will not always be received well. There will be times you will appear out of step, odd, or even be in danger, but you will not be alone. Satellites will monitor your every move. You will have a phone with immediate access to authorities in your home country. Military intervention will always be available just over the horizon. They will guard you carefully and give you regular provision to meet your needs. All they ask is that you live by the values of your home country, no matter the perceived cost.

So Christ's statement to Nicodemus is both bold and profound. Not only must he become a new person, he must live with an entirely new perspective—the perspective of Christ's kingdom. This new perspective is not based upon what he naturally sees around him. Rather, he must have vision for what he does not see but knows to be true. We, too, must gain this vision, the perspective of Christ's kingdom while living in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. To gain this vision, we must gaze through the window offered by Scripture. We don't see all. We don't know all. We know, by experience and by Scripture, that our current experience is one in which we “*know in part*” and “*see but a poor reflection as in a mirror*” (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). But with that said, Scripture offers glimpses, windows into a spiritual world, and these glimpses offer a new perspective, a new vision, and strength for living lives that are at times out of step with the world around us. These insights are essential for transformational living. One day we will “*see face to face*” and “*know fully*,” but that day is not today (1 Corinthians 13:12). Today, we gaze through Scripture's windows.

One such window is Scripture's final entry, the book of Revelation.

CAST DOWN

Consider a bold statement:

And there was a war in heaven (Revelation 12:7).

This statement is followed by a brief description of a battle in the spiritual realm. The battle raged between God's angels and “*that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him*” (Revelation 12:9). So the enemy was not able to stand but was hurled out of God's presence.

Listen closely to the victory declaration following the battle...

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down (Revelation 12:10).

The accuser, described as the one who now leads the whole world astray, was cast from God's presence. That's fascinating. Before the time of this battle, the accuser was permitted to go before God and accuse God's people. It is said that these accusations would be heard “*day and night*.” What's most fascinating, though, is that the accusations were tolerated, and then they were not. Why were they once tolerated? Why were they then stopped?

Yes, for a time, God let the accusations stand. The accuser relentlessly belittled God's people. One can only imagine the kind of accusations leveled:

THE BATTLE

Did you see what he did? He said he was your follower, and then he did that. Did you hear what she said? She claimed you as her God, and then she said that. And what about that one over there? What a fraud! Wonderful people you have following you. You must be so proud.

And then it stopped. It was tolerated no longer. The accusations went silent, and the enemy was hurled from God's presence. Why? Was God simply tired of the barrage? Was it just, "enough is enough!" Or did something qualitatively change? Had a new day dawned? Was there something that happened that rendered the accusations useless? One would certainly not fault God for getting fed up with the accusations, but consider Scripture's description of the change:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ (Revelation 12:10).

Yes, something changed. Christ came.

Why might God have tolerated the accusations? Because, for a time, the accusations were legitimate. There was no grounded response. The enemy could point to the numerous failings and legitimately state: "See! They're failing! You lose! This grand endeavor to establish a faithful following is a failure! They're all failures!" Such accusations would stand. There was no solid response. The people would, in fact, fail their God.

But then something changed. Christ came, and the accusations were powerless. What was the statement we read previously about our standing before God? Because of Christ's death, we read that we will one day stand before God, "free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22). The accusations were leveled and the accusations were tolerated, but now they are not because now Christ's work is known. In another place, in regards to the enemy, Scripture states, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, God made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15). The enemy is disarmed and hurled from God's presence. The accusations must stop.

Unless, of course, the accusations are believed to be true, even when they are not. Consider again what we view in the unseen world when we gaze through Scripture's window: "For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Revelation 12:10). So now, the accuser who was once before God cannot legitimately make an accusation before God. The accuser knows this, and has now "been hurled down." What might the accuser do now? Does he sheepishly slink off into the corner waiting for time to come to a close? Not according to Scripture. In this very passage we read, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Revelation 12:12).

The accuser, who once leveled accusations before God, now levels accusations toward God's people. God does not tolerate the accusations. The accusations that once held legitimacy are now debunked because of Christ's great work on the cross. The only tactic left is to continue the accusations with those who will listen, those who will entertain them as possibly true, even if they are not. The accusations are based on deception, and the response is abundantly clear. This very passage, this very same window into the unseen world, lets us know how those in the seen world overcome the accuser:

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).

Yes, there is a battle going on, and this battle rages. But to overcome this battle is to live faithfully by what has already happened in Christ, no matter the apparent cost.

THE BATTLE

THE SECOND IMPERATIVE

As mentioned, seven imperatives for transformation will come through this module. Previously, we discovered the first:

I must recognize the real me.

Our second imperative builds upon this by digging more deeply into a statement addressed in the first module and more rigorously applied here. Simply put, it's this:

I must fight for my life.

Scripture states that the devil “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). How might he bring destruction? Over and over, again and again, we hear of the enemy’s weapon of choice. This accuser has no legitimate accusations. Rather, “he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). In other places, we read:

He deceived the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:14).

All the nations were led astray (Revelation 18:23).

Satan...will go out to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-8).

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 20:10).

We must not and cannot wade through life with our guards down. The enemy is far too determined and far too crafty. He is a liar and the father of lies. He will lie to us about God. He will lie to us about ourselves. He will lie to us about true life, true living. If we are to not just survive life but thrive in life, we must be a people who fight for our lives.

If we take a passive approach, if we sit back and let life happen to us, we quickly discover that being passive does not inspire us to live well and to love God. The enemy will take full advantage of passive living. Lives will be lulled to sleep with the remote control drooping from the tired hand. Fear will rule. Anxiety will dictate. Escape becomes the solution.

How?

So how does this work? How do we truly fight for our lives? What must we do? How do we engage? This imperative could be easily misapplied. As always, we look to Scripture for clarification.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

What do we do when one of the enemy’s favored tactics is that of deception? We demolish enemy strongholds. We “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Yes, there’s more to it than just this. We’ll dig even deeper in subsequent weeks, but for now, let’s zero in on this one essential idea. We must be a people who identify strongholds of deception and bring these pockets of resistance into truth-filled obedience to Christ.

STRONGHOLDS

So what do we mean by a stronghold? Let’s consider a few examples:

THE BATTLE

He's thirty-three and genuine in his desire for Christ. One might not know it, though, by the weekend he just lived. He had no intention of stumbling like that. He was alone, tired, and simply wanted rest. But sleep evaded him, and in a matter of hours he found himself, once again, clicking through a website inconsistent with his convictions. With every click he traveled further from the man he wanted to be. Why was he there? What was he doing? He knew he didn't really want this, but he did it anyway, just as he'd done the week before. The week before that was a good week, which seemed irrelevant now. He knew he'd regret this. He knew he'd wake up feeling compromised and frustrated, but *I've already crossed the line*, he thought, *might as well keep going*.

She's twenty-nine and single and a regular volunteer for the church's middle school ministry. She genuinely loves God, and she loves to laugh with those young girls. *If they could see me now*, she thinks, *What would those girls say if they knew this side of me?* She hovered over the toilet and pushed her finger to the back of her throat. The evening's binge erupted from her stomach and splashed before her. She cringed. She'd done it once again. She told herself she wouldn't, but she did it anyway. Why? What was really going on? She had confided in a few people. She'd read websites and even a book on the topic. Yet here she was again. She knew she didn't want to be this way, but night after night, week after week, month after month, it controlled her.

He's forty-four, married, has three kids, is active in his church, and has little to complain about. His career had been stratospheric. For nine years he'd been at the top of his game. Few had scored the deals he'd scored, and many envied his success. An e-mail dinged his inbox. He clicked to find a prospective new client expressing continued interest in his services. Once again, he was on the brink of major dollars. The last paragraph presented the one potential inhibitor. It was the question they always ask, the very question his company had yet to adequately answer. The honest answer would jeopardize the deal. He'd been here before. He'd developed a canned response that, at best, diverted their attention. In truth, though, it was a lie, a bold-faced lie to get the deal. It troubled him every time—sometimes more than others. He had his justifications, but the genuine justification was that he wanted the deal; and, yes, it was the money, but it was more than that. He wanted the little “w” by his name declaring him the winner. He wanted to set the records. He wanted to stand out amongst his peers. *One more time*, he thinks. Click.

Strongholds come in various shapes and sizes, but we get the idea. These are pockets of resistance strengthened by a bundling of deceptions. What are the lies that lead to pornography, eating disorders, or dishonesty in our work? Or, in a more subtle way, what are the lies that generate anxiety, fear, and restlessness? What keeps us from pausing? What lies generate sleepless nights? Why would we compromise our integrity, purity, or commitments? Why do we overwork and overeat? Are these decisions as simple as the actions, or do we believe things that are simply not true? If it is as simple as the external actions, surely we could change these actions with a couple of New Year's resolutions. But it doesn't seem to work that way. New Year's resolutions consistently sound like last year's resolutions. Strongholds have a tendency to show up again and again.

But what if we got after the lies? What if we unpacked what was really going on and held these deceptions up to the light of Scripture? Consider the lies that fuel sexual deviation. Surely physical impulses play a significant role, but there's more to it than that. There's the lie that says we're missing out. There's the lie that says unbridled sexual expression generates a more satisfying life. Or how about the lie that screams from the lives of those we *think* are living the good life by the way they play their weekend nights. And one more: There's the lie that says, *“If I don't do this, I'll lose this person, and this person is good for me.”* Deception after deception, brick upon brick, the stronghold is fortified.

How about eating disorders? What bundle of deceptions cement these strongholds? Is it just about the food? Or is something deeper going on? Is that food being used for food's sake? Or is that food being used to anesthetize the pain of some form of insecurity? The food tickles the pain, but is only followed

THE BATTLE

by fear of fat grams and calories, which only strengthens the original insecurity. Relief from the vicious cycle is sought through purging the food, but this, too, strengthens the original insecurity and brings it right back to where it all started. Here, as well, deception builds upon deception, brick is laid upon brick, and the stronghold is fortified for yet another day.

And what about dishonesty, lies, and deception? Is it just about providing for one's self or one's family? Or, as with other categories, is something deeper going on? How much are our decisions influenced by the way we define our worthiness? Is worth defined by always winning, always beating the competition, or always getting the deal? Does losing the deal bring normal degrees of disappointment or is this self-defining? How much influence does Dad's definition of worth and value still hold sway over our lives? Dad may or may not even be living, but what did he celebrate? Did Dad celebrate honesty at all cost, or did Dad celebrate victory at all cost? Is this just about the deal, or is this about pleasing an unpleasable parent? Or maybe it's not Dad. Maybe it's the voice that says, "*She won't love me for my looks, but she'll love me for my success.*" Getting the deal will gain us something, but what do we lose in the process? As with other categories, brick is laid upon brick and a stronghold is fortified through the complexity of multiple deceptions.

BREAKING OUT

How do we break out? How do we live from our new hearts, our new selves? How do we get to the place where this week is better than last week and next week looks better still? Much can and will be said about this, but without question, we can and must be a people who fight for our lives by swinging the sword of truth. In doing so we "*demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

So, back to that blue-sky day. How might it be different? How might we engage the day actively rather than waiting for the day to engage us? What if we entered the day entrusted to God and with sword and shield in hand? Attacks will come, as they always do, but what if we're ready? A co-worker or friend leaves us feeling belittled. The belittlement could send us spiraling toward escapist behavior, or we could fight for our lives and swing the sword of truth: "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:14). Moving past that we encounter an opportunity, a great opportunity, one we want to take but is daunting and leaves us feeling small. We could cower in fear, or we could raise the shield of faith and swing the sword of truth: "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*" (Isaiah 41:10). Maybe we're then beckoned by a temptation. It's the all-too-familiar magnetic draw to a quick fix and a feel-good moment. We crave that buzz to at least momentarily escape the challenges of life. The pull is strong and is accompanied with the lie of hopelessness. Caving feels inevitable. What must we do? We must stand firm with the belt of truth buckled round our waist, "*God is faithful; he will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

NEXT STEPS

Our first two imperatives are simple to understand but easily set aside.

Recognize the real me? Sounds wise, we think.

Then we turn the page and move on with our lives.

"Fight for my life? Yes, I can see that."

And we put down the notebook and turn on the TV.

THE BATTLE

The experience that follows leads to genuine implementation in our daily lives. We will consider the strongholds, we will bring these before God, and we will affirm what we know to be true by God's grace. If we are to live out of our new hearts, we must not approach life naively. We must engage the battle. We must fight for our lives.

THE BATTLE

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AFFIRMATIONS



MISPERCEPTIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS

Last week, you identified *misperceptions* about the real you. This week’s Reading gave deeper insight into the source of these misperceptions. They are not the random wanderings of a weak mind. Rather, they are strategically spoken lies to frustrate our growth, limit our experience of God’s goodness, and minimize our impact in the world. Without question, misperceptions must be addressed.

This week, not only will you address misperceptions, but you will be guided through a thoughtful process to develop *affirmations*. An affirmation is a personalized statement, rooted in Scripture, that affirms something you know to be true in your head but may need convincing of in your heart. By developing these affirmations, you engage the process of grabbing hold of and empowering scriptural truths about the real you in life.

The development of these affirmations will start where the previous Morph Me exercises left off. For example, maybe over the last couple of weeks you discovered a pattern of anxiety in your life rather than peace. Suppose you traced this anxiety down to a pattern of people-pleasing driven by the misperception, “My worth is tied to people’s approval of me.” To address this misperception, you could develop an affirmation from God’s perception of you. This truth might be, “God’s love for me is infinite and unconditional,” based on Jeremiah 31:3—*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness*. This affirmation, then, would become something you integrate into your daily thoughts to help you “*Recognize the real me*” and “*Fight for my life*.”

A few things to know before getting started:

- ▶ **Examples**—At the beginning are sample affirmations. Read these briefly to better understand affirmations.
- ▶ **Cards**—You’re encouraged to create the affirmations here, but to then rewrite them on the small pages provided in the Scripture memory cards.
- ▶ **Plan**—As part of this exercise, you’re encouraged to create a regular rhythm to review your affirmations. If, for example, you create an affirmation about people-pleasing, and the person you struggle with most is a boss or colleague, your plan might be to review the affirmation before any meeting with that person.

DEVELOP AFFIRMATIONS

There are four components of an Affirmation Statement.

1. **Scripture**—Affirmation Statements are rooted in Scripture. These biblical statements remind us of truths that counteract lies. Multiple passages can be included, but Affirmation Statements are meant to be brief.
2. **The Affirmation Statement**—The second aspect is the Affirmation Statement itself. This is your own personal application of the passage written in a brief and memorable statement.
3. **The Affirmation Description**—Because the Affirmation Statement is brief, it is followed by a thoughtful description. This description is taking the Scripture and the statement and personalizing it in a manner that speaks to current needs and realities.
4. **Plan**—Finally, consider when the affirmation is most applicable in your life, and plan to review the affirmation in these moments.

Follow these steps:

STEP 1: Start by reviewing the misperceptions (i.e., strongholds) that you identified through last week's Morph Me exercise. Taking one misperception/stronghold at a time, pause to ask God to direct you to Scripture that counteracts this lie, and write the Scripture in the space provided. If you do not know applicable Scriptures, consider the following:

- ▶ At the back of this exercise are lists of Scriptures associated with common areas of struggle.
- ▶ Use www.studylight.org to search for Scriptures with particular keywords.
- ▶ Ask Running Partners to help you find Scriptures.

STEP 2: Write an Affirmation Statement that expresses this biblical truth about “the real me.”

STEP 3: Write a lengthier description of your Affirmation Statement. This lengthier description is a fuller description that you might not memorize, but that you read from time to time to remind you of thoughts behind the affirmation.

Step 4: Write a plan for reviewing your affirmation. Your plan may be to review the affirmations at critical times, or it may be to simply review affirmations first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

Step 5: Rewrite an abbreviated version of your affirmation in your Scripture cards notebook.

AFFIRMATIONS

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture His divine power has given us everything we need for life and
godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his
own glory and goodness. 2 Peter 1:3

Affirmation Statement I have what I need to follow Christ.

Affirmation Description (Against stronghold: I'm not capable of following Christ.)
God has given me everything I need to follow him. I'm not enslaved to
past failures. I have what I need today. God has given me great grace.

Review Plan Review at breakfast daily

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace
with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained
access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. Romans 5:1-2

Affirmation Statement Because God is my God, I will live peacefully today.

Affirmation Description (Against stronghold: My peace is dictated by those around me.)
God is at peace with me. Others may not be at peace with me today, but God
is the authority. If I am fully acceptable to him, then I too fully accept
myself.

Review Plan Review before team meetings at work.

AFFIRMATIONS

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has
gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17

Affirmation Statement By God's grace, through Christ, I am whole.

Affirmation Description (Against stronghold: I am broken and unfixable.)
Past mistakes are exactly that. past. I am a new creation filled with love for
God and those around me. I will not settle for anything less. I will live in
accordance with who I truly am.

Review Plan Review when I wake up and before I go to sleep.

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your
God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my
righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Affirmation Statement God is with me; I am not alone.

Affirmation Description (Against stronghold: I am all alone; my circumstances will overwhelm me.)
I will not be afraid of the challenges that face me today, but I will trust God
and acknowledge his presence with me today.

Review Plan Review before driving home from work.

AFFIRMATIONS

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

AFFIRMATIONS

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT THE REAL ME**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

AFFIRMATIONS

ANXIETY LIES

ANXIETY LIES

- ▶ Lies about personal well-being
- ▶ Lies about finances and material needs
- ▶ Lies about life challenges
- ▶ Lies about phobias and fears

PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Joshua 1:6-9

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 1:6-8

"Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Matthew 6:25-27

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Matthew 6:31-34

So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

AFFIRMATIONS

PERSONAL LIES

PERSONAL LIES

- ▶ Lies about God's forgiveness
- ▶ Lies about God's purification
- ▶ Lies about God's empowerment and equipping

PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Psalm 147:10-11

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.

"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool."

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

AFFIRMATIONS

TEMPTATION LIES

TEMPTATION LIES

- ▶ Lies about God's power to break habitual behavior
- ▶ Lies about personal ability to resist temptation
- ▶ Lies about what will truly make us happy

PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Proverbs 1:10-19

My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse"— my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood. How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds! These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves! Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it.

Romans 6:13

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Timothy 6:9

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 2:18

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

James 1:13-14

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

2 Peter 3:17

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

AFFIRMATIONS

HARDSHIP LIES

HARDSHIP LIES

- ▶ If God loved me, this would not be happening.
- ▶ If God loved me, I would have _____.
- ▶ I cannot make it through this.
- ▶ God is not able to solve this problem. God is not really in control.

PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Job 2:9-10

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Psalm 68:5

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

Psalm 126:5

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

Isaiah 25:8

He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Hebrews 12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

Revelation 2:10

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

AFFIRMATIONS

Week Three

Conversations with God

ROMANS 5–6

READ

In this letter to the church in Rome, Paul is building a case. Like a lawyer in the courtroom, he makes a point, expounds and builds on the point, and he then assumes cross examination and addresses questions. It is in this week's readings—Romans 5 and 6—that Paul first expounds on grace and then addresses a highly anticipated question from cross examination: Is grace a license to sin? It is by grace, we will read this week, that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Even more, this grace was not a one-time offer, but it is grace “in which we now stand” (Romans 5:2). Does this standing in grace make obedience superfluous?

To get to this question, we need clarity on two essential concepts: grace and regeneration.

Grace

Grace is a summary word. It describes the gift of God, the favor of God, and the work of God on our behalf. God declares us righteous, he justifies us, not because we deserve it, but by grace. In another letter, Paul writes, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). By grace, by God's gift, we are brought into good standing with God. Sin is not held against us but taken care of by grace.

Regeneration

Regeneration is a word used by theologians to describe an essential concept in Romans and elsewhere. In short, regeneration is the spiritually dead being raised to spiritual life. Romans 5 goes to the depth of this concept by taking us back to the beginning. Why is humanity so broken? Why the pervasive rebellion against God? The following may sound cryptic, but once understood, it is deeply profound.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned (Romans 5:12, TNIV).

Why the pervasive brokenness? Consider this: All humanity is impacted by decisions of our ancestors, even decisions hundreds and thousands of years prior to our conception. Yes, this can sound far-fetched, but consider it carefully. When an ancestor moves from one state to another, for example, or from one country to another, that ancestor effectively moves the entire family lineage in the process. Or if an ancestor intentionally raises a child to speak a different language, chances are the new language will be adopted for generations to come. Reflective of these examples, rebellion against God at humanity's inception created a state of spiritual death—separation from God. This deathlike state made Adam incapable of reproducing spiritually alive people. It is this reality Paul touches when he writes the seemingly cryptic verse just mentioned: “*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin...*” (Romans 5:12, TNIV). Humanity is widely in a state of spiritual death, as is seen by pervasive disregard for God.

ROMANS 5–6

Why does this matter? Many reasons, not the least of which is that it deepens Paul's response to cross examination.

Is Grace a License to Sin?

Paul raises the question himself.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (Romans 6:1).

Paul's response to this cross examination is both immediate and strong.

By no means! (Romans 6:2).

But why? If we're forgiven, why not simply do as we want to do whenever we want to do it? And if we can't, are we truly saved by grace? These are fair questions that can be addressed a number of ways, but in these chapters, Paul gets to the heart of the matter by pointing to the very purpose of regeneration.

We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4).

The English phrase "in order that" comes from a solitary Greek word with unmistakable meaning: *hina*. *Hina* denotes purpose, aim, and goal. "We were buried with Christ," Paul explains, *for the very purpose of living a new life*. When we identify with Christ, we identify not just with his death (bringing forgiveness), but also with his resurrection (bringing new life). The death is the dying of our old lives. The resurrection is the rising to our new lives. If we go to Christ so we can wallow in sin, we deny the very purpose of going to Christ. So the very purpose of regeneration in Christ is empowerment for living with heart and passion for God. To deny this heart and passion and run from God denies the very purpose of grace.

As you read Romans 5 and 6, consider your own view of grace, and talk with God about it. Do you view grace as forgiveness leading to passionate living for God? Or do you view grace as a means to rebel against God so you can continue to live as the spiritually dead? And specific to this week's Reading, what implications does this have on the fight for your life?

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your

ROMANS 5–6

thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 5–6

ROMANS 5–6

Week 3, Conversations with God, p. 96

Week Three
Conversations with People

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE



INITIATE MEETING

- ▶ Designate someone to pray. Before praying...
 - Read the *Running Partner Values* (page 11) aloud.
 - Sit silently for thirty seconds to individually pray and to slow yourselves down.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - What insights did you gain from the reading?
 - How have you tried to live out the imperatives of “I must recognize the real me” and “I must fight for my life” over the last two weeks? Where were you successful? Where were you unsuccessful?

- ▶ Morph Me
 - Take turns reading your affirmations. Explain the misperceptions that the affirmations address and relevant realities or stories behind them. Those who got stuck in the exercise, explain as much as you can and ask the others for guidance.

- ▶ Conversations with God
 - What Conversations with God did Romans 5–6 spark for you this week?
 - Which Scriptures did you memorize this week? What did you learn from them? How have they impacted your life? Practice reciting them to each other.

PRAYER

- ▶ Pray for each other. As you do, pray for the realities in each person’s daily life, but be certain to pray for each person in light of the conversation you just had. Pray for each person to be strengthened in his/her fight against lies of the enemy this week.

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE

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Week Four

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 117)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 7</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Ezekiel 37:1-14</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 7 Day 2: Romans 7:1-6 Day 3: Romans 7:7-13 Day 4: Romans 7:14-25 Day 5: Romans 7 Day 6: Ezekiel 37:1-14</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>Hebrews 11:1</u> “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”</p> <p><u>John 6:28-29</u> “Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 101)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 109)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 121)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out</p> <p>RELATED RESOURCES</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community</p> <p>SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS</p> <p>(visit website)</p>

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 4, p. 100

Week Four
Reading

POTENTIAL

AN ODD SITE

There was nothing unusual about the traffic. They abhorred it, but they also expected it. For most, it was their daily routine. Most were simply making the trek from work to home or from home to work. The traffic was both stifling and frustrating, but normal.

But all was not normal.

All was not routine.

Nobody knew what to make of it.

Bumper to bumper, car after car, traffic inched along, but something had everyone's attention.

It wasn't a wreck. It wasn't a car pulled to the side. It wasn't even an ambulance loading the wounded, a fire truck dousing a blaze, or a police officer issuing a ticket.

It was an odd sight.

Right there, bouncing along as if it were normal, directly behind a small green car, and directly in front of a large silver truck, was an airplane. Yes, an airplane, driving (or would this be taxiing?) down the highway as if it belonged. The pilot (or would this be a driver?) had a wearied look on his face. Not so for the passenger. Yes, sitting directly behind the pilot was what appeared to be a passenger. He looked like most any business traveler: a newspaper open before him, periodically sipping coffee while glancing out the window. The only evidence of surprise from the passenger was when people would stare or wave. "Why are you waving at me," said the look on his face. "Do I know you?"

There was no attempt to pull over.

There was no attempt to pull up.

Not only would this plane not fly, but the pilot would not even attempt flight. Others looked with wonder. Some commented, "If that were me, I'd find a stretch of road and get up and out of this mess." As if reading their minds, the pilot gave periodic evidence of his willingness to fly. From time to time he would shrug his shoulders, shake his head, and inconspicuously point to the man behind him, as if he were the problem. And yet, nothing was done. They continued to bounce along with the rest of traffic as if they belonged, as if they were doing exactly what they should be doing when traffic is congested. When traffic picked up, they simply sped along with it. When traffic slowed, they slowed as well.

Which gave rise to what may have been the oddest thing of all: Periodically, the passenger would clearly express his frustration with the traffic. He'd grimace. He'd tap the pilot and point to a faster lane. At one point, the passenger tossed his paper on the floor and shook his head. Such actions are expected from the car that can't fly, but this man was in an airplane. All he needed to do was ask the pilot to pull off at any exit. They could then make their way to an airport or an empty road, and they

POTENTIAL

could leave the traffic behind. They could soar above at multiplied speeds without the frustration of traffic in their way.

But they didn't.

They stayed in traffic.

They continued to bounce, to weave, to sigh with frustration.

And yet, they could be free.

They could climb above the chaos and soar with the birds, and yet, they inched along like a snail. High above in a helicopter, a radio announcer monitoring traffic may have said it best: "*Talk about untapped potential! That airplane will do more than 200 miles per hour above the clouds, and it's inching along like he has to. What's with that?*"

POTENTIAL

Potential.

Capacity.

Prospective.

Promise.

Ability.

Gift.

Aptitude.

Propensity.

Talent.

There's something exciting about potential. The little girl displays an unusually high degree of athleticism. She stands out on her team. She has potential. The young man scores far above average on the entrance exam. He distinguishes himself from his class. He has potential. The new hire meets her goals three weeks before anticipated. She is set apart from her colleagues. She has potential. Potential is invigorating, inspiring, and hopeful.

And it is also deceptive.

Potential, by definition, is the chasm between that which is actual and that which is possible. The athlete may have potential to win five gold medals, but the medals have not been won. If the potential is realized, it is no longer potential; it is reality. To have potential is both good and welcomed, but it is not a point of satisfaction. In truth, those who are satisfied with potential lack potential because the potential will likely be squandered.

Maybe most frustrating is potential in the past tense.

He had such potential. He never seemed to believe it.

She could have really done something. She had potential. It's too bad she did that.

Before he got caught up in that crowd, he was really going places; he had potential.

Why did she have to meet him? She had such potential.

POTENTIAL

What once inspired hope later haunts us with what could have been. Untapped past potential follows us to our present reality. We quietly wonder what today would be like had we handled yesterday differently. We can say we have no regrets. It sounds bold and confident and may in fact be genuine. But to one degree or another, we see at least pockets of past potential gone unrealized. What if we'd not quit? What if we'd stayed with it? What if we'd persevered when times got tough? To obsess over these thoughts is unhealthy and unnecessary, but to ignore the lessons of our past will not serve us either. There is a humble confidence that gives honest assessment of past decisions.

Which leads us to the greatest pocket of potential available to humanity.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Consider, if just for a moment, the opportunity available to those who follow Christ.

There is the cross of Christ. Through this cross is forgiveness. This forgiveness opens the door to a relationship with our Creator. This Creator offers the Holy Spirit. This Spirit empowers and guides our living. There is prayer. There is Scripture. There are promises that inspire bold living. There are covenants. There are examples of well-lived lives and examples of lives lived not so well. There are commands to protect us. There are proverbs through which we may grow wise. There are angels, spiritual agents, assisting us in the unseen world. There is more, much more, but maybe most of all, there is the Father overseeing all things large and small.

Potential. Tremendous potential. Unparalleled potential.

And all too often, untapped potential.

Why?

Let's go back to the airplane.

THE AIRPLANE

Why might our friend, the passenger, deny the potential of that plane? Why remain stuck in traffic when sitting beneath him is a power that could easily lift him up and out of the congestion? Why do this, when sitting in front of him is a pilot completely capable of flying that plane? Awareness? That's doubtful. Someone sitting in an airplane would certainly know the plane's potential. Mechanical difficulty? It's possible. A reasonable explanation might be that the plane has problems. But let's say it doesn't. Let's say the plane is 100 percent capable of flying, the pilot is 100 percent willing to fly it, but the passenger has zero intention of doing so. Why might this be?

The mystery is solved when, in time, the plane is stopped by a police officer. "It's just too complicated," the passenger explains to the puzzled policeman. "I looked into flying it, but my eyes crossed from reading the manual. Look at all those dials up there. Then there's all the explanation of wind and weather. I got into it but gave it up. It's much easier to simply drive it on the ground."

"But you have a pilot," the policeman responds.

"Yes. And your point is?" the passenger asks.

"Why not let him fly the plane? He knows what he's doing."

"It's just too complicated, too dangerous, too unknown. If I don't understand it, I can't do that."

Odd we say? Definitely. But uncommon? Not exactly.

POTENTIAL

Let's leave the airplane on the side of the road and consider matters of faith.

SIMPLE FAITH?

Consider a question: Following Christ – is it simple or complex? Be cautious of quick answers. Quick answers will miss a critical insight. Before answering, consider a few other questions.

A telephone – is it simple or complex?

A microwave – is it simple or complex?

A radio – is it simple or complex?

Telephones are simple, right? It depends on what we mean. Telephones are simple to use. A child can use a telephone. But to say telephones are simple is to miss the centuries of technology that have gone into developing this tool we use without thought. Few can explain how telephones truly work. How is it that we pick up a phone, punch a few numbers, and in a matter of seconds we're talking to a person on the other side of the globe? How does that work? There's a great deal of complexity that goes into the makings of a simple-to-use phone.

And the microwave – is that simple? Of course it is. We grab a bag of popcorn, place it on the tray, shut the door, push the button, and two minutes later it's done. It's that simple. A child can do it. True, but can a child build a microwave? How many of us really know the technology embedded in a microwave? Not only is there the technology that heats the food, but even the development of the casing, the buttons, and the digital clock are mysterious to most. There's a great deal of complexity that goes into the makings of a simple-to-use microwave.

One more, that radio in the car – is that simple? Consider what's really happening. Somewhere, either locally or globally, a few people are sitting in a booth talking into microphones. Their voices carry through those microphones and somehow make it to the speakers in our cars. What happens between the microphone and the car's speakers? Most of us don't know. Most of us are just grateful for the simplicity of the buttons we push and turn to use the radio. It's complicated for somebody; it's simple for us.

Now back to the real question: Following Christ – simple or complex? Honest answer: Yes, following Christ is both simple and complex. Scripture says as much.

There's depth and complexity that goes beyond human knowledge...

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33).

And yet it is designed for a child...

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (Luke 18:17).

Hold these thoughts. We'll come back to them in a moment.

THE AMALEKITES

There's a common generalization that can be overstated but is essentially true. It's often and accurately noted that Old Testament stories give a *physical* picture of what happens *spiritually* in the New Testament and today. In the Old Testament, for example, we see *physical* battles. In the New

POTENTIAL

Testament we see *spiritual* battles. Which leads us to a critical discovery: Physical battles in the Old Testament offer tremendous insight for the spiritual battles of the New Testament and our daily lives.

One such story is both brief and profound.

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword (Exodus 17:8-13).

The Israelites are attacked. They defend themselves with the sword, but their sword is empowered by something greater than the strength of their swing. As Moses stands with arms raised and the staff outstretched, the Israelite warriors are winning. As Moses lowers his hands and his staff, the Israelite warriors are losing. Moses quickly discovers this reality and labors to be fully submitted to God. He tires and his friends surround him. He is given a place to sit. His arms are held high with the support of his friends. All the while, the Israelite warriors fight on the field of battle and ultimately defeat their enemy.

How did that work? What really happened? Did angels intervene? Was there an unseen army that attacked on Israel's behalf? Or maybe it was God's Spirit. The Spirit moved mysteriously on that battlefield giving the Israelites the needed advantage. Or maybe it was none of that. Maybe it was something God can do that we know nothing about. Maybe he just spoke, and they won. Honestly, we don't know how it all worked and what really happened in the unseen world. We don't know, and neither did Moses. That's the complexity of that battle.

We do know the simplicity, though. We know that when Moses entrusted the battle to his God that the battle went in Israel's favor. We also know that when the battle was not entrusted to his God that the battle went in the Amalekite's favor. This was simple. Moses and his friends caught on very quickly. Could they explain it? Partially. Could they experience it? Fully.

THE IMPERATIVES

The first two of seven imperatives...

I must recognize the real me.

I must fight for my life.

And now a third...

I must trust.

It's so simple we can easily downgrade its necessity. Let's move on to the complexity. Let's dig deep into the mysteries of our faith. And yes, gaining depth of insight is incredibly important. Nothing here is intended to minimize the strength that comes from Scripture's deepest revelations. A gross misapplication of this teaching would be to think that depth of insight is unimportant. That's not the case.

Very simply, we seek to avoid two errors.

POTENTIAL

First, there's the error of untapped potential for fear of the complexity. How foolish it sounds to say, *"I can't use a telephone because I don't understand how it works."* Understanding a telephone's technology is not essential to tapping the power of that technology. Likewise, an infinitely greater opportunity is missed when we say, *"I can't experience God's presence because I don't understand how he works. He's for people who really know what's going on."* Yes, there is complexity and mystery to the workings of God; and yes, a growing depth of insight is both available and important, but to limit our access to God's presence in our lives until greater understanding is achieved is to needlessly miss the greatest opportunity available to humanity.

And second, there's the error of assumed experience by knowledge of the complexity. What does that mean? A person may truly understand the technology of a radio but prefer to drive in silence. Knowledge of that complexity does not necessarily translate into experience of it. Likewise, one of the most surprising aspects of Christ's ministry was how he challenged religious authority at this very point: *"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering"* (Luke 11:52). These were the *"experts in the law."* They had insight into the complexity. They could explain things few others could explain. But it was all for nothing. They *"have not entered,"* Christ said. In their passion for the complexity, they missed the simplicity. Because they could explain it, because they could pass a test on it, or write an essay about it, they assumed they lived it, but they didn't. Potential went untapped because it was buried by the experts.

GOD'S ESSENTIAL POWER

To experience transformation, to build godly character, takes a power greater than ourselves. The Israelite's battle was not just a matter of who had the most warriors or the sharpest swords. Key to fighting, central to winning, is finding the greatest source of strength and power available to humanity. Moses turned to God. He raised his arms and entrusted the battle to a power far greater than any human army. Is it any wonder, then, that when we flip to the pages of the New Testament to gain insight into our spiritual battle, that we discover a direct reflection of the physical battles fought in earlier times? When battle tactics are expressly addressed we read, *"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power"* (Ephesians 6:10). In another place we read that we are able to overcome *"because the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). Just like the Israelites fighting the Amalekites, we must raise the arms of our hearts and declare our trust in a power greater than our wit, greater than our intellect, and greater than our knowledge of the truth.

The identification of strongholds and the development of affirmations are essential, as we just discovered. But if this is all we do, if we simply embrace the conviction that truth beats lies, we run the risk of being like the sword-swinging Israelites engaged in the battle but not entrusting the battle to God. Yes, truth beats lies, but swords also beat attacking enemies, and the Israelites would have lost if their faith had just been in their swords. To fight for our lives is much more than personal pep talks convincing ourselves we can do it, we can live well, we can think right and do good. Such tactics, unsubmitted to God, leave us naked and vulnerable before an enemy hellbent on our destruction.

The imperatives work together. Yes, we fight for our lives; we take captive every thought to bring them into obedience. And as we do this, as we swing the sword of truth, we simply entrust the struggle to the God of all power. It is in this simple act of trust that we engage the depth, the complexity, the mysterious and liberating power of God. We will understand aspects of this power, and there are other aspects we will not understand but do not need to understand. Our role is simple; God's role is complex. When asked, *"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* Christ made it very clear, *"The work of God is this: to trust in the one he has sent"* (John 6:28-29).

POTENTIAL

PULLING IT TOGETHER

Let's pull it all together.

Consider the young woman. Decades have passed since she was assaulted as a young girl, but she continues to carry needless shame. Those early memories hover over her every day and continue to deceptively *accuse* her. Even more, this perception fuels her current actions. She lives out of her wounds. *Why protect my purity?* she thinks, *I'm not worth much so why treat myself as if I am?* One shame leads to another and the accusations mount. But what if she took those thoughts captive and recognized the real person that God created and re-created? This would be both significant and profound. It would be a huge step in the right direction. But if left at this point, she may simply have truth without power. Such a condition would bring temporary encouragement but could easily lead to ongoing frustration. But what if she took it a step further? What if she not only recognized the truth and took those thoughts captive, but what if, both individually and together with trusted friends, they called out to God for liberation, for freedom, for victory against the Amalekites? What if like Aaron and Hur to Moses, her friends came alongside her and propped up the arms of her heart so she could be fully entrusted to a power greater and grander than anything they could imagine? Such a step would be simple. There's nothing complex about it. And yet, this simple act of faith would tap into the complexity and mystery of her astounding and liberating God.

Or consider the young man. His is the relentless drive for achievement. No, it's no ordinary desire to succeed; this is success on steroids. Nothing else matters but getting the deal, and he knows it's destroying his life. He simply cannot stop. His relational world is hollow. Escapist behaviors abound. These offer temporary anesthetic to a much deeper pain, but nothing changes down deep. Most of all, he just works, nonstop, all the time, no matter the cost. Attempts at boundaries and time off simply don't work. The problem is not time management. The problem is the recordings in his mind. These are strongholds. Over and over the voices drive him. Dad wasn't intentionally mean, but acceptance was based on performance, and value was measured by production. But what if this young man took a different view? What if he brought himself to Christ and let Christ define who he is rather than let himself be defined by what he may or may not produce. He would "*Recognize the real me*" and "*Fight for my life*" by embracing these truths. But as with our previous example, this swinging of the sword, if left to itself, could be powerless. Like the Israelites against the Amalekites, the young man must not fight in his own strength. But what if he didn't? What if he took a risk? What if he gathered with a couple of trusted friends, his own Aaron and Hur, and came against this stronghold in faith? What if he carried this newfound faith throughout his day, his week, his month, with ongoing prayer and support from his community? Something profound would happen. By taking these truths and entrusting them to a power greater than himself, not only would he be swinging the sword, but the arms of his heart would be stretched out to the God of all power, the God who will raise this man up to live a new life. Here as well, another stronghold of deception would come down, the enemy would be hurled from the presence of the young man, and the accuser would be silenced once again.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, our lives are impacted by grenades lobbed into our lives from strongholds that simply must go. If left unchecked, rather than silencing the shame, we will be defined by our wounds or our failures. The accuser will continue his rampage, and rather than living by faith, we will live by fear and be defined by human limitations. For some, it's enslavement to the opinions of others. For others, it's anxiety over the future. For others still, it's pride over our successes or shame over our failures. Whatever it is, the accuser will continue the accusations until we take captive these thoughts, lean into God's power, and reclaim lost ground.

Tremendous potential is available to us in Christ.

It's time to tap the Pilot.

POTENTIAL

We need not know the complexity of flying.

We must simply entrust ourselves to the Pilot and the power of his plane.

Let him find the runway, push the accelerator forward, pull back on the stick, and take us up and out of the congestion of troubled living.

POTENTIAL

Week Four
Morph Me

INHIBITORS



INHIBITORS

Over the last two weeks you addressed fruit of the Spirit by identifying misperceptions about yourself and then created affirmations to address these misperceptions. This week and next, you'll address a different issue but work in a similar manner and for the same purpose: How can we ever-increasingly experience fruit of the Spirit?

Consider airplanes again. This time, don't consider the odd scenario at the beginning of this week's Reading. Consider real airplanes, and consider real people's inhibitions about getting on those planes. When people refuse to get onto a plane, they're effectively not trusting the plane. They'd prefer to travel in their own power, or by the power of a car, train, or bus, than by the power of an airplane.

Why? What keeps that person from getting on the plane?

Fear is too easy of an answer. Unpack the fear. Why is the person afraid?

For some, it's misinformation. They truly believe the airplane is dangerous despite statistical data that says otherwise. This misinformation is an inhibitor to trust.

For others, fear grows from a bad experience. Maybe they were on a plane that had trouble or know someone who died in a plane crash. This experience is an inhibitor to trust, sometimes very understandably so.

For others still, maybe it's not misinformation or a bad experience, but they just hate flying. Maybe it's a control issue. They don't really know. But they do know they would rather be in a car, where they sit in the driver's seat, than on a plane, where somebody else controls the plane. This desire for control, or some similar issue, is an inhibitor to trust.

What's true of trusting airplanes is true of trusting God. The power of God is available to us, but any number of things can inhibit our trust. Inhibiting our trust leaves us on the ground, traveling by human power, when we could be soaring through the air, traveling by God's power. Inhibitors to trust double as inhibitors to fruit of the Spirit. A lack of self-control can be a lack of trusting in God's power. A lack of peace can be a lack of trusting in God's presence.

Which inspires an essential question:

What inhibits my trust in God?

The exercise that follows is designed to address this through a series of thoughtful questions. You will then reference these discoveries in next week's Morph Me exercise where you will address these inhibitors of trust and develop a plan to "get on the plane." In this sense, this week's Morph Me and next week's Morph Me work together in a manner similar to Weeks Two and Three where you identified misperceptions and then developed affirmations that addressed those misperceptions.

INHIBITORS

FIRST STAGE SELF-REFLECTION

First Impressions

As you considered this week's Reading and the introduction to this exercise, you may already have thoughts of what inhibits your trust and your experience of God's power in your life. Before considering questions to provoke your thinking, what are your first impressions? What might be inhibiting your trust of God? Feel free to not only write fully mature thoughts but also little inklings to explore further.



INHIBITORS

SECOND STAGE DIGGING DEEPER

Trust can feel intangible, but trust and lack of trust make themselves known. Consider the following areas of life to identify areas where trust may be lacking and inhibitors could be found.

Fruit of the Spirit

Turn back to the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment summary on page 36 and consider your three lowest scoring fruit. If you lack peace or self-control, for example, why? What are you believing or not believing that may inhibit trust in these areas? If the three lowest scoring fruit do not reveal anything significant, consider the others.



Areas of Known Disobedience

Consider areas of your life where you commonly struggle to obey God. What are you believing or not believing that may inhibit trust in these areas?



INHIBITORS

COMMON INHIBITORS OF TRUST

Authentic trust in God has many inhibitors, but the following categories are broad enough to address many of them. Consider the questions and the thoughts that follow to identify potential inhibitors of trust.

The Self-Sufficient

The self-sufficient lack trust in God because they don't really see the need. They may trust God in a broader sense, but on a day-to-day basis, they don't really live by faith. Life is lived by their competencies and skills rather than looking to God for guidance and provision.

I do or don't see self-sufficiency as an inhibitor to trust because...

The Self-Abasing

The self-abasing view themselves as incapable and incurable. They do not entrust themselves to God because they believe their cause to be hopeless. They're not necessarily despondent and down. They may view their self-abasement as reflective of reality. They may genuinely question if God will truly empower lasting change in their lives.

I do or don't see self-abasement as an inhibitor to trust because...

The Misperceiving

The misperceiving do not trust God because to them God is not trustworthy. They may intellectually believe God to be trustworthy, but their hearts are not in agreement with their minds. Maybe they think God will make their life boring and miserable. Or maybe they think God is angry, picky, or outdated. Whatever it may be, their perception of God inhibits full trust.

I do or don't see misperceptions about God as an inhibitor to trust because...

INHIBITORS

The Complacent

The complacent are those who know what to do to trust God, and they know how to do it, but they have not or will not expend the needed energy to do so. To engage God takes time, and they are either stuck in passive ruts, or they have so much activity in their lives that to pursue God feels more like another task than a desired relationship.

I do or don't see complacency as an inhibitor to trust because...

The Wounded

The wounded are those whose thoughts of God are coupled with questions about hardship or loss. They find it difficult to trust God when God has allowed such difficulty in their lives. They may (or may not) intellectually know God's love and God's goodness, but their experience makes it very difficult to believe this from the heart.

I do or don't see woundedness as an inhibitor to trust because...

The Cynical

The cynical are those whose disposition toward God is negative by default. For some, this disposition is something that simply needs correction. In others, though, the cynicism results from understandable sources. Maybe they were brought up in a home where religion was used as a club. Or maybe they trusted God to do something, but for one reason or another, God didn't do what they thought he would do. Whatever the situation, they expected God or religion to be one thing, and for them, it was something quite different.

I do or don't see cynicism as an inhibitor to trust because...

Other

The above categories are intended to inspire rather than limit your thinking. What else?

INHIBITORS

THIRD STAGE TALKING WITH GOD

Either audibly or in written form, talk to God, and simply ask him to speak to you about any inhibitors to trust you are carrying. Ask that you would have eyes that see and ears that hear. Listen to him in this moment, and listen for his voice throughout the week. Record thoughts from this conversation below.



INHIBITORS

FOURTH STAGE SUMMARY

Summarize any critical observations that you made through this Morph Me exercise.



In the following box, state potential or actual inhibitors to trust as succinctly as possible.

INHIBITOR:

INHIBITOR:

INHIBITOR:

INHIBITOR:

Finally, look back to your summary results for the Fruit of the Spirit Assessment on page 36, and consider how the inhibitors to trust you identified in this week's Morph Me exercise might be contributing to any areas of lacking spiritual fruit. Record your thoughts below.



INHIBITORS

INHIBITORS

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Week Four

Conversations with God

ROMANS 7

READ

Let's make a few observations about life and death. Prepare yourself; they're a bit odd.

First, death has implications on a person's obligations. When a person dies, that person is no longer personally bound to contracts, debts, and responsibilities. Yes, the estate will have to settle all accounts, but that person is gone and doesn't need to be concerned with such matters.

Second, both life and death have symptoms: breath or lack of breath, pulse or lack of pulse, brainwaves or lack of brainwaves. It doesn't take a highly trained eye to identify life and death in most circumstances. Yes, recent death may be difficult to discern, but give that body a little time, and the symptoms will make the assessment self-evident.

These two odd but obvious observations are helpful to this week's Reading from Romans. Last week, we acknowledged that in this letter Paul is building a case. Like a lawyer in the courtroom he makes his point, builds on the point, and then subjects his point to cross examination. The pattern continues this week as he continues to address questions of law, grace, and obedience.

First Observation: Obligations after Death

You'll recall that Paul has been addressing the question of grace and license. Is grace a license to sin? His answer is an emphatic "no" and explanation of this "no" carries into Romans 7. To explain himself further, Paul leans into the first observation above. When a person dies, that person is free from worldly obligations as is the spouse who was once bound to that person. If a person dies, that person's spouse is free to marry another. To get the weight of this illustration, consider where Paul left off at the end of Romans 6. He addressed a reality all too familiar to humanity. Despite our best intentions, we feel enslaved to destructive living. In Paul's words, "you were slaves to sin" (Romans 6:20, TNIV). It's as if sin owned us. We bowed to sin's wishes and obeyed sin's commands.

But then something happened. In Christ, we died. It's this idea Paul addresses at the beginning of Romans 7.

Do you not know...that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him... So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (Romans 7:1-2, 4, TNIV).

The point? "By dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Romans 7:6, TNIV). In other words, because we died in Christ, we are no longer bound to the external code of do's and don'ts, but we now have the beauty of God's Spirit who brings powerful transformation to our lives. We'd be foolish to turn our faith into a list of external do's and don'ts. We died to that. But we'd be even more foolish to

ROMANS 7

deny the powerful and transformative presence of God's Spirit in our lives and miss the life God has for us. As mentioned in the previous chapter, "What benefit did you reap...from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin..." (Romans 6:21-22, TNIV).

Which leads to cross examination and the usefulness of our second observation.

Second Observation: Life and Death Have Symptoms

A question is unearthed by Paul's discussion of law.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? (Romans 7:7, TNIV).

Or put another way, is Paul saying that the external law is a bad thing? Why would God have created this system if it would be ineffective? Did God make a mistake with Old Testament law? As with his response to other questions, Paul's response is emphatic.

Certainly not! (Romans 7:7, TNIV)

Which gets to the point of diagnosing a problem by being aware of the symptoms. Listen carefully to Paul's explanation.

I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet" (Romans 7:7, TNIV).

The law is incredibly important. God did not intend for the law to produce righteousness but to diagnose unrighteousness. The law does not heal. It can't heal. It has no power to heal. What the law does do, though, is expose the condition of spiritual death and heighten our awareness of our desperate need for help. Without the law, one might see his or her actions as normal and good, despite the destructiveness, which is in fact what we often see today. Humanity barrels on destructively with a general sense of right and wrong but lacking the sharp definition that comes from knowing God's written law.

This week, as you read Romans 7, consider talking to God about your own awareness of sin. What symptoms do you see externally that point to your internal reality? Are there symptoms of spiritual life, or are there symptoms of spiritual death? If the symptoms are those of spiritual death, talk to God about your approach. Are you approaching life by the old way of the written code or by the new way of the Spirit? Are you attempting to break out in your own strength, or are you embracing this week's imperative and entrusting yourself to God?

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

John 6:28-29, "Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'"

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized.

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Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 7

ROMANS 7

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Week Four
Conversations with People

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



OPENING QUESTIONS

Have each person in the group answer one of the following questions.

- ▶ Describe a time when you were hesitant to trust someone, but you did, and it *worked out well*. What happened and has this influenced your willingness to trust God?
- ▶ Describe a time when you were hesitant to trust someone, but you did, and it *didn't work out well*. What happened and has this influenced your willingness to trust God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - How is following Christ simple? How is it complex?
 - Have someone read aloud the section titled, “The Imperatives” beginning on page 105.
 - Are there areas of untapped potential in your relationship with Christ? What keeps you from trusting Christ in these areas?
 - Are there areas where your head knowledge of Christ gets in the way of your experience of Christ? What could help you overcome this obstacle?
- ▶ Morph Me
 - What inhibitors to trusting God did you identify? Why are these significant for you?
- ▶ Conversations with God
 - Have someone read Romans 7:14-25 aloud.
 - Can you relate to the struggle with sin that Paul describes? If so, how is this expressed in your own life?
 - How do the imperatives “recognize the real me,” “fight for my life,” and “trust” help us in this struggle?

PRAYER

- ▶ As a Small Group, or in Running Partners, discuss the latest in your lives and pray for each other.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Week 4, Conversations with People, p. 122

Week Five

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 145)	
READ <u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 8 <u>Related Passage</u> Galatians 5 <u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 8:1-11 Day 2: Romans 8:12-17 Day 3: Romans 8:18-27 Day 4: Romans 8:28-39 Day 5: Romans 8 Day 6: Galatians 5	MEMORIZE <u>Galatians 5:25</u> "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." <u>John 15:4-5</u> "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." MEDITATE

WEEKLY EXERCISES						
VIDEO (visit website)	●	READING (page 125)	●	MORPH ME (page 133)	●	CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE (page 149)

WEB EXTRAS	
Check out RELATED RESOURCES (visit website)	Online Morph community SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS (visit website)

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 5, p. 124

Week Five
Reading

THE CARNIVAL

THE WHISPER

It's been awhile, but we observed a distinction between the wise and the foolish. The distinction is not absolute. It does not always work this way, but we know the distinction by experience. We asked a question:

How do the wise and the foolish handle information they believe to be important?

A simple thought was offered—a simple observation.

The foolish scream. The wise whisper.

Whisper?

Scripture says as much: “*The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools*” (Ecclesiastes 9:17). Wisdom has intrinsic weight that does not need volume. Foolishness needs help to be convincing. Wisdom is believed by the quality of the message. Foolishness needs the shout of the messenger. The wise, the experienced, those who truly want *life*, learn to listen for quiet words of wisdom calling out to them through the carnival of chaos.

Deeper insight into this will lead us to our fourth imperative.

THE CARNIVAL

The young boy stands in the midst of the carnival's chaos. A bag of cotton candy dangles from one hand; a string of tickets dangles from the other. Prospective thrills beckon him to every stand, every ride, and every game. His eyes are wide with excitement. He races through the maze of people. His time is limited. He doesn't want to miss a bit of it.

He tosses rings at the ring toss. He hopes to win a bear. Close, but not quite.

He races to the merry-go-round. He hopes to ride the blue one. Purple will do.

He throws balls to dunk the clown. Three balls per ticket. Four tickets burned.

The carnival is fun. The carnival is frustrating.

The fun drives him on. The frustration leaves him lonely. As he races to the next thrill, the next experience, he hears a voice cutting through the chaos.

He stops. He turns. He wonders.

The voice is familiar. The voice is wanted. It wasn't wanted at first. At first he wanted to run free, to run alone. The reality of the carnival changed all that. Now he welcomes the voice. Now he wants the

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voice. He can't quite place the direction, but he hears it again. To his frustration, blaring bells from a ride beside him drown the voice out.

Where is he? Was that him? I think it was him.

He turns. He looks. He wishes. He wants.

Through the crowd before him, he thinks he catches a glimpse of him. The crowd shifts, and his view is obstructed.

Was that him? I think it was him. It could have been him.

He runs. He runs some more. He stops. He listens.

Upon stopping, upon listening, upon waiting, rather than the hundreds of voices around him, rather than the clanging bells and beckoning voices, he listens to the one familiar voice calling his name.

It is not loud; it need not be.

It's a trusted voice that cuts through the chaos.

To his surprise, to his relief, to his delight, he does not discover the voice by running to the distant corners of the carnival. The voice is not found in the shifting crowd.

The voice is found as the boy stops and listens.

He pauses. He does not run.

He simply looks to the towering presence standing calmly right beside him.

There he is. That's my dad!

THE CONSTANT PRESENCE

A familiar voice is powerful. It need not be the loudest voice in the room or scream for attention. Yes, the voice must be heard, but familiarity beats volume. The wise know this, and rather than listen for volume, they listen for the quiet ping of truth in that familiar voice they've grown to recognize: "My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

When Christ physically walked this earth, there was a critical moment when he pulled his closest followers aside. The cross was imminent. In a matter of days, circumstances would change dramatically. These followers had lived closely with Jesus for several years. They walked side by side; they shared meals; they slept in the same fields, the same rooms. They knew each other well. They had the high privilege of literally living and walking with the Son of God. Which makes one of Christ's final statements to them either desperately odd or powerfully intriguing.

Christ said, "It is for your good that I am going away" (John 16:7).

Good? What could be better than having the face-to-face interaction they had with Christ every day? If they had questions, they turned and asked him. If they were sick, they could walk across the room and experience his touch. If they were confused, they could address him. He was right there with them. What could be better than that? How could it be *good* that he would be leaving them?

"Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

Without question, this must have caused confusion.

What counselor? If you're sending someone else, most certainly this counselor can't be better than you. How can it be good to get this counselor? You seem to be implying that this will be a better situation than the one we have right now. That's not possible.

As stunning as that sounds, that is precisely what Christ was saying. He would leave, and his leaving would be good because having the Counselor present would be better for them than his own physical presence. It would take time for his closest followers to be convinced that this new situation could be truly better, and certainly, there was a richness to the physical presence of Christ. In time, though, they would discover what we can still discover today: A spiritual presence is a constant presence not limited by physical realities.

When Christ walked closely with his followers, he would also have times of absence. He was a physical being and willingly limited himself by this. Scripture describes times when, to his disciples' frustration, he slipped away: *"Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'"* (Mark 1:36-37). Such is the reality of the physical world.

The Counselor would be Spirit.

After the cross and after the resurrection, Christ again met with his followers. Prior to his ascension, he made a statement that, here again, must have sounded odd at first. Later they would look back on this statement and piece it together. He tells them, very simply, *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). This Jesus, this being who died and then rose, now promises his perpetual presence. But was he not the promise for the Counselor? The Counselor would be the one who would be present? How is Christ to be present until *the very end of the age*?

We do not know the extent of his disciples understanding at this point, but in time, they would see it clearly. This Counselor, this ever-present Spirit, would later be referred to as *the "Spirit of Jesus."* In one such place, an early follower of Christ wrote, *"I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what happened to me will turn out for my deliverance"* (Philippians 1:18-19). So the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, is referred to as *"the Spirit of Jesus Christ."* Is it any wonder then that Christ himself would have said, *"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you"* (John 16:7). A presence would become far more effective than the physical presence of Christ. It would be the spiritual presence of Christ, and it is this spiritual presence that allows him to promise, *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

The young boy at the carnival is not emboldened by finding detailed instructions on how to navigate the carnival. He did not find a map, or list of rules, or instructions for the games and rides. He is not inspired by an arrow on a sign telling him where to go next. He is not relieved to just have guidance for the games. Boldness for his battle is embodied in a person. His strength is in the presence of a person stronger, wiser, and more experienced than himself. Release from his fear comes when his father, leaning down, whispers, *"I'll stay close. Stay close to me. We'll do this together."* The child's great joy at the carnival, the memory he will savor most as he ages in life, will not just be the carnival itself, but the person with whom he experienced the carnival.

And so it is with the Spirit of Jesus.

Christ says, *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you"* (John 15:4).

Translation: *"I'll stay close. Stay close to me. We'll do this together."*

Christ says, *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:13).

Translation: *"I'll stay close. Stay close to me. We'll do this together."*

Christ says, *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

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Translation: *“I’ll stay close. Stay close to me. We’ll do this together.”*

Christ says, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”* (Acts 1:8).

Translation: *“I’ll stay close. Stay close to me. We’ll do this together.”*

Scripture states, *“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us”* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Translation: *“I’ll stay close. Stay close to me. We’ll do this together.”*

Scripture states, *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit”* (Galatians 5:25).

Translation: *“I’ll stay close. Stay close to me. We’ll do this together.”*

The message is not isolated. It is pervasive.

THE IMPERATIVES

God’s method is not to just download Scripture to our mental hard drive, sit back, fold his arms, and wonder if we’ll make the cut. Rather, he comes within us, he strengthens us, he leads us, and he interacts with us. He wants to do this life, this carnival, together. Like the young child, we are not emboldened by just finding detailed instructions on how to navigate the carnival. We have not just found a map, or list of rules, or instructions for the games and rides. We are not inspired by an arrow on a sign telling us where to go next. We are not relieved to just have guidance for the games. Boldness for our battle is embodied in a person. Our strength is in the presence of a person stronger, wiser, and more experienced than ourselves. Release from our fear comes when God’s presence leans down and whispers, *“I’ll stay close. Stay close to me. We’ll do this together.”* And here as well, our great joy at the carnival, the memory we will savor for all eternity, will not just be the carnival itself, but the person with whom we experienced the carnival.

Which leads to our fourth imperative.

I must recognize the real me.

I must fight for my life.

I must trust.

And a fourth imperative:

I must walk by God’s Spirit.

If we are to authentically love God, if we are to experience God in our daily lives, if this journey is not just an exercise of the intellect but a calling to a way of life, then we must, we absolutely must, listen for the voice of truth calling through the carnival of chaos. There’s something powerful in this. We know it and sense it. If this is truly possible, we want the experience in our daily lives. For most, the question is not desire, but practice. How does this work? How do we truly live by the Spirit? What must we do? How do we experience God’s presence? How do we hear God’s voice? Much could be said to these questions. Let’s get after the essentials.

THE PERSONALITY OF CHRIST

As a starting point, we must recognize that this Spirit is not an inanimate *force* or *energy* in the universe, but a personality. Yes, it has force. Yes, it has energy. But, *it* is not an *“it”*; *it* is a *person*. The

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implications of this are profound. We are not just pulled along by a colossal magnet. The Spirit of Jesus is not a cosmic hit of supercharged caffeine. We are inspired and strengthened by the presence of a powerful and personal being with emotion, perspective, and presence. This Spirit “*searches all things, even the deep things of God*” (1 Corinthians 2:10). This Spirit “*helps us in our weakness*” (Romans 8:26). This Spirit “*prays for God’s people in accordance with God’s will*” (Romans 8:27). This is a living personality that interacts and intercedes.

One of the more fascinating statements on this comes from a man who walked with Jesus physically. John was one of Christ’s closest followers. He is referred to as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 13:23). Without question, this was a man who would have treasured the physical presence of Jesus. He sat with him at dinner. He walked with him, and later, along with the other disciples, he is referred to as Christ’s friend (John 15:15). This man knew Jesus well.

Years later, John writes to followers of Christ who did not experience Christ’s physical presence. He draws attention to the physical experience he and others were fortunate enough to have when he writes that Christ is the one “*whom we have heard, whom we have seen with our eyes, whom we have looked at and our hands have touched*” (1 John 1:1). Why would he do this? Will his readers hear him say, “*You missed him! He was here, and you missed him! Let me tell you what he was like, since you missed him!*”? We might expect this. It’s the kind of gloating common in our world. John does something quite surprising though.

When John writes, he writes with a stated purpose. So as to be certain nobody misses this, he tells them plainly that his purpose in writing is to “*proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3-4).

You catch that? It’s stunning!

John writes about what was “*seen and heard*” (the physical presence of Christ), so that “*you also may have fellowship with us*” (the spiritual presence of Christ). So as to be certain there is no mistaking what he means by this fellowship, he describes it in detail: “*Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*”

John does not write to speak of a fellowship that came and went. He does not acknowledge experiencing Christ physically to underscore what he experienced and all others now miss. Rather, he writes out of passion for his *current* experience of Christ. He wants others to experience him, too. He’s tasted of this fellowship, and he wants his readers, us, to know and experience what he continues to experience. His fellowship is an ongoing fellowship. He’s so passionate that we too experience this that he tells us next, “*We write this to make our joy complete*” (1 John 1:4). It’s as if he’s saying, “*Yes, I experienced him, but so can you! You must know this! It’s not too late! You didn’t miss him! He’s still here and longs to fellowship with you! We are called not just to a set of principles to live by, but to a fellowship. We are called to relate to a being, a person, who once walked physically and now offers his perpetual presence spiritually.*”

All this enhances the “*How?*” question. If there is a spiritual fellowship available to us, how do we recognize this fellowship? How do we discern the voice of God? God may call us through the carnival of chaos, he may walk beside us, but how are we to recognize God’s voice through the many competing voices that surround us? How do we know it’s God?

THE PRESENCE IS NOT SEEN

In speaking of our interaction with God, Scripture tells us, “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*” (1

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Corinthians 13:12). If interaction with the Spirit of God seems simultaneously real and mysterious, then the experience is an accurate reflection of the experience described by Scripture. This could be misunderstood. Scripture does not tell us to set a low expectation of our experience with God and minimize his presence in our lives. That's a misreading of Scripture. Rather, the experience of God's presence can be both powerful and profound; his presence impacts us in both known and unknown ways. But if we have a physical expectation rather than a spiritual expectation, we may very well turn a deaf ear to the familiar voice standing right beside us and calling us in the midst of the carnival's chaos. We may be wishing and waiting for something that's already there.

The young child at the carnival knows his father's voice because it is a voice he has heard countless times. He recognizes the voice in the midst of hundreds of competing calls because this is a voice he has heard for years. It is at this place where we lean into our experience with Scripture. Why listen to God's voice in Scripture? Scripture trains the ears. The person who trains his ears by hearing God's voice through Scripture is much more capable of hearing God's voice in his or her life experiences. In the midst of the carnival's chaos, the young boy may hear the booming voice of another grown man. The pitch may be similar. It may get his attention for a brief moment, but very quickly he will dismiss it. *"That's not my dad...that's not what he sounds like."* To experience the presence of God in our daily lives, we must be trained by the presence of God in Scripture. Scripture familiarizes us with the kinds of things God says and does. We may not yet experience him face to face. We may be in a season where we *"know in part,"* but through Scripture we are also given example after example, life after life, story after story, familiarizing us with the heart and passion of God.

Consider the early follower of Christ already mentioned—John. His spiritual experience of Christ was no doubt enhanced by his physical experience of Christ. How was he to recognize the spiritual presence of God in his life? Without question, having experienced Christ physically trained him to recognize Christ spiritually. What's true for John is true for us. Scripture trains us. We begin to recognize the kinds of things God says and does. Without training our ears with Scripture, we will project God's presence and voice on any inclination believing what we want to believe. Such living is misguided and dangerous.

Which leads to another area of importance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

If familiarity with the presence and voice of God is acquired and trained, it is critical that we surround ourselves with others who are also experiencing the presence of God. Their presence and their experience serve the incredibly important purpose of balancing and refining our own experience. *"Yes!"* the friend says, *"I affirm what you're sensing. I, too, am convinced God is doing that in your life."* Or *"Slow down, good friend, I see why you may think that, but I sense caution; you may be a few steps ahead or a few steps behind God at this point."* Scripture puts an incredibly high premium on the collective agreement of God's people. It goes as far as saying, *"That if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them"* (Matthew 18:19-20). This statement is not intended to be a blank check given to any two believers, but among other things, it points us to an essential aspect of Christian friendship. Two or three followers of Christ will refine each other, purify each other's understanding of God's presence in their lives, and their going before God together will be greater than the assumptions they may take alone.

There's more...

THE CARNIVAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF PAUSING

The carnival of chaos bellows with confusion. Confusion often breeds more confusion. Noise often breeds greater noise. Chaos often breeds amplified chaos. Speed often breeds increased speed. Which leads to another critical aspect of living by God's Spirit.

We must pause.

We must stop.

We must stand in the midst of the chaos and listen.

Proverbs reminds us, *"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way"* (Proverbs 19:2). Psalms reminds us to *"cease striving and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10, NASB). Ecclesiastes tells us to *"not be quick with your mouth, nor hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few"* (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Yes, there is a time and a place to kick it into high gear, but when that time is *all the time*, and when that place is *every place*, we run the dangerous risk of getting swept into the chaos of the carnival rather than experiencing God's presence in the midst of the swirling realities that surround us. Just as the young boy finally discovered the voice of his father right beside him when he stopped running from one end to the other, we too will establish greater awareness as we cultivate a contented spirit with ears tuned to hear God's voice. God can and will speak in any moment, and many of these moments can and will be as we move swiftly through life. But even as we at times must move with external haste, this does not mean our internal person must match the runaway momentum of circumstances. As mentioned, the wise and spiritual *"cease striving and know that God is God"* (Psalm 46:10).

GUARD YOUR HEART

The young boy and his father begin to walk. The chaos swirls around them, but the cadence of the boy's steps now matches the long but adjusted strides of his father. While once the boy was running frantically to and fro, now he walks with steady intention. The father gently guides him. In one place, he affirms the son's excitement for the thrill of one of the rides. In another place, he encourages the son to step out anyway, even though the boy is scared. In still another, the father encourages the son to wait. A few more inches of growth will give him what he needs for that one. Through it all, the son experiences a critical lesson: To make the most of the carnival, it's best to walk with his father.

Scripture puts it like this...

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

Through Scripture, through community, through quiet and thoughtful listening, the Spirit of Jesus will make his presence known. At times we will be propelled forward, even though greater comfort is behind us. At other times we will be held back, even though excitement appears to be in front of us. There will be moments it all makes sense. We'll know danger and rebellion are on the other side of that door. And, of course, there will be times it doesn't make sense, and we'll wonder and question why we can't do that or have that.

Through it all, one thing is certain: God will become greater through our experience of his presence. We will cultivate greater love for God and greater enjoyment of God's gifts by keeping in step with his Spirit. It will be when we break from his gentle but decisive strides that we grope and gripe over the gifts and strain to turn them into gods. We will want them to be *IT*, but they are not *IT*. They are *it*. They are gifts to be enjoyed. They are designed to inspire our hearts to the one who is greater and grander than our hearts could ever dream. For we were created with eternity in our hearts and only

THE CARNIVAL

The Eternal can satisfy this eternal longing. Above all else, we must guard this heart by letting it feast on the greatest and grandest of all.

THE CARNIVAL

Week 5, Reading, p. 132

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II



INTRODUCTION

Last week, we asked a question.

What inhibits my trust in God?

The question is simple but weighty. To morph, to experience irreversible life change, we do not look to our own power any more than the weary traveler looks to his feet to travel cross country. Weary travelers look to a power greater than themselves, most commonly an airplane, to get them up and over the land. Likewise, we look to a power greater than ourselves to bring about a change we cannot bring on our own.

This week, we pick up where we left off with last week's Morph Me, and we develop affirmations to address the identified inhibitors of trust. By identifying and addressing these inhibitors, not only do we set ourselves up to engage God's power, but we also increase the clarity of God's voice in our lives by removing barriers that may diminish our desire to listen for his voice. Put another way, the exercise that follows gives application to two imperatives: *I must trust* and *I must walk by God's Spirit*.

With that said, an important distinction must be made.

This exercise addresses strongholds by applying truth to falsehood, but if that's all it does, it runs the risk of failing at the very truth this teaches. It's been a week (or more), but consider this paragraph from Week Four's reading:

The identification of strongholds, the development of affirmations are essential, as we just discovered. But if this is all we do, if we simply embrace the conviction that truth beats lies, we run the risk of being like the sword-swinging Israelites engaged in the battle but not entrusting the battle to God. Yes, truth beats lies, but swords also beat attacking enemies, and the Israelites would have lost if their faith had just been in their swords. To fight for our lives is much more than personal pep talks convincing ourselves we can do it, we can live well, we can think right and do good. Such tactics, unsubmitted to God, leave us naked and vulnerable before an enemy hellbent on our destruction.

With this in mind, this week's Morph Me comes in two stages. First, you will engage a thoughtful process to create affirmations that address inhibitors to trusting God and living by his Spirit. Second, you will be encouraged to engage God thoughtfully and prayerfully. As you do this, you will not only be engaging God's power in this moment, but you will be talking with God about future moments and how you can apply the affirmations you have developed. With these two steps, the arming of truth and the engagement of God's power, there's no limit to what God could do.

FIRST STAGE DEVELOP AFFIRMATIONS

This week, you will create affirmations similar to those you created in Week Three. Then, you affirmed biblical truths that address misperceptions about the real you; now, you will affirm biblical truths that address inhibitors to your trust in God. If, for example, in Week Four you identified self-sufficiency as an inhibitor to trust in your life, then you might develop an affirmation around 2 Corinthians 12:9, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*”

STEP 1: Turn to page 115 where you listed identified inhibitors, and repeat these below. If you have identified other inhibitors in your life since last week’s exercise, write these below as well.

-
-
-
-

STEP 2: Ask God to direct you to Scriptures that address these inhibitors. Write the Scriptures on the affirmation pages that follow.

This step may not come quickly or easily. A few suggestions...

- Sit prayerfully in God’s presence and ask for his guidance.
- The pages at the end of this exercise offer a partial list of passages associated with the six common inhibitors discussed in Week Four (self-sufficiency, self-abasement, misperceptions about God, complacency, woundedness, and cynicism).
- Ask Running Partners for insight.
- Use www.studylight.org to search for passages with particular key words.

STEP 3: Write affirmation statements that express these biblical truths that encourage trust in God. Write them in a way that is personalized to the area you are addressing in your life.

STEP 4: Write a lengthier description of your affirmation statement and a plan for review. Use this space to give supporting thoughts and ideas that will strengthen your thinking. Your plan may be to review the affirmations at critical times, or it may be to simply review first thing and last thing of every day.

STEP 5: Rewrite an abbreviated version of your affirmation in your Scripture cards notebook.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

SAMPLE AFFIRMATION ABOUT TRUST

Scripture In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the
plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose
of his will. Ephesians 1:11

Affirmation Statement God is in control.

Affirmation Description What is happening in my life right now is not a shock to God. He knew
this would happen even before I was born, and he is able to make his
good will come out of the situation.

Review Plan Review before starting my car and meditate on as I drive to work.

SAMPLE AFFIRMATION ABOUT TRUST

Scripture In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in
all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith... may be proved genuine and
may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7

Affirmation Statement God sees and cares about my situation, and my suffering is not in vain.

Affirmation Description God has not forgotten me or turned a blind-eye to my pain. He knows what I
am experiencing, and he is even using these difficulties for my own good—to
grow me spiritually and to bring about good even in ways that I cannot yet
understand.

Review Plan Review when I wake up and just before I go to sleep.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should
change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise
and not fulfill? Numbers 23:19

Affirmation Statement God is faithful to keep his promises.

Affirmation Description God will be faithful to keep his promise to me that I will never be
forsaken. He will protect me and provide for me in this challenging
financial season.

Review Plan Review before and after paying bills.

**SAMPLE AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture For you, O Lord, are the Most High over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
Psalms 97:9

Affirmation Statement God is bigger than my gods.

Affirmation Description I will no longer put my trust in gods that cannot sustain me, but I will
put my trust in God, who is the most powerful being in all of creation
and who is supremely able to meet all of my needs.

Review Plan Review at the beginning of each day.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

**AFFIRMATION
ABOUT TRUST**

Scripture

**Affirmation
Statement**

**Affirmation
Description**

Review Plan

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

SECOND STAGE TALK TO GOD

In the final stage of this exercise, talk to God about the affirmations you just created. Ask him to bring to mind anticipated scenarios in which you'll likely need to lean into these truths and trust God in the near future. Ask for wisdom about what it would look like for you to actively trust him in these situations. Listen for the Spirit's voice and guidance as you pray. Resist the temptation to rush this final stage. Developing the affirmations is important, but we must now genuinely entrust these to God and thoughtfully prepare ourselves for those moments we square off with temptation.

Use the space below to record thoughts and insights.



SCRIPTURES

ADDRESSING INHIBITORS TO TRUST

These Scriptures are meant to guide, but not limit, your meditation. Feel free to search Scripture for other applicable verses.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Deuteronomy 8:17-18, You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

Psalms 139:2-4, You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Proverbs 2:6, For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Job 37:23, The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.

2 Samuel 22:28, You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.

Psalms 18:27, You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

Isaiah 66:2, "Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

Luke 1:52, He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

1 Corinthians 4:7, For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

James 4:10, Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

SELF-ABASEMENT

2 Corinthians 10:5, We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Jeremiah 32:17, Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

Luke 18:27, Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Ephesians 1:11, In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

2 Peter 1:3, His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Ephesians 1:3-4, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

Ephesians 3:17-19, And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

1 John 3:1, How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

MISPERCEPTIONS OF GOD

Hebrews 13:8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Colossians 1:16-17, For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

1 Kings 19:11-13, Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Psalms 23:4, Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Nehemiah 9:17, But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Psalms 147:5, Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Psalms 86:15, But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Isaiah 43:13, Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?

Jeremiah 31:3, The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

Psalms 139:7-10, Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Joel 2:13, Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Zechariah 9:9, Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Romans 11:33, Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Jeremiah 10:10, But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

Psalm 89:14, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

Numbers 23:19, God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Matthew 11:29, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Ephesians 2:4-5, But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

1 John 3:1, How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2 Peter 3:9, The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Psalm 33:4, For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.

COMPLACENCY

Proverbs 13:4, The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

Proverbs 20:4, A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

Proverbs 21:25, The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work.

Proverbs 22:13, The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!" or, "I will be murdered in the streets!"

2 Thessalonians 3:13, And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

Ephesians 5:15-16, Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Colossians 4:2, Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 1:13, Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Psalm 96:9, Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Psalm 99:5, Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

Romans 2:6, God will give to each person according to what he has done.

WOUNDEDNESS

Jeremiah 31:3, I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Zephaniah 3:17, The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

Romans 8:35-39, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 4:15, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

I Peter 1:6-7, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

I Peter 4:12-13, Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

I Peter 5:10, And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

John 16:33, I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

CYNICISM

***Important Note: The passages that follow address cynicism, but they do not adequately address cynicism that results from understandable sources. As described in the Week Four Morph Me, cynicism may result from warped experiences with religion or households that use God as a club. For that form of cynicism, passages listed above under *Misperceptions about God* may be a better fit. The passages below address cynical dispositions that need to be confronted.

Joshua 1:9, Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Numbers 14:27, How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites.

Proverbs 19:3, A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

I Corinthians 10:10, And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

Philippians 2:14-15, Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Philippians 4:4, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

I Timothy 6:6, But godliness with contentment is great gain.

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

AFFIRMATIONS, PART II

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Week Five

Conversations with God

ROMANS 8

READ

We'd be hard-pressed to find a statement in Scripture more descriptive of the human struggle than where Paul left off in last week's reading of Romans.

For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (Romans 7:19, TNIV).

Paul went on from there to describe himself as a “*prisoner of the law of sin at work within me*” (Romans 7:23, TNIV). We know this prison. It is the prison of good intentions challenged by the reality of persistent struggle. We know what we want to do, but we don't do it. Instead, we do what we do not want to do, and the further down the path of life we get, the more we see the destructiveness of these decisions. We want freedom from this. We want the kind of freedom where ever-increasingly we choose what we already know is best for our lives and the lives of those we touch. Self-help plans may work temporarily, but we've tried these, and we consistently drop back to old patterns. Where is true and lasting liberation? In the final verse of last week's Romans reading, Paul points to Christ.

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:25, TNIV).

Deliverance. Liberation. Freedom.

It is this freedom Paul now expounds in Romans 8 and in so doing puts grace on display with some of the most stunning statements in all of Scripture. Consider the chapter's opening:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2, TNIV).

Did you hear it? In Christ there is “*no condemnation*” and we are “*free from the law of sin and death.*” Meditation on these two thoughts alone will change one's life.

And it will also raise important questions. Among other things, Romans 8 addresses three questions:

How do we experience this freedom?
Does this freedom mean we will not sin?
What about life's hardships?

The following brief thoughts around these questions will help make the most of your reading.

How do we experience this freedom?

As you read Romans 8, carry with you the previously mentioned distinction between simple and complex aspects of common technology today. The telephone, microwave, and radio are simultaneously simple and complex. The complexity is seen in their engineering; the simplicity is seen in their use. In Romans 8, Paul addresses the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Clarity is gained on how this all works, but full understanding may still elude us. Most important to our

ROMANS 8

experience is not full understanding of how the Spirit of God empowers us, but a reminder of how this letter began: “*The righteous will live by faith*” (Romans 1:17). How do we experience the liberating power of the Spirit of God? Through the simple mechanism of trust. We entrust ourselves to God. By Christ, then, “*there is now no condemnation*” (Romans 8:1), and by the Spirit, then, we are “*set free from the law of sin and death*” (Romans 8:2). In other words, as we entrust ourselves to God, we will experience new power and new strength to set our “*minds on what the Spirit desires*” (Romans 8:5). These thoughts lead us to our second question.

Does this mean we will not sin?

If the liberating power of the Spirit meant immediate perfection for all Christ followers, Paul would not be writing this letter or offering this teaching. It would not be necessary. He makes the purpose of his exhortations on the Spirit known when he states that it is “*by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body*” (Romans 8:13). That is to say, the very purpose of this discussion is to remind the church in Rome that the liberating power of the Spirit is available for the ongoing battle with sin because this battle still rages, and not because it’s over. Yes, the battle is over in that the decisive blow has been delivered by Christ, but the battle is not over because the implications of Christ’s decisive blow have yet to be fully applied in our lives and in this world. Which leads to the third question.

What about life’s hardships?

Life is filled with struggle. When a person commits his or her life to Christ, one might expect that struggle would cease. If “*we have peace with God*” (Romans 5:1), would God not see to it that our lives are filled with good and pleasurable experiences? Many often propose such teaching, but it is a misrepresentation of both Scripture and reality. It is in this chapter that Paul gives some of the more important thoughts to inspire perseverance in our journeys. Currently, we have “*the firstfruits of the Spirit*” (Romans 8:23). In other words, because the Spirit of God is present in our lives, we experience an initial harvest of good fruit from his presence. The harvest is not complete, though; so it is while we experience this initial harvest that we “*wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies*” (Romans 8:23, TNIV). This is our hope, and we “*wait for it patiently*” (Romans 8:25, TNIV). With that noted, then, how do we deal with life’s hardships? What do we do with the fact that challenges come our way, sometimes very substantial challenges, and at times these challenges are even a direct result of our following Christ? It is here where we hear some of the most inspiring language in all of Scripture regarding God’s loving and powerful oversight to all that happens in our lives. God is not idly sitting back waiting for the culmination of time. He is actively at work in all things, laboring “*for the good of those who love him*” (Romans 8:28, TNIV).

As you read Romans 8 this week, talk to God about your experience of freedom and your experience of hardship. How do you engage the Spirit of God? How do you process hardship and struggle? As you have this conversation with God, consider carefully his words through Romans 8 and how they might strengthen your understanding of this week’s imperative, *walk by the Spirit*. Much can be gained by meditating on these profound thoughts that have inspired followers of Christ from generation to generation for thousands of years.

MEMORIZE

This week’s memory verses:

Galatians 5:25, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

John 15:4-5, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are

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the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 8

ROMANS 8

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Week Five
Conversations with People

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE



INITIATE MEETING

- ▶ Designate someone to pray. Before praying...
 - Read the *Running Partner Values* (page 11) aloud.
 - Sit silently for thirty seconds to individually pray and to slow yourselves down.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - What insights did you gain from the reading?
 - How have you tried to live out the imperatives of “I must trust” and “I must walk by the Spirit” over the last two weeks? Where were you successful? Where were you unsuccessful?

- ▶ Morph Me
 - Take turns explaining your affirmations. Those who got stuck in the exercise, explain as much as you can, and ask the others for guidance and ideas.

- ▶ Conversations with God
 - Your Scripture reading for the week (Romans 8) described the difference between a life lived according to the Spirit versus a life lived according to the sinful nature. Which description does your life at this point most closely reflect? Why?
 - Which Scriptures did you memorize this week? What did you learn from them? How have they impacted your life? Practice reciting them to each other.

PRAYER

- ▶ Pray for each other. As you do, pray for the realities in each person’s daily life, but be certain to pray for each person in light of the conversation you just had. Thank God for his transforming work in each person’s life.

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE

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Week Six

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 167)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 9–11</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Genesis 15</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 9:1-29 Day 2: Romans 9:30–10:4 Day 3: Romans 10:5-21 Day 4: Romans 11:1-24 Day 5: Romans 11:25-36 Day 6: Genesis 15</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>1 John 3:2</u> “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But...when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”</p> <p><u>2 Corinthians 3:18</u> “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 153)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 161)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 169)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out</p> <p>RELATED RESOURCES</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community</p> <p>SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS</p> <p>(visit website)</p>

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

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Week Six
Reading

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

SHE CHANGES YOU

She changes you.

No, she doesn't.

Yes, she does.

No, she doesn't.

Yes, she does.

Better or worse?

Better.

She makes me better?

Much.

How?

You've stayed in the same job for more than six months. You take better care of your body. You're content. Best of all, you chew with your mouth closed.

I chewed with my mouth open?

Wide open. Like a cow chewing its cud.

That's gross.

Yes, she's good for you.

HE CHANGES YOU

He changes you.

I know.

He really changes you.

I know.

You're not the same person you used to be.

I know. Isn't it great?

No.

It's not great?

No. It's not great.

But you said he changes me?

He does.

Not for the better?

Not for the better.

How?

You don't laugh anymore. We used to laugh a lot. Now you're serious all the time. Actually, you're worse than serious. You're gloomy.

Gloomy?

Yes, gloomy.

That's not good.

No, it's not.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Let's be honest. We'd like to think of ourselves as immutable pillars of strength unchanged by those around us, but it's simply not true. For better and for worse, we are changed by the presence of others. At times, the change is immediate, but shallow: The teenage girls abruptly change their conversation when Dad walks into the room. At other times, the change happens over time, and it's deep: The troubled young boy grows into a confident young man through the influence of a committed mentor.

The power of presence, of course, cuts both ways. Scripture says as much...

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm (Proverbs 13:20).

We've seen this. Even more, we've experienced it. We think back to that season of life where we were in a friendship or ran with a group of friends who clearly brought out the worst in us. Maybe that season is years ago or maybe that season is the current season. Either way, we see this and know this. It's easy to see in younger years, but the influence of others is not reserved for junior high peer pressure. The influence of others is felt in the boardroom and the family room. We are changed by the presence of others.

The power of presence is more than simply our tendency to play to other people's opinions. Yes, the normal desire to be liked influences our actions, but there's more to it than that. Consider a young girl. She is not just influenced by her very normal desire to please her dad. She is also influenced by her father's character. Is he a peaceful man, or is he anxious? Does he make her feel safe, or does he frighten her? Does she sense confidence or insecurity in her dad? For better and for worse, her father's presence will influence the young girl, not just by what he does, but by who he is. The same could be said of other seasons of life.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

How about the presence of one's boss? Is he confident or arrogant? Does he bring stability or instability? Is the boss someone who offers constructive criticism, or does he belittle people to make himself feel superior? His presence, for better and for worse, influences those around him. Spend a little time with that boss and be changed a little. Spend a lot of time with him, and there's potential for much change. The insecure can grow in confidence, and the confident can grow in insecurity. Yes, we must take responsibility for ourselves, but clearly, one of those responsibilities is to consider whose presence we bring into our lives.

There are many important questions we could address when considering the power of presence. Yes, we could address questions of community, friendships, and family. These are important questions deserving of our attention. But there is a question of great significance that is consistently neglected when considering this topic. It's neglected, in large part, because the subject of this question is not commonly considered a *real* person. The question comes from one of Christ's most profound statements.

I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Christ is present. So consider this: *What influence does Christ's presence have on us?*

The question is straightforward, but it's a question ripe for simplistic answers. It's ripe for simplistic answers because, as mentioned, the ongoing presence of Christ in our lives is not commonly considered *real* or *personal*. Although we know God as a *being*, we commonly neglect God as a *person*. We think of him as *other*, as *different*. To be sure, God is both *other* and *different*, but this does not mean he is some sort of impersonal force. To the contrary, a central purpose in Christ's coming was to make God known. Scripture says as much...

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18).

So we must not miss Christ's profound statement that he is always with us, to the very end of the age. This statement was not just for his immediate audience. If it were just for his immediate audience, he would not have added the statement, "*to the very end of the age.*" He was speaking to them, but he was speaking to us, too. Christ's presence continues to this day. For what purpose? The simple answers may be good answers, but if we answer too quickly we'll miss the profound. We must think broadly. What does God's presence bring about in our lives? Hold that thought. We'll come back to it in a moment. For now, roll the clock forward.

THE END OF THE AGE

Let's be blunt: Life as we know it will one day cease. We will breathe our last breath. For some, this will be decades from now. For others, the final exhale is moments away. Scripture is clear: We need not "*grieve like the rest of humanity, who have no hope*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Yes, we will breathe our last breath, but our last breath here is not the ultimate end. In Christ, we have hope. Which leads to a question: *What will the next life be like?*

It's a grand question. What will we be like? What will we do? Scripture offers a variety of windows into eternity through which we may gaze; but like all windows, the views are simultaneously revealing and limiting. There is both mystery and revelation. One of these windows speaks to both the mystery and the revelation in a single phrase. It's a profound insight offering critical insight for our conversation today...

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

John acknowledges the mystery: *What we will be has not yet been made known.* But he then offers what we do know: *We shall be like him.* That's fascinating for our conversation. We are after transformation. This passage describes a day when our transformation will be full and complete. There will be a day, John tells us, when we will be fully Christ-like in our character.

The fruit of the Spirit will be fully present and without compromise. We will experience total and uncompromised peace and rest in our souls. We will not just have short moments of joy, but we will have fullness of joy. Love will abound. Self-control will be fortified. We will be both kind and courageous. In short, we will be whole. We will finally and fully be the people we long to be. Yes, not only will God be at peace with us, but we will be at peace with ourselves.

But we know this, right? There's more. Let's go deeper.

John's statement, that "*we shall be like him,*" has profound implications on our lives today. It's not just that John reminds us that transformation will be complete, but that he gives insight as to how this will happen. Will transformation happen by the waving of a magic wand or the snapping of God's fingers? Or more seriously, will the process of physically dying enable us to finally shed old habits entirely? What happens? How do we change? How do the fruits of the Spirit come to full maturity? Listen carefully to the statement...

...we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Transformation will be complete not by the waving of a magic wand or the snapping of God's fingers, but because we will "*see him as he is.*" If that sounds odd, consider what we just noted: There's power in another person's presence. We know this reality. We experience this daily. Presence matters. Experience the presence of good and noble friends, and it influences our character. Work under the leadership of a wise and stable leader, and we sleep better. Spend time with friends who believe the best in us, and we, too, eventually see what they see. Now do this: Take that principle, magnify it by the presence of an infinite being, and we get a glimpse of how we are changed.

What happens when battles with anxiety over personal well-being are brought into the presence of the God who loves us and is infinitely capable of caring for us? In short, anxiety evaporates and is replaced by fullness of peace, or put another way: *We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* Or what happens when sensitivities to addictive behaviors, rooted in unfounded shame, are brought into the presence of the God who fully and wholly accepts us in Christ? In short, the sensitivities evaporate and are replaced by immovable self-control, or put another way: "*We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" Or again, what happens when fear for life's challenges are brought into the presence of the God who declares all to be well. In short, fear evaporates and is replaced by great courage, or put another way: "*We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

The presence of God brings transformation. When we stand by grace in the presence of God, the ultimate authority, and hear him declare that we are "*without blemish and free from accusation*" (Colossians 1:22), we will never question this again. When we walk by grace with the one referred to as "*the Alpha and the Omega...the Almighty*" (Revelation 1:8), and when we hear him declare that, "*There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain*" (Revelation 21:4), then in that instant any residual anxiety or fear will forever be replaced with strength and peace. When we are finally with the Satisfier of our souls, the groping and griping of our previous lives will be a distant memory, and as we feast on God's presence our souls "*will be satisfied as with the richest of foods*" (Psalm 63:5). There is power in presence.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Which brings us back to Christ's statement...

I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Must we wait to experience transformation by God's presence until the beginning of the next age when we are told his presence is with us to the end of this age? Of course not. There is an essential insight in this that leads us to our next imperative.

I must recognize the real me.

I must fight for my life.

I must trust.

I must walk by God's Spirit.

And a fifth imperative:

I must worship.

WORSHIP

Pause.

When you read the word *worship* what did you feel?

What went through your mind?

What went through your heart?

Excitement or boredom?

Life or death?

Vitality? Or does the thought of worship make you feel sleepy?

No doubt, perspectives will vary, but if thoughts of worship take us to an hour on Sunday morning, then our thoughts are limited. We must break the mold. Is worship truly a transformational practice? Or is worship a long and dusty service we had to endure when visiting grandmother as a child? If worship is limited to a weekly service, a service in which we may or may not find inspiration, then one rightfully questions this imperative. Odd it would be, though, for an unlimited being to be worshipped solely through limited methods.

And Scripture says as much. Christ says as much.

AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

She was tired. She had walked this path countless times. It was essential to living, to life: She needed water. At the end of the path was the well. Friends and neighbors were always coming and going. Conversation at the well was not unusual. But she certainly did not expect what she found on this day. Not only did she converse with a man, but this was a Jewish man, and she was a Samaritan. Differences were sharp.

The conversation got sensitive. The man told her things he should not know. He knew of her multiple marriages and her current live-in companion. She certainly did not expect this from a stranger at the well. How should she respond? What should she say? Maybe it was out of insecurity, an effort to change the topic. Or maybe it was a jab back, an effort to stir controversy. Whatever the reason, we

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

do not know. We do know the conversation moved from her personal life to the topic of worship: *“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem”* (John 4:20).

And such was the controversy between the Samaritans and the Jews. Worship would be limited to a location, a spot on the map. One group located a mountain. The other group preferred a city. They had their reasons, their explanations; they could make their case. So what would this man say? What did he think of the controversy? Clearly, he had powerful insight into people’s lives. He revealed things he was not told. What side would this apparent authority take? If this man, who was no ordinary man, sided with the Jews, then that would be a significant challenge: *“A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:21, 23-24).

Neither. Not on a particular mountain. Not in a particular city. The worship of God is now greater and grander than any tradition once claimed. True worship, authentic worship, is not limited to a location, a service, or a song. Authentic worship is not simply something we do at a particular place, on a particular day, at a particular time. Authentic worship involves the ongoing orientation of one’s heart. It is both spiritual and truthful.

And get this...

It’s powerful.

TRANSFORMATION

What happens when a person cultivates ongoing awareness of the presence of God in his or her life? What about when that person meditates on the goodness, greatness, and grandness of God? Or how about when that person enjoys quiet moments, moments with the Father, when God’s strength and gentleness seem so contrary to life’s frenetic pace? God’s presence is available but so often overlooked. Consider carefully the powerful observation made by Scripture about worship:

And we, who with unveiled faces, all contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

What is being done? We contemplate God’s goodness, greatness, and grandness...his glory...and the result is transformation. We are *“transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.”* Why? For the very same reason that transformation will be complete when we one day stand in his presence: *“We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”* (1 John 3:2). There is power in another person’s presence.

Consider this: We all contemplate something. What do we contemplate while making the morning drive to work? Do we contemplate the daunting challenges of the day before us? Or do we contemplate the God who is sovereign over all such challenges? Be mesmerized by the challenges, and there will be fruit from that contemplation in our lives. Be mesmerized by the God who will help us navigate those challenges, and there will be fruit from this form of contemplation as well.

Or how about the contemplation inspired by endless hours of passive entertainment? Does this contemplation bring about peace and self-control? Or does this contemplation plague us as we attempt to drift off to sleep? What would it be like if we trained our minds to contemplate the One we are called to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? How might we rest better in the evenings if in our days we consistently brought our minds back to authentic worship? What would it be like if we allowed the wonder of the creation that surrounds us to point us to the wonder of the Creator? Might we be transformed into his likeness if we consistently and passionately contemplated his goodness?

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

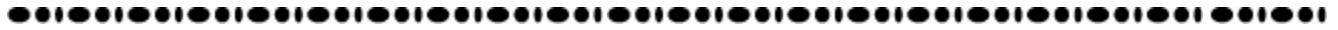
Our lives, our conversations, our interests can either blow fog over the presence of God in our lives or can blow the fog away. Scripture is clear that one day we will see him face to face. We will “*know fully, even as we are fully known*” (1 Corinthians 13:12). But today, we “*know in part*” and “*see dimly as in a mirror*” (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). By worship, by contemplation of God, we gain clarity into this mysterious God, and as we do, we are changed; we are transformed. Christ tells us that he is with us to the very end of the age. If he is here, we must realize his presence and be changed by his presence. There is power in the presence of another, and by worship, we not only recognize the presence of God, but we revel in his presence and are transformed by doing so.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

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WORSHIP



INTRODUCTION

It's one thing to talk about worship; it's another thing to do it. For some, the exercise that follows will be welcomed and natural. For others, it will be intimidating and unnatural. Wherever you are on that spectrum, you're encouraged to engage this exercise with both boldness and creativity. Engage this exercise with old ruts and routines, and it will be a waste of time. Engage this exercise with fresh thoughts and fresh methods, and this could be an important experience.

On the page that follows, you will be asked to worship. What this looks like is up to you. If in your mind, when you think of worship, you think of something that *other* people do in a manner you'd *never* do, then don't do it like them. Or, if in your mind, when you think of worship, you think of something you do all the time, then don't do it the way you always do it. Six times the Psalms exhorts or describes the singing of a "new song" to God. For you, your "new song" may not even be a song. Your worship might simply be spoken, or drawn, or it may even be a time of silence.

As a starting point, you'll be encouraged to use the affirmations you've written over the past few weeks. However you go about it, use these to inspire thoughts of God. You do not need to limit yourself to the affirmations, but by starting with these, you'll begin where you've left off, and you'll be reinforcing the work God is already doing within you.

This exercise is not complicated, but it will take time and energy. The page that follows gives guidance. In short, you'll be asked to set aside time for a more intentional time of worship. Yes, you could make light of this, but don't. Make the most of it. God may very well have a unique way he would like to commune with you.

EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE

Worship is not reserved for Sunday mornings or certain locations. Worship can be done while walking the dog, in the privacy of a closet, or under the sun in the middle of a park. With that said, some environments can be more conducive to authentic worship, and this exercise is intended to inspire a time of more focused worship inspired by the affirmations you created and practiced over the last few weeks.

STEP 1: Choose a time and place.

When and where could you honestly and openly worship God for who he is? Can you do this best on a walk? Or, for you, would it be better to be in the privacy of a quiet room or in an outdoor setting?

To get the most out of this exercise, plan a time in the next few days when you will simply worship God. The time can be as short or as extended as you'd like. If worship is part of your normal practice, then use this exercise to worship differently than you typically do. If this is new, then simply find a way that fits who you are. Most importantly, set yourself up for the greatest possibility of authentic worship.

I will complete Step 3 _____, on _____.
(location) (day and time)

STEP 2: Prepare before you go.

Bring the affirmation pages that you created in the Week Three and Week Five Morph Me exercises. If conducive to the setting and your intentions, bring a Bible or journal. (Journal pages are provided on the pages that follow if you do not currently use a journal.) If you plan a more extended time of worship, you may want to bring worship music, art, or other resources. Unless absolutely necessary, leave your cell phone, computer, or other potential distractions at home or put them away.

Remember, your method of engagement in worship is not critical, but your attitude of engagement is everything. Bring items that will foster an attitude of authentic worship; leave things that will hinder this attitude.

STEP 3: Worship God.

Thank God for meeting with you.

Thank God for his power to transform your heart.

Meditate on the Scriptures from your affirmations.

Praise God by affirming the beauty and mastery of his craftsmanship as you recognize the "real you" that he has created and crafted in you. Express your gratefulness to him for his transformative work in your heart.

Praise God by affirming to him any truths about his character that you wrote in your affirmation statements and by telling God how much you celebrate these attributes in him.

Sit and enjoy God's presence. Don't fill the air with chatter. At times, be silent. At other times, speak out. Worship God in a way that feels natural and authentic to you (sing, dance, shout, walk, run).

If helpful, write your thoughts and your worship on the journal pages that follow.

WORSHIP

WORSHIP

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Week Six

Conversations with God

ROMANS 9–11

READ

Authors often refer to the arc of their stories. Problems created in opening chapters are played out through the chapters that follow and then typically resolved in the final chapters of the book. Interestingly, Scripture has an arc. The problems created in Genesis are fully resolved in Revelation. The journey between them takes thousands of years, but is a powerful story of love and redemption.

As mentioned previously, much of Scripture's story chronicles the Jewish nation, Israel. It is in Romans, though, where we gain increased clarity that the arc of Scripture is not just about one nation but all humanity. This broader view of Scripture makes sense for many reasons, not the least of which is that the problems created in Genesis were not limited to one people group but pervasive to all people. It would be anticlimactic if the arc of Scripture offered resolution for one group rather than a pervasive solution made available to all humanity.

With that said, a question remains: What about Israel? Paul makes such a strong case that the unfolding story of Scripture reveals good news for Gentiles, that the natural question to follow is to wonder about God's unique relationship to the Jewish nation. Clearly, God had a special purpose in mind for the people of Israel. It was to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, that God said, *"I will make you into a great nation...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-3, TNIV). Has God now forgotten the Jewish nation? Was God's work with them ineffective? It is these very questions Paul now addresses in Romans 9 through 11, and in so doing, speaks powerfully to God's sovereignty and the majesty of his plan.

As you read Romans 9–11, a challenge will be given that grows through the chapters. It is a challenge against arrogance. Oddly, and we see this today, faith can become arrogant. A person decides to follow Christ and feels quite good about this decision. *"Why don't others see what I see?"* is the all-too-common perception. This perception creates an arrogance unbecoming of true faith when fully understood. Not only is the very nature of faith incompatible with arrogance, but it is in these chapters where we discover that our disposition toward faith *"does not...depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy"* (Romans 9:16, TNIV). Paul builds on this thought, and after showing that Gentiles should in no way view themselves as superior to Jews, he makes his challenge clear: *"Do not be arrogant, but tremble"* (Romans 11:20, TNIV).

This challenge against arrogance is especially interesting when one considers not only the arc of Scripture but also the arc of Romans. To this point in Paul's letter he has taken great pains to show that the Gentiles are not below the Jews in regards to their standing with God. *"All have sinned,"* we read previously, *"and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). In these chapters, though, he cautions Gentiles to not err on the other side and falsely think they are above the Jews in their standing with God. He does this by giving a glimpse of the story from God's vantage point, by putting God's active mercy on display.

ROMANS 9–11

As you read these chapters, listen for the arc of Scripture and listen for your own pockets of arrogance. Do you admire your brilliance for discerning the grace of God? Or do you bow humbly and acknowledge God’s undeserved mercy? Such questions often inspire authentic, resonant worship.

MEMORIZE

This week’s memory verses:

1 John 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But...when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don’t *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



Week Six
Conversations with People

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



OPENING QUESTION

Have each person in the group answer the following:

- ▶ Who has been the most positively influential person in your life? Who has been the most negatively influential person in your life? How did their presence impact you for better or worse?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - Prior to engaging this week's reading, what did you think it meant or looked like to worship God? Did this week's reading change or reinforce your concept of worship?
 - Why worship?
- ▶ Morph Me
 - What was your worship experience like this week? Where did you go? What did you do? Did you experience God's presence? Was the time fulfilling? Disappointing?
- ▶ Conversations with God
 - What insights did you gain from this week's Romans reading (chapters 9–11) and from other readings prior to this week?
 - What can we learn from God's dealings with the Jewish nation of Israel?
 - Have each person in the group choose their favorite Scripture memory passage from the previous six weeks and recite it to the group. Describe how it has impacted your life.

PRAYER

- ▶ As a Small Group, or in Running Partners, discuss the latest in your lives and pray for each other.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Week 6, Conversations with People, p. 170

Week Seven

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 193)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 12–14</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Ephesians 4–5</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 12:1-8 Day 2: Romans 12:9-21 Day 3: Romans 13:1-14 Day 4: Romans 14:1-12 Day 5: Romans 14:13-23 Day 6: Ephesians 4–5</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>1 Timothy 4:7-8</u> “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”</p> <p><u>Romans 12:2</u> “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 173)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 181)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 195)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out</p> <p>RELATED RESOURCES</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community</p> <p>SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS</p> <p>(visit website)</p>

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Week 7, p. 172

Week Seven
Reading

RAW GOODS

QUESTION

There's a question we must consider. Getting to the question, though, will take thoughtfulness. To just ask the question here will diminish the question. The question is too important to be diminished. We'll get to it later.

First, a bold statement from Scripture:

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

The statement contains two oddities. First, what's with the "work out your salvation" line? Salvation is apart from works; it is by grace, so why would Scripture say that? And second, what's with the "fear and trembling" line? Does God really want us to walk around scared?

Time to go deep...then we'll get to the question.

WORKING IT OUT

Consider a scenario:

The young man is given a gift. It's something he never expected. Little did he know that his late grandfather had left him a healthy inheritance to be received when he turned twenty-five. It's not a fortune, but it is helpful. He recently finished college. He has a decent job, but the student loan he's paying off is a great challenge. Also, a few years back he had made a few foolish moves on a whim with a credit card. It's not backbreaking debt, but it's debt nonetheless. On the positive side, he sees opportunity. He'd really prefer to go into business for himself, but he didn't want to do so until the debt was paid off. This unexpected gift, this gift of grace, pushes the reset button. He's free from the past and free to move forward with the future.

What does the young man do with his gift?

Very simply, he takes the gift and applies it to areas of need. First, he goes after debt. He wipes out his school loans and his missteps with a credit card. Once the debts are paid, the young man makes his second move. He uses what's left as start-up capital for his new business. These are good moves, wise moves, moves that will serve the young man for years. These actions could be described a lot of ways. One way to describe his actions, as odd as it might sound, is that he, the young man, takes the gift and *works it out*. Or maybe more clearly, he works the gift into the needed areas of his life. The gift is fully received. It's deposited into his account. He then takes the gift and applies it to his life.

But what if he didn't? What if he received the inheritance and did nothing with it? What if a check arrived in the mail, accompanied by a letter from the law firm executing his grandfather's will, and the young man does nothing with it? Let's say he leaves the check in a stack of stuff, and never does

RAW GOODS

anything with it? Never. The check, the gift, it's ready to be used, ready to be *worked out*, but it's never endorsed, never cashed, never applied to blaring needs in his finances. Odd? Very. "Give the check to me," we say. "I'll do something with that check. I'll put it to good use." But he doesn't. He neither uses it, nor gives it, but simply leaves it in the pile for a later date that never comes. One wonders if he understands its value. Did he read the attorney's letter? Did he really even look at the check?

To *work out* a gift, a gift of grace, is not in contradiction to that gift, but is an application of the gift. The working out of grace honors grace by applying it to the very needs of our lives. Why receive the gift in the first place, if the gift remains unused? *Euangelos* has been discovered; we gain depth of insight into the good news. There is forgiveness, and there is more than forgiveness. There is a new heart, a new creation, and this new person is ready to be *worked out*, or maybe more precisely, *worked into* our total selves. To leave the gift untouched wastes the gift. As with the young man, one wonders if we understand the gift's value? Have we read the "attorney's letter"? Did we really even look at the "check"?

So maybe that helps with the *work out your salvation* oddity. How about the other? What do we do with *fear and trembling*? Let's get after this, and then we'll address the question.

FEAR AND TREMBLING

Consider a question. It's admittedly odd, maybe even offensive, but consider it carefully. The question is this:

Does God fear?

Surely not; God is all-powerful. Why would God ever fear? Even more, we are called to purge fear from our lives by putting our trust in God. If God fears, then the call to rid ourselves of fear by trusting in God would be pointless. God would be fraudulent.

True.

But why then does the psalmist say that we are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:14). God is the one who did the making, so he'd be the one who "*fearfully*" made humanity. What's with that? Was God afraid when he made humanity?

Back to the young man:

The young man pays off his debt and uses the inheritance to go into business for himself. He's an engineer. He designs buildings. In time, he lands his first few clients. The clients are pleased. They note his thoughtfulness and rigor as he designs their buildings. The young man is thorough in his planning and leaves nothing to be guessed. He approaches his work with focus and intensity. When asked about this, he explains thoughtfully: "Others will walk through this building. They will spend long hours here. They are counting on me for this building to be safe. Yes, I take this very seriously."

Or one might say, the young man does his work "*fearfully*." The fear is not in the sense that he's paralyzed with obsessive fearful thoughts, but in the sense that the work is done with tremendous care. That building will support lives. Miss something, and it could all come crashing down. The engineer is intentional, focused, and thoughtful. Scripture would call this a healthy kind of fear.

Likewise, when God made humanity, Scripture tells us we were not slapped together. We were "*fearfully and wonderfully*" made. God went about his work with great care. No, he was not frightened in the human sense of being frightened. But, yes, he was thoughtful toward making something wonderful.

RAW GOODS

Which brings us back to the working out of our salvation. As God created us “*fearfully*,” we are called to mirror this focus in our re-creation. We are to work this salvation out into our lives and we are to do so “*fearfully*.” It’s not enough to check the God box and move on. To do so misses the point. Now we get to bring God’s presence into every area of our lives to see this salvation worked out and worked into our lives.

THE QUESTION

So, now the question:

Scripture tells us we were “*fearfully and wonderfully*” made. We then see God giving the same kind of intentionality and focus in our re-creation. God did not slap together a cheap and sloppy grace. He sent his Son. The Son died on the cross and rose from the dead. The Spirit did a mighty work. We were raised from the dead and given new hearts. We now have eyes that see and ears that hear. There is life, real life, pulsating through us. More, much more, could be said. This is just the beginning. There is an eternity of grace awaiting us. It’s stunning. It’s profound. And it leads to our question:

God’s taking his work very seriously; are we?

Or put another way, does *our* focus and intentionality on our re-creation reflect *God’s* focus and intentionality on our re-creation? Or put another way still, let’s say our friend’s grandfather worked the night shift for thirty-six years to earn the money our friend then inherited. Let’s say the grandfather stewarded that money wisely and thoughtfully, investing it so it would grow for future generations. Let’s say the grandfather did so in hopes that the grandson would experience a better life than he himself experienced. But then, let’s say, the grandson treats the inheritance flippantly. Let’s say he shrugs his shoulders with a “no big deal” look on his face. Let’s say he gives it little attention or maybe squanders it all in Vegas. Tragic? Something like that.

To be sure, such a question could be misunderstood, easily read as a guilt trip. Such is not the case. Rather, the actions of God, the weight he puts on our re-creation, underscores the value and the stakes. Consider our passage in greater context:

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13).

Why work out our salvation with fear and trembling? Because it is not just anyone at work in us. It is the God of the universe at work in us. If this work is weighty enough for his heightened focus and sacrifice, then the working out of his grace must be of utmost importance to us. He has modeled the seriousness of the cause.

SIXTH IMPERATIVE

Which leads to our sixth imperative...

What follows spiritual birth? Spiritual birth, in healthy situations, is followed by spiritual nutrition and spiritual activities that mature the spiritual infant to adulthood. Spiritual birth, in unhealthy situations, is followed by a lack of spiritual nutrition and spiritual activities and growth is stunted at best. The spiritual self at spiritual birth has all the components of spirituality, but they must mature. New life is truly possible. There is a new disposition, a new heart, a new creation, and we can genuinely expect to see change in our lives.

But birth is a beginning.

Spiritual birth is real and miraculous, and for the miracle to mature, it must be followed by spiritual nutrition and spiritual activity. To live in accordance with the new heart, the new creation, we must strengthen the new creation in a manner not unlike strengthening an infant toward adulthood. Put these thoughts together and we discover a new reality for our new lives. The new reality is that new life is possible and expected, albeit not instantaneous. Pillars of the faith, like Paul, were clear that they were not yet complete (Philippians 3:12), but the new birth gave them a disposition, which they fed and matured. Paul said as much when he led us to our sixth imperative for living in accordance with the new heart.

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Train.

I must recognize the real me.

I must fight for my life.

I must trust.

I must walk by God's Spirit.

I must worship.

And a sixth imperative:

I must train.

RAW GOODS

Scripture makes a stunning statement about the new creation: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).

How are we to understand a statement like that? It's a bold statement. A person born of God “will not continue to sin”? A person born of God “cannot go on sinning”? Are we to understand that the genuine Christian experience is one that is completely void of sin? If so, what would this say to pillars of the faith, like Paul, who late in life spoke of their imperfection (Philippians 3:12); and what do we make of our own experience that so often feels like a struggle? What is this bold passage really saying?

Consider the last line. The person “cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” A new birth has taken place. There's an implicit message in this played out in Scripture and in our daily lives. Birth is the beginning. Birth is not the entire experience. Birth is the starting place.

Or put another way, birth is raw goods for life.

There's a new creation, a new disposition, new longings, new desires—a new heart. Recall what we discovered early in our journey about our hearts, our desires. The heart “is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23), and “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). This statement in 1 John, that we “cannot go on sinning,” points us to a reality we already know: We live in accordance with our hearts. When a person experiences new birth, a new heart, a changed life will inevitably follow. That person cannot persevere in living against the new heart, the new creation, or the new reality. It's not that the person experiences heavenly perfection. Rather, John writes that the new creation cannot “go on sinning,” or put another way, the new disposition is one that won't allow us to persevere in the downward spiral toward attitudes and actions we know to be destructive and displeasing. There is a

RAW GOODS

new disposition and this new disposition “*has been born of God.*” The new birth gives this new disposition. There will be ups and downs, but the trajectory is one of ever-increasing passion for the greatest of things, the greatest of loves, the greatest of purposes. But we must remember, this is simply a disposition. This is a new heart from a new birth. This is raw goods. Like physical birth, we must be matured intentionally. We must work out our salvation by working the gift into our lives.

SPIRITUAL TRAINING

Spiritual training is a lot like physical training. The physical body grows in strength by training. Likewise, we must train the new creation, the new heart. The new creation must engage the practices and disciplines that give the new heart the nutrition needed to bring it to full maturity. Leave that heart immature, let the new creation go without healthy spiritual nutrition and spiritual practices, and the new creation will not be trained into maturity. Positively speaking, engage that new heart, exercise that new creation, feed it and give it the activities needed for growth, and inner transformation follows.

And therein lies a great challenge.

THE CHALLENGE

Like physical training, spiritual training sounds great in theory, but actually doing it is an altogether different thing. Most don’t neglect the gym or basic nutrition for lack of knowledge. Understanding may not be advanced, but most carry at least a basic idea of the kinds of things that help or harm our physical health. This knowledge can always be improved, but improvement in knowledge means nothing if there’s no implementation. Far more effective is good and basic insight *applied* than advanced and specialized insight left unpracticed.

Proverbial wisdom gives important insight for lasting implementation: “*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty*” (Proverbs 21:5). Translation? Planning matters. The imperative of *training* is best preceded by intentional *planning*. Planning leads to profitable living, Proverbs tells us, while hastily implemented inspiration has very little staying power.

What happens when a person gets brief inspiration for physical fitness, rushes to the local gym, hands over the credit card to cover monthly dues, and slaps together a training program? The training peters off in days; the credit card is charged for months.

This journey is nothing if not followed by meaningful implementation.

Which means we must be thoughtful; we must plan.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT INFLUENCES

Thoughtfulness for physical health begins with an honest assessment of current practices. Everyone has a nutrition plan; it just may or may not be a plan that’s helpful. It’s not that we don’t eat anything or don’t do anything with our bodies; it’s that the eating and activities may not build strength and health. They may do just the opposite. What’s true physically is, here again, true spiritually.

If we are committed to authentic transformation, if we genuinely want to live according to the new heart, the new creation, then we must take seriously Scripture’s exhortations addressing our inner person. We must “*not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will*” (Romans

RAW GOODS

12:2, TNIV). We are transformed by *the renewing of our minds*. Which leads to a critical question for honest assessment:

What currently feeds our mind, our inner person?

Something is shaping us. Something is influencing us. It's not a matter of deciding to have a nutrition plan. It's a matter of deciding to have a *good* nutrition plan. So what's currently in place? What's currently feeding our hearts, minds, and dreams? Just as great strides can be made in our physical health by identifying and eliminating unhealthy influences to our body, so can great strides be made in our spiritual health by identifying and eliminating unhealthy influences to our soul. Paul said as much when he wrote his friends in Philippi: "*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*" (Philippians 4:8). How are we to meditate on the best of things? No doubt, by first identifying the sources of garbage filling us with the worst of things.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT NEEDS

A second critical factor to lasting implementation for spiritual training is honest assessment of current needs. The needs of one person will not directly mirror the needs of another. In the world of physical training, one person's greatest need will be to lose weight while another's will be to gain muscle. These are two legitimate needs for two very different people. Their training will have plenty of similarities, but they will have distinctions as well.

In the world of spiritual training, distinctions for the individual are incredibly important. Scripture points us to a reality we all know from experience: "*There is...a season for every activity under the heavens*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, TNIV). Life has seasons. The realities and needs of one season are different from the realities and needs of another. The young and single college student with no kids has needs distinct from the realities and needs of the mother of three kids under three years old. Spiritual training will contain essential elements common to all. But to be effective, the training must match the current season of our lives.

Similar to life seasons are the seasons of spiritual maturity. This, too, is highly critical to a person's spiritual training. The person walking the first few miles of a life of faith will have different needs and realities from the high-mileage Christ-follower well into his or her journey. The new Christ-follower will likely have a greater need to develop depth of insight into prayer, Scripture, and walking with the Holy Spirit. This person may enter into a season of more rigorous study. They may have a more aggressive reading plan, maybe they take a few classes, or maybe they meet regularly with a mentor. These needs are not entirely unique to new followers of Christ, but there are certainly distinctions of emphasis for those young in their faith.

The high-mileage Christ-follower will likely be in a season where their spiritual training will have similarities but likely different emphases. They also will spend important time in Scripture, but the nature of their time may or may not be around rigorous study. Their emphasis may be spiritual replenishment or training for a specialized area of service. Maybe they're gearing up for a new season of service, or maybe they are in a season of rest. It's not that their spiritual training is entirely different than the person new to the faith—there are common practices that last a lifetime, but the nature of the training must be tailored to the need of the person's season of spiritual growth.

DOING IT

If we are to morph, if we are to build character, we must “*work out our salvation with fear and trembling.*” Or put another way, we must train. We must assess our influences and needs. We must consider what shapes us and make, at times, the tough calls toward training for godliness. We have a new heart, a new creation, and this heart beats for God. The new heart yearns for God and rejects the temptation to turn life’s gifts into gods. To truly do this, we must embrace this imperative for true living. We must *train to be godly*. Talk of training is good. Talk of training is important. Talk of training must happen. But talk of training is cheap if it is just that—talk. Implementation is where we discover the true difference.

What influences you? What shapes you? What trains your thoughts and actions? The exercise that follows takes courage, boldness, and humility. Engage it fully and authentically, and you may very well discover critical insights that will influence the days and years to come.

RAW GOODS

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Week Seven
Morph Me

DECLARATIONS



OLD ME / NEW ME

Life is filled with choices. Here's one:

Will I live according to the *old me* or according to the *new me*?

By now, this question carries weight. Early on we discovered that central to the gospel, the *euangelos*, is the giving of a new heart. By grace, we become new people. The purpose of this *Morph* experience is to inspire and strengthen *new me* living. If living from the *new me* was entirely inevitable, this *Morph* experience would not be necessary. But it's not inevitable. We make choices every day.

Interestingly, not only do we choose to live from the *old me* or to live from the *new me*, but we also make choices of whether we will train the *old me* or train the *new me*. These decisions may or may not be a factor of right versus wrong. The decisions may be acceptable but unhelpful. Four hours of television, for example, may or may not involve sin, but either way, it may not be helpful. What follows is an exercise that will feel risky. It will feel risky because you will be asked to be honest with *old me* patterns in your life. Yes, this means sin. And yes, this means more than sin. It will be tempting to give partial answers to the questions. You may find yourself willing to write some *old me* patterns but hesitant to write others. As you go through the questions, consider the current opportunity. *Old me* patterns are destructive. *New me* patterns keep step with the Spirit and produce fruit of the Spirit in your life. We want peace, joy, and self-control, but often, we engage life in a way that decreases rather than increases fruit of the Spirit. By engaging this exercise honestly, you may very well establish *new me* patterns that will strengthen real living rather than erode it.

After identifying both *old me* and *new me* patterns and influences, you will be asked to create brief *Declarations*. These *Declarations* will feel a bit like *Affirmations* but not exactly. Essentially, they are decisions you will make about the way you genuinely want to live. So as you go through this exercise, listen for the voice of God. How is he speaking to you? What convictions are gaining strength? How might you live differently after this exercise from the way you were living before?

Be bold.

Be thoughtful

Be prayerful.

And as always, feel free to color outside the lines, but if you do, may it be to track down *old me* patterns rather than to avoid them.

DECLARATIONS

**FIRST STAGE
ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ACTIONS
OLD ME**

In the past ninety days, what *old me* actions have you taken? Or put another way, what incidents of sin or patterns of sin have you engaged that are unreflective of the new you? Consider also thoughts, desires, and dispositions. Be thorough.

DECLARATIONS

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ACTIONS NEW ME

In the past ninety days, what *new me* actions have you taken? Or put another way, how do you see the new you emerging in your life? As with the *old me* assessment, consider also thoughts, desires, and dispositions. And again, be thorough.

DECLARATIONS

SECOND STAGE ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT INFLUENCES

Now we look at influences. What are you doing that strengthens the old you? What are you doing to train the new you? The questions come in pairs. First, you'll specify influences. Second, you'll reflect on those influences to consider if they strengthen or weaken the new you.

YOUR DAY

How do you spend the greatest part of your day (work, family, friends, etc.)?

Does this typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

ENTERTAINMENT

What forms of entertainment do you regularly engage in?

Does this entertainment typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

STRESS

What do you do for stress relief?

Does this typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

DECLARATIONS

PLEASURE

What do you do for fun? What hobbies do you have? What do you enjoy? How often do you do these things?

Do these activities typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

PEOPLE

Which individuals or groups most influence you? Consider both people you personally interact with and people who may influence you from a distance.

Do these individuals or groups typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

IDLE TIME

When your mind goes on autopilot, what do you typically think about? When you're in a more reflective mood, what do you dream about?

Do these idle moments or thoughts of the future typically strengthen the old you or the new you? How and why?

OTHER

What else do you do with your life, not covered in the above categories, that strengthens the old you? What else strengthens the new you? How and why?

DECLARATIONS

THIRD STAGE ANALYSIS

Having looked at outward actions reflective of the *old me* and the *new me*, and having now considered influences that either strengthen or weaken the new me, in this third stage we pull it all together.

ANALYSIS

What *old me* outward actions listed on page 182 can be tied to influences you identified on pages 184-185?

Are these influences that need to change entirely, or are they influences that need to be done differently? (For example: a job might be kept but done differently, or escapist behaviors for stress relief might need to change entirely.)

What *new me* outward actions listed on page 183 can be tied to influences you identified on pages 184-185?

On the page that follows, summarize influences you could change in your life that would disengage the *old you* and strengthen the *new you*. Consider what you've uncovered in this exercise, imperatives from this *Morph* experience, and other influences you know from life experiences.

DECLARATIONS



DECLARATIONS

FOURTH STAGE DECLARATIONS

Now it's time to commit. It's time to move from acknowledging what *needs* to change to declaring what *will* change. It's one thing to uncover the problems; it's quite another to *implement* a new training plan.

In this final stage, write a list of declarations in which you express what you will do differently from this point forward. Be both thoughtful and prayerful. How is God speaking to you? What convictions is he developing in you and asking you to live by? Resist the temptation to fill this page with a hollow list of "shoulds." Rather, be bold in areas you truly sense God's voice. If there are ten changes, then write ten. If there is one, write one.

After writing the declarations here, write an abbreviated version (without the "why?") on the cards provided within the Scripture cards notebook.

Sample declarations are given on the following page.

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

DECLARATIONS

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

I declare that _____.

Why?

DECLARATIONS

SAMPLE DECLARATIONS

I declare that I will no longer watch television with provocative content. Instead, I will read books, talk with God, or create intentional family time where we have fun together.

Why? I recognize that the type of shows I watch and the excessiveness of my TV-watching are feeding the old me. I see this as one major cause for lack of peace, self-control, and rest in my life. I also recognize that by replacing TV watching with both God-time and family-time, I will start to feed the new me, and in the long-run will feel more rested, and thus more peaceful. I can also see that this will help the fruit of self-control to grow in my life since I will be filling my mind with soul-enriching thoughts and memories instead of fueling my temptations.

I declare that I will no longer overeat to pacify stress but bring my stress to God.

Why? I see that the way that I use food to relieve stress is becoming a problem in my life. I no longer eat in moderation, and I recognize the unhealthy, addictive pattern that it has in my life. I justify it because it's just food, but it's robbing me of true peace, not to mention causing problems for my health. I know that this declaration will be hard to carry out, but on this day, I am committing to trust God and lean into his power to exercise self-control, and I'm asking my friends to pray for me toward this end.

I declare that I will be more intentional about friendships in my small group by attending group regularly and initiating lunch or coffee with other participants at least one time each week.

Why? I really need good spiritual influences in my life. Most of my close friends and co-workers are not following God, and it's hard to grow spiritually when no one around me really gets it. It's hard to fight sexual temptation, for example, when everyone around me thinks indulging in pornography and sex outside of marriage is the normal, healthy way to live.

I declare that I will memorize Philippians 4:8 and remind myself of this verse when my mind wanders to thoughts of discontentment with my material possessions and current financial status.

Why? I'm starting to recognize that my constant hunger for a bigger paycheck, bigger house, and more, more, more only leads to less satisfaction in my life and not more. The problem is not my paycheck or my possessions, but my HUNGER for these things. In my idle time when my mind starts to wander to this place, I will bring to mind Philippians 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." I will also thank God for the things that I DO have and pray (instead of complain) about any areas of true need.

DECLARATIONS

I declare that I will write a brief one-page prayer to God each morning.

Why? My prayers have been lifeless, and consequently, I've been carrying my stress rather than entrusting it to God. I've tried to pray in the car, but something always distracts me or my mind wanders to other things. By writing a brief prayer, at least one page in a journal, I will unload my concerns for the day as best as I can, and then seek to be fully present in my other commitments. These prayers will be from the heart and not a checklist of obligatory prayers.

I declare that I will read through the New Testament by my next birthday.

Why? I read Scripture but have done so haphazardly. By setting this goal, I will have to make better daily choices with my time. On most days, I will read in the evenings before going to bed. To do this, I will have to spend less time on the Internet, but I'm convinced it will be well worth the effort.

I declare that I will reinvigorate my musical passions by writing songs about my journey with God.

Why? My passion for God has grown flat, and I see a connection to how I've let the musical gifts he gave me go unused. I've meant well in that time has been taken by serving my kids and family, but I'm no good for anyone if my love for God grows cold. My journey with God has had many ups, downs, twists, and turns, and I look forward to working this out through song. Doing this will not be easy. I will need to remind myself that it really is best for everyone if I pull back from time to time and not allow myself to get swept away by the busy pace of this season of life.

I declare that I will limit my obsession with watching sports to one game per week and spend the time gained by getting in shape spiritually, physically, and relationally.

Why? I've become a sports junkie, and as fun as this can be, it's taking its toll on areas of life that are truly important. I'm not growing spiritually as I could, physically I'm out of shape, and my relationships with people I care about are weakening. I can still enjoy sports while not watching every moment of every game. I'll catch the scores and watch one game a week.

I declare that I'm done with pornography.

Why? I've said this before, but I've not had the support system I have in place today. I will address the issue with my running partners and small group. I will read the affirmations that address the anxieties that drive my desires to escape. I will memorize Scripture to fill my mind with good thoughts. I will push through the "detox" that will be a reality for the next few months as I develop new patterns. This will be a challenge, but I'm doing this in God's power, not my own, and it's time I live as the "new me."

DECLARATIONS

DECLARATIONS

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Week Seven

Conversations with God

ROMANS 12–14

READ

Key to understanding this next section of Romans is the very first word.

Therefore... (Romans 12:1).

Change happens from the inside out. We know this. Inside-out change is the heartbeat of the *Morph* experience, and it's central to Romans. The emphasis on the internal could be easily misapplied, though, by leading one to believe that the external is unimportant. Such is not the case. The opening of Romans 12 marks a transition. After sounding the depths of God's internal work, Paul now puts the external results on display. By embracing the astounding work of Christ and God's Spirit, change will be seen in a person's life.

Paul addresses numerous ways this change is seen in a person's life. Spiritual change is seen in the way a person stewards gifts and talents (Romans 12:3-8), it is seen in the way we interact with others (Romans 12:9-21), it is seen in our respect and obedience to government (Romans 13:1-7), and it is seen in how we are patient with the weak and respectful of those with differing views (Romans 14). Most significant to all of this change, though, is Paul's emphasis on love. Woven through each of the areas he addresses is his conviction that the commandments are "*summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'*" (Romans 13:9).

Deep thinkers are often criticized for their lack of practical application. It is thought that they crawl to the top of their ivory towers and philosophize about issues irrelevant to daily life. Paul's letter to the church in Rome is unquestionably deep. It is in these chapters, though, that we discover the profound implications on our daily lives. As you read through these chapters, talk with God about your own life and how spiritual training could bring about an internal change that is deep and profound, that will increasingly be put on display by outward acts of love toward others.

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

1 Timothy 4:7-8, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

ROMANS 12–14

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



Week Seven
Conversations with People

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE



INITIATE MEETING

- ▶ Designate someone to pray. Before praying...
 - Read the *Running Partner Values* (page 11) aloud.
 - Sit silently for thirty seconds to individually pray and to slow yourselves down.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ Reading
 - What is spiritual training and why is it important?
 - How have you tried to live out the imperatives of “I must worship” and “I must train” over the last two weeks? Where were you successful? Where were you unsuccessful?
- ▶ Morph Me
 - What influences, healthy or unhealthy, did you identify that feed and shape your inner person?
 - What declarations did you make this week? How will you implement these in your life?
- ▶ Conversations with God
 - What insights did you gain from this week’s Romans reading (chapters 12–14)?
 - According to these chapters, what is the result of a transformed life? How can you apply this to your own life?
 - Which Scriptures did you memorize this week? What did you learn from them? How have they impacted your life? Practice reciting them to each other.

PRAYER

- ▶ Pray for each other. As you do, pray for the realities in each person’s daily life, but be certain to pray for each person in light of the conversation you just had. Pray for God’s wisdom, guidance, and strength for each person as they face anticipated future challenges. Pray for the fruit of the Spirit to be evident in each person’s life.

RUNNING PARTNER GUIDE

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Week Eight

OVERVIEW



DAILY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD	
INTRODUCTION (page 219)	
<p>READ</p> <p><u>Scripture Reading</u> Romans 15–16</p> <p><u>Related Passage</u> Acts 27–28</p> <p><u>Suggested Daily Reading Plan</u> Day 1: Romans 15:1-13 Day 2: Romans 15:14-22 Day 3: Romans 15:23-33 Day 4: Romans 16:1-16 Day 5: Romans 16:17-27 Day 6: Acts 27–28</p>	<p>MEMORIZE</p> <p><u>2 Corinthians 4:17-18</u> “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”</p> <p><u>Hebrews 12:1</u> “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”</p>
	<p>MEDITATE</p>

WEEKLY EXERCISES			
<p>VIDEO ●</p> <p>(visit website)</p>	<p>READING ●</p> <p>(page 199)</p>	<p>MORPH ME ●</p> <p>(page 207)</p>	<p>CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE ●</p> <p>(page 221)</p>

WEB EXTRAS	
<p>Check out RELATED RESOURCES (visit website)</p>	<p>Online Morph community SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS (visit website)</p>

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

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Week Eight
Reading

A NEW KIND OF GROAN

THE GROAN

Let's come full circle. Where did we begin?

We began with the groan.

We began with the groan that we hear but do not hear. We listened not to the noise but through the noise. We listened for the groan that we hear every day and yet may never have heard at all. It's the constant behind the noise. We listened closely to the world around us, to the clashing and clanging of our days. We noted the groan's pervasiveness. We noted our expectation of the groan in back alleys and war-torn countries, and yet the groan is not limited to these places of physical strife. The groan reverberates from both Main Street and Wall Street. It is heard in the halls of academia and on the athletic field. The groan comes from the young and the old. It's everywhere. It's the constant hum behind the clatter and clanging of the day.

In that, we noted life's frenetic pace.

Mail stacks on top of mail.

E-mail stacks on top of e-mail.

Voice mail stacks on top of voice mail.

The telephone rings. The doorbell rings. The alarm clock rings.

The co-worker has a question. The child has a question. The boss has a question.

The friend needs help. The family needs help. The neighbor needs help.

The baby cries for food. The child cries for comfort. The adult cries for direction. The aged cry from loneliness.

Get in the car.

Get on the plane.

Get the deal.

Get back in the car.

Get back on the plane.

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Get back home and do it again the next day.

Don't rest.

Don't evaluate.

Don't think.

Just keep going.

Just don't quit.

Just go.

It's the waiting, the worrying, the wishing, the wanting.

It's the groping, the griping, the grating, the grappling.

It's the groaning.

We groan.

And then we asked a question.

A dangerous but profound little question.

Why?

Why do we groan?

THE PERFECT HOUSE

Remember the house?

We took a tour of a beautiful, but dangerously flawed house.

There was the appearance of character but lack of true character. The house had all the trappings: the brick, the wood, and the stone. And yet, the dramatic appearance was dangerously misleading. The house groaned. It was flawed. All indicators pointed to expansive soil, shifting sands, a foundation not worthy of being a foundation.

Such observations led us to the teachings of Christ:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matthew 7:24-27, TNIV).

What if we were different, we asked? What if we were wise? What if we were a people willing to unearth faulty foundations, soft spots, expansive soil, and shifting sand? What if we did this and built our lives on top of a foundation worthy of being a foundation? What would life be like? What would life feel like? What kind of a life might we build? What if our efforts were not put so much toward external displays of character but internal depth of character? What would come out of our lives? Who would benefit from the security of our "homes"?

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Which launched us on this multiweek experience unearthing soft spots, establishing new patterns, taking thoughts captive, embracing Christ's truth, trusting Christ's power, listening to Christ's Spirit, and more, much more.

And so now the groan is silenced.

Gone.

Finished.

Never to be heard from again.

We silenced that groan.

Right?

Not exactly.

TWO ERRORS

So what's the deal? Is this where we pour cold water on all we've discovered? Is this where we modify our expectations for genuine change, genuine character, and genuine transformation? A little change is possible, we'll say, but we are human after all. Let's not get carried away. Let's not set expectations too high. High expectations only lead to disappointment. Let's dumb this down a bit and get on with our lives.

Is that what we do now?

Again, not exactly.

Let's acknowledge potential errors.

First, there's the error of confusing the battle with the war. This is the declaration of *Mission Accomplished* when the mission is yet to be fully accomplished. A battle has been won. Maybe the battle was a significant battle. Maybe life feels very different. Maybe tremendous ground has been gained. Transformation happens. Character emerges. Anxiety turns to peace. Addiction is replaced by self-control. We celebrate. We worship. We tell our friends, our family, and anyone who will listen. This is good, all good, right up to the point where we do the unthinkable. We thought we were done. We thought it was over. We had gained such tremendous ground, and then we do it. We let our guard down. No, it's not yet a blatant pursuit of old habits and old patterns. It begins with innocence. We simply set down our shields and sheath our swords. Maybe we're tired. Maybe we crave a little passivity. Maybe, if we're honest, we crave old times and old patterns. We know the war hasn't really been won; we know that, but we act as if it has. We confuse the battle we have won with the war we still wage. Such actions, or more precisely inactions, inevitably lead to setbacks, frustrations and, dare we say, failures.

That's one potential error. There's another.

A second is the error of virtual surrender. It's not that we think progress isn't possible. Sure, progress is possible, but this is not our default expectation. The default expectation is struggle. Even more, those who don't struggle are labeled inauthentic. To struggle is to be real. We loathe plastic religiosity pretending to be perfect. Far more attractive is the person wrestling with sin. Such perspective, genuine as it is, is truth ripe for misapplication. Yes, plastic perfectionism is heinous, but if this disdain leads to the wearing of sin as a badge of honor, then something has gone dreadfully wrong. There's nothing honorable about sin. It's destructive. It robs us of life. It takes down both individuals and

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families and leaves people separated from their Creator. Plastic perfectionism is sin as well. It, too, is deeply destructive. But if our response to religiosity is a reveling in sin rather than a reviling of sin, then we've missed something terribly important. Our junk must go. Nothing is gained by a virtual surrender.

So what is our perspective? How do we engage real struggle where real victory is normal?

Let's consider a new kind of groan.

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Consider the following passage thoughtfully. Maybe read it twice.

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

There is a groan that must diminish. It's the groan emanating from a faulty foundation. In this, we do not relent. We dig for soft spots, unearth the sand, and build our lives upon a rock-solid foundation. In so doing, though, we come into a reality. It's a reality that, if unexpected, can leave us disillusioned. It's not that we thought this life would last forever, but we hoped we wouldn't still feel vulnerable. In truth, though, we do. We discover new life, new joy, new peace, new patterns, but we do not shed life's frailty. The passage just read likens our current reality to a tent. We, of course, run a risk by putting this tent metaphor in the same context as Christ's metaphor of a house, but the risk is worth it. It's worth it because even the grandest "house," the life resting fully in God's strength, when compared to the "house" it will one day be, makes this current grand house look like a tent.

And so a new kind of groan emerges.

It is a healthy groan.

It is the groaning for that which we were created.

What was just read? Hear it again in part, taking note of the added emphasis.

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Did you catch that?

God made us for a purpose.

This purpose is fulfilled not in this tent but in our heavenly dwelling for which we groan.

There is a new kind of groaning. The groan we silence is the groan of destructive living. The groan that emerges is the healthy longing for that which we were created. It is the longing for our very purpose. Scripture tells us that our "momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). In another place we read that "our present sufferings are not

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worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). We were not created for this earthly tent. We were created for our heavenly dwelling. We must not miss this. The here and now serves a purpose. It prepares us for our ultimate purpose.

We were not created for *this*.

We were created for *that*.

But *this* prepares us for *that*.

Existing for this life is no more our purpose than existing in the womb is the purpose of an embryo. In time, the embryo develops, matures, and ultimately leaves the womb in a different form. We, too, develop, mature, and ultimately leave this womb, this life, in a different form. We were not created and placed here as an end. We were created and placed here to prepare us for that which we are ultimately created.

This is preface.

This is preview.

This is pregame.

Which leads us to our seventh imperative.

I must recognize the real me.

I must fight for my life.

I must trust.

I must walk by God’s Spirit.

I must worship.

I must train.

And our seventh:

I must persevere.

Much could be said of perseverance. Let’s make three observations here.

CONTENTED DISCONTENTMENT

We long to *arrive*. We long to be at that place where all battles have been fought and won, all confusion has been cleared and resolved, and all wounds have been helped and healed. Scripture does not push against this longing. Rather, vision is cast for a future day when the longing will be fulfilled by describing a day when there will be “*no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*” (Revelation 21:4). Yes, this old order will pass away, and the grand adventure of the new order will be ushered in. This new order will bring fulfillment to the unfulfilled longings we live with today. We were created with eternity in our hearts, and this longing for the eternal will finally find its home.

Assistance for the present is found in a distinction. Yes, to follow Christ is to live with a degree of discontentment, but it is a *contented discontentment*. Odd, you say? Not really. The lovers experience contented discontentment when they are engaged but not married. They have found true love, but they are not yet fully together. Homebuyers experience contented discontentment when they have contracted to purchase a house but have not yet closed. They have found a place to call home, but

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they are not yet in the house. Travelers experience contented discontentment when they have left their place of origin and are *en route* to their destination. They are relieved to be off and going, but they are not yet there, and contented discontentment propels them forward.

Identifying contented discontentment strengthens our resolve to persevere. Without this clarity, we're easily distracted by false promises of immediate fulfillment in other things. "I'm following Christ," we say. "It should be better than this." Maybe yes, but maybe no. Maybe the struggle of the moment is accomplishing one of the very things struggle is intended to accomplish. Describing a time of intense struggle, Paul writes that this hardship "*happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead*" (2 Corinthians 1:9). Hardship can send our hearts wandering, or it can focus our resolve upon that which we know will ultimately bring our hearts true rest. As followers of Christ we are not yet in a place of ultimate contentment, but we are unique in that by grace we have discovered where ultimate contentment will be fully realized. We need not keep searching. We are content in our discontentment.

Which leads to a second observation about perseverance.

ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

It would be easy to argue that following Christ does not work. This may sound like a denial of everything we've discovered so far. Such is not the case. Rather, it's a reinforcement of everything we've discovered so far. Following Christ does not "work" if we maintain a limited, cradle to grave, perspective. Scripture states this bluntly: "*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men*" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Why would Paul say such? Consider how he describes his life...

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:25-28).

If following Christ is meant to generate the good life, then it failed Paul. Even more, Paul himself advocated a very different philosophy of living if the limited perspective is true. Consider this thought-provoking statement:

If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Yes, if the limited perspective is true, if there is no eternity, then Scripture exhorts us to party like there is no tomorrow. But Scripture does not give us a limited perspective. We are given an eternal perspective, and with this eternal perspective, living for the moment looks foolish. Why live for immediate gratification when there is a grand view going far beyond the most distant horizon? Christ himself exhorts us to "*not store up earthly treasures where moth and rust destroy, but to store up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy*" (Matthew 6:19-20). Yes, there is a frailty to this life that continues even for those who follow Christ, but we were never intended to live for this frail life. We were created for an eternal perspective. This eternal perspective empowers perseverance for the inevitable ups and downs of following Christ in a world often hostile to our faith. We cannot and must not be a people engrossed with the here and now. Thoughts of eternity must not be limited to quiet comforts when a grandparent passes away, as real and important as that may be. Rather, an eternal

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perspective must inspire our daily living. We are told to follow Christ, “*who for the joy set before him endured the cross*” (Hebrews 12:2). If we are to endure the crosses of our daily lives, we too must live for the joy set before us, for the grand view of God’s grand plan.

Which leads to a question and a third observation.

PERPLEXED

The question is this...

What is God’s grand plan?

It’s not only a fair question; it’s an essential question. If an eternal perspective is intended to inspire perseverance in the moment, then what do we know about this eternal perspective? What is the hope that stands before us? Will we like what comes next? This, of course, is a very significant question we will not fully exhaust here, but we will make an essential observation.

Scripture states, “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*” (1 Corinthians 13:12). This passage, and others like it, simultaneously speaks to both mystery and revelation. Yes, much has been revealed. We know that we shall see face to face. We know that we shall know fully, even as we are fully known. We know of a new earth where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). We know of the great multitude, standing before God, so numerous that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9). We know these things and more. Much has been revealed, and this inspires perseverance.

And yet, there is mystery.

Knowing what we know about eternity will not answer our every question. Difficulties will enter our lives, and although an eternal perspective will bring comfort, it will not answer everything. Hardship and tragedy, especially when it is severe, will be soothed but not fully resolved by our hope of eternity. We will still ask, “Why?” and at times be met with silence. This will test our faith like nothing else will test our faith. There will be intense seasons where we wonder why this event, this tragedy, this hardship has come upon us. Nothing here is meant to minimize these seasons. Flippant comments of eternity are not just unhelpful but are often destructive.

Those attempting to resolve all mystery in hardship miss an essential observation of Scripture. This observation is felt throughout but is described with wisdom by Paul. When writing of a time where “*We were hard pressed on every side*” (2 Corinthians 4:8), Paul describes their perspective. They were...

... *perplexed, but not in despair* (2 Corinthians 4:9).

A daring faith, a rich faith, a tried-but-true faith allows itself to be perplexed, sometimes deeply so. Quick answers do nothing when we are hard pressed on every side. In such seasons, far wiser is the faith that simultaneously takes comfort from that which is revealed, while allowing perplexity in the midst of mystery. This perplexity, when embraced, brings a comfort of its own and protects us from despair. Yes, there may be despairing times, but pulling out of these times will not be done with simple answers, but more commonly by allowing the perplexities to stand. To truly persevere, we must be a people who take comfort from what we know of the grand and eternal perspective, while allowing perplexities from the mystery to remain unresolved.

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PRESS ON

Much has been learned.

Much has been gained.

Much more will be experienced as we put it all into practice.

The unhealthy groan will diminish.

The new longing, the groaning for our eternal dwelling, will increase.

With the multitudes of travelers on the way of Christ, we too must “*press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us*” (Philippians 3:12). As we persevere, we will ever-increasingly resemble and reflect the goodness of our God. We will build a lasting character that outlives this temporal tent and ushers us into our eternal dwellings.

Week Eight
Morph Me

CASE STUDIES



OUTSIDER VIEW

Consider for a moment the perspective of an outsider. This is the counselor or consultant whose vantage point is different because he or she is not in the middle of things. When done well, this outsider brings a degree of objectivity not available to the insider. The perspective is not perfect, of course, but it is both unique and important. Wise is the person who seeks objective counsel.

Throughout this *Morph* module you have engaged a variety of thoughts. Much more could be said, but at this point, greater gain is experienced by taking what you've learned and applying it to life. In hopes of catalyzing application, the exercise that follows is unique. In previous *Morph Me* exercises, you've taken the perspective of an insider. You've looked at your own life and considered how best to grow. In this next exercise, you'll consider three brief case studies. In so doing, you will take the perspective of an outsider. You will lean into lessons from this module (and beyond) to "counsel" the subjects in the studies.

Then there's the fourth case study.

The fourth case study comes back to you. In a format reflective of the case studies you will have just completed, you will be asked to briefly write a case study on yourself. You'll then be asked to do what may feel unnatural but offers much wisdom. You'll be asked to view your own case study as if you are the outsider. What counsel would you give yourself?

The purpose of this exercise is twofold. First, to offer objective counsel, you'll need to pull together insights from throughout this *Morph* module. Because the imperatives work together, considering how you'd pull them together is an important exercise. And second, as you consider your own case study and how the collective imperatives apply to you, a natural outcome will be the identification of next steps to apply to your life moving forward. These next steps are essential for this module to have lasting value in your life. If, after turning the final page of this notebook, you are unclear of how life will be different from when you opened the first page of this notebook, then much time has been wasted. But if you leave this notebook with increased clarity on how you can become more of who God created you to be, then this experience will have been well worth the effort.

THE IMPERATIVES

Throughout this *Morph* experience, seven imperatives for transformation have been identified. The following is a list of the imperatives with a brief definition. These seven imperatives are not attempting to be comprehensive. For that reason, an eighth “other” has been listed to encourage thinking beyond the list for other ways God will inspire and equip the building of character.

I must recognize the real me.

God does not ask us to change our old selves because our old selves won't change. Rather, God asks that we recognize our new selves. The old self dies with Christ on the cross. The new self is raised to life and beats with a new heart so that “*we too may live a new life*” (Romans 6:4).

I must fight for my life.

The enemy is displeased with the new creation and works tirelessly to keep us in our old frame of mind rather than our new frame of mind. The enemy's primary weapon of choice is the lie. To confront these lies, we must “*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

I must trust.

To follow Christ is not complex but simple: “*The work of God is this: to trust in the one he has sent*” (John 6:29). This simple trust mobilizes a complexity of things we know and don't know. We understand some of the complexities, but our job is not to get to the complexities but to engage the power of God, and all that he does, by entrusting our lives to him.

I must walk by God's Spirit.

God is not distant but with us and in us. As we experience the carnival of life, we train our ears to listen through the noise for the increasingly familiar presence of God's Spirit. This Spirit both guides and empowers our lives. Our job is not to be god of this life, but to “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:25) and follow his ways.

I must worship.

Transformation happens not by being mesmerized with life's struggles and problems but as we “*see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2). Worship is not just the weekly singing of songs (which may or may not be worship) but a heart and mind that celebrates God in all that we do.

I must train.

The *new me* must have spiritual nutrition and spiritual training to grow from infancy to maturity. Yes, this includes engaging God through Scripture and prayer, but it also includes giving careful consideration to the “*food*” that feeds our lives. Every day we are feeding the *new me* or feeding the *old me*. Those who “*train to be godly*” (1 Timothy 4:7) will carefully consider the influences on their lives.

I must persevere.

God made us for a purpose. Our purpose is not fulfilled in this earthly tent but in the heavenly tent for which we were created. In this life, we may be “*perplexed*” but we need not “*despair*” (2 Corinthians 4:8). These perplexities and challenges call for perseverance. As we persevere, we are ever-increasingly transformed into the people God calls us to be.

Other

This list of imperatives is intentionally incomplete. Community, for example, is not listed because it is so implicit in this *Morph* experience. Confession, as well, could be a category of its own and is woven through many of the exercises we've done. Consider Scripture and consider your own experience for other ways God builds character in your life.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study #1

Tyler

Tyler works hard and he plays hard. He's single, in his late twenties, plays on a coed softball team, and is in the midst of starting a company with two friends from college. Three years ago, one of the women on his softball team invited him to church. He didn't want to go, but he was intrigued by her, so he went along and pretended to be interested. The relationship didn't work out, but nobody was more surprised than he was when he found himself returning to church without her. Something about it compelled him. In time, to his friends' great amusement, he committed his life to Christ. He didn't mind the mocking of his friends. He could take that and took it well. What he did find extraordinarily difficult was abstaining from sex. At first the idea was ridiculous to him, and it was a major inhibitor to giving his life to Christ. In time, though, he saw things differently. Cheap sex lost its appeal. A friend from church told him that sex was a lot like fire. "When fire is in the fireplace," the friend told him, "it brings warmth to the home. But when fire burns outside the fireplace, it can burn the house down." This made sense to Tyler, and he hoped one day to experience the real thing. In the meantime, though, his genuine desire to follow God didn't do much to quench his seemingly ever-present sex drive. At first, he'd simply give in. He'd call old flings and one thing would lead to another. This left him feeling not only dirty from the sex, but hypocritical as well. In time, he no longer made those calls, but he consistently found himself on explicit websites. It wasn't daily, and there were seasons where he'd not give in for many weeks and sometimes even months. But then he'd have a stressful day, or a stressful week, and although he knew better, it felt a little justified. Once he had stumbled, he seemed to stay there for a few days or a few weeks, and then he'd finally turn it all off and hope for the best again. Through it all, he felt frustrated and stuck, and he didn't know what to do.

Counsel

Put yourself across the table from Tyler. He has come to you for counsel. You may view yourself as an odd choice for counsel, but ignore this. You've been listening to him tell his story for a good thirty minutes, and he is now at a place where he really wants to know your thoughts. "I welcome encouragement," he tells you, "but I really want solid advice. What should I do? How can I break these old patterns and live differently?"

On the page that follows, with the imperatives in mind, offer your counsel.

CASE STUDIES



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Case Study #2

Anna

Anna committed her life to Christ as a teenager. She's now in her mid-thirties and has had enough ups and downs in life that she considers her faith weathered. With that said, she goes through periodic seasons of wandering from God. It's not that she goes wild, but she loses connection and distances herself from God and other important relationships in her life. In a recent conversation with a friend she poured out her woes, and through conversation made a significant discovery. She didn't like to admit something that sounded so petty, but much of her current stress revolved around one thing: her boss. This would be easy enough to fix had her friend not asked a piercing question. He asked about her previous boss and the boss before that. In fairly short order, she realized that of the five jobs she'd had since college, she left three of them due to her boss. Only one job transition was due to a better opportunity, but even in that one she didn't like her boss. Now in her fifth job, she was contemplating a change, and it was all about her boss. The pattern was consistent. Initially, she'd take a job, see great promise in the job, and for the first few months rave about her new boss. In time, though, she'd develop intense anxiety over the relationship. Typically, the anxiety wasn't over meeting the company's expectations; she always seemed to do that, but there was something about these relationships that brought out the worst in her. Some of the bosses were men and some of them were women, so she couldn't point to gender. There was just something about the power they held over her life that initially attracted her but ultimately repelled her. Most discouraging to her was the part she didn't tell her friend. In each situation, as anxiety increased, it enflamed a lifelong struggle she'd had with binge and purge eating. After difficult days she'd consistently find herself eating far more than she knew was healthy, and then throwing it all up in hopes of protecting her softening figure. If this was just about work, maybe she'd just endure it. But she knew more was at stake, and she didn't know what to do about it.

Counsel

You meet Anna for coffee and clearly she's agitated. After asking a few questions, the dam breaks and she tells you her struggles. You may view yourself as an odd choice for counsel, but ignore this. You listen for a long while, and she feels understood. Now she wants advice. She asks you point blank: *What should I do?* Clearly, she's grateful for the empathetic ear, but she wants next steps. What do you tell her?

On the page that follows, with the imperatives in mind, offer your counsel.



CASE STUDIES

Case Study #3

Dan and Heather

Dan and Heather were in love, and now they're not. After eleven years of marriage, the relationship is in a very difficult place. Neither has been unfaithful, and both claim to follow Christ, but something is terribly wrong, and it has been for years.

Ask Heather, and it's not that Dan does any one thing horribly wrong, but it's a collection of little things that have eroded her love over the years. He's short with her and short with the kids. He says things that aren't blatantly mean, but they're just strong enough that she has a growing insecurity. He sleeps in when she needs help, and he doesn't seem to notice all the things she does for their family. To her, he takes her for granted.

Dan understands Heather's frustrations, and he doesn't disagree wholeheartedly, but he also doesn't think he's the sole source of their problems. Yes, Heather works hard for their family, but she also works their family hard. He feels more like a handyman and a butler than he does a husband. He wishes Heather could turn it off every now and then, simply enjoy the people around her and enjoy the good gifts they have. She doesn't, though. Instead, she's constantly discontent. It seems to him that until her task list is done she'll refuse to have any sense of peace or joy. To Dan, therein lies much of the problem, because her task list never is and never will be completely accomplished.

Counsel

Through an odd set of circumstances, you find yourself in conversation with Heather and Dan. They didn't seek you out for counsel, and you may or may not feel an ideal candidate to give them advice, but they open up and tell you their story. You listen and ask a few probing questions along the way. In time, Dan turns the conversation over to you. "Tell us what you think," he says. Heather agrees. They genuinely want to know how they could both be better people for a better marriage.

On the page that follows, with the imperatives in mind, offer your counsel.



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SUMMARY

You're at the final page of this module. Before closing this notebook, pause to reflect. What are significant insights you have gained along the way? What are next steps you will integrate into your life? Consider your affirmations, declarations, and your own counsel to yourself. Don't feel obligated to summarize this entire *Morph* experience, but what stands out? If helpful, flip through the notebook to refresh your memory.



CASE STUDIES

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Week Eight

Conversations with God

ROMANS 15–16

READ

In these final chapters of Romans we get a glimpse not just into Paul's theology but into Paul's life. To get the full weight of these chapters, consider first a different glimpse of his life from another writing, his letter to the church in Corinth.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:23-29).

A natural question arises: Why? What drove this man? How did he persevere through all of his challenges? It's in this week's chapters we gain insight into his drive.

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (Romans 15:20).

Paul had a mission, a calling, a great passion that propelled him to take enormous risks and persevere through grueling trials. This letter itself is a testament to his passion. He sent it ahead of what he hoped would be a personal visit. "I will go to Spain and visit you on the way," we read this week (Romans 15:28). Spain captured his attention because they'd yet to hear the good news. His visit to Rome would be on his way to continue the fulfillment of his calling, he hoped.

There is no evidence, however, that Paul ever made it to Spain. Most believe he was martyred before making it there. We do know, though, that he did make it to Rome. He was taken there by Roman guard to stand trial before Caesar. Our last view of Paul is of his work while under house arrest. Such conditions would diminish the passion of most and offer excuse enough to lay low. Not so for Paul. Scripture tells us that while under house arrest Paul's perseverance showed once again as he "boldly and without hindrance preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31).

In your conversations with God this week, keep Paul's example in mind. Take note that in the final chapter of Romans, Paul greets no less than twenty-six people by name. This cause-driven, risk-taking, deep-thinking man was passionate about people, and it showed. What compels you? What drives you? Bring these thoughts before God and into your conversations with others.

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 15–16

Week Eight
Conversations with People

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



OPENING QUESTION

- ▶ Choose one of the three case studies give in the Morph Me exercise on pages 209-213. Have one person read this case aloud. As a group, discuss the counsel that you would give this individual or couple and how the seven imperatives could be implemented to promote transformation.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ▶ Now take turns reading aloud your own case studies. After each group member reads his or her case and the counsel they gave themselves, take time as a group to offer counsel about how he or she might experience transformation by leaning into one or more of the seven imperatives. (Refer to page 208 for a summary description of each imperative.) Be sure to listen for the Spirit's guidance as you offer this counsel and to treat sensitive information sensitively.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Have each person in the group answer the following questions.

- ▶ What does the road ahead look like for you in your spiritual journey now that this *Morph* module is coming to a close? What challenges do you anticipate? What next steps will you take?

PRAYER

- ▶ As a Small Group, or in Running Partners, discuss the latest in your lives and pray for each other.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Week 8, Conversations with People, p. 222

MORPH MODULES



Love God

Every house has a foundation. The house's foundation may or may not be a good foundation, but there is something upon which that house is built. Every tree has roots. The roots may be weak, or they may have been recently severed; but if a tree exists, then roots exist somewhere. Houses have foundations, trees have roots, and people have gods. There is something upon which our lives rest. We love something. We trust something. We look to something for our well-being. This thing, this person, this objective, if it is at the center of our trust and the center of our lives, it is our god. We may not view our vocation as a god, but how often do we treat it with godlike status? We may not view a desired relationship as our god, but how often do we give that relationship godlike status? So many things can be made central to our lives, and so many of these things are good things when enjoyed in their good and rightful place. But gods? Wise are those who carefully consider who or what has their ultimate love and trust.

Love God is an eight-week module designed to train participants in what it means to authentically love God. For those who have yet to experience any of the *Morph* modules, you are encouraged to do this module first.

Love People

There are six billion people in the world. At any given time, we are in relationship with a handful. At times, these relationships bring great joy. At other times, these relationships bring great pain. Truth be told, relationships bring about the best and worst of life. Our greatest joys consistently involve people. Our greatest pains consistently involve people. But what happens when a life is liberated by a love for God? How does love for God impact and influence our love for people? Christ gave two great commandments. First, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And second, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Are these commandments related? Might love of God inspire and equip us to authentically love those around us? How rich might life be if we ever-increasingly knew how to truly love people—not put up with people, not walk over people, not use people or avoid people—but truly love people.

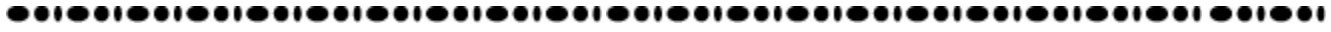
Love People is an eight-week module designed to train participants to authentically love the people in their lives.

Be Christ's Body

The world is a beautiful place, but it is also a broken place. Turn on the evening news, and the brokenness comes at us in waves. Sure, we'd like to do something, but how? How can one person truly make a difference? How can we, with our limited time and resources, really matter in a world overflowing with needs? For the better part of 2,000 years, followers of Christ have pooled their time, talents, and resources to make a difference in the world. Liberated by a love for God, set free from enslavement to living for instant gratification or the accumulation of resources, authentic Christ-followers liberally and passionately pour love and grace into the world around them. Astounding things happen when followers of Christ discover their spiritual gifts and mobilize these gifts into action by partnering with the body of Christ around them.

Be Christ's Body is an eight-week module designed to train participants in how to be active participants in the body of Christ to make a sizeable and significant difference in the world around them.

About Morph



Morph Development Team

Like most worthy endeavors, *Morph: Build Character* was developed in community. It was written and developed by Rick Shurtz and Sherilyn Villareal with the support, guidance, and input of numerous others at Gateway Community Church. If you have ideas on how to make this experience better, please let us know.

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