



INTRODUCTION



This primer includes readings from Weeks 0 through 3 of *Morph: Love God*. These readings present the inspirational and practical vision for *Morph*, introduce important *Morph* concepts, and set up the Read-Memorize-Meditate rhythm of *Conversations with God* exercises that appear throughout all *Morph* modules. All of this is essential background for the general *Morph* experience.

Not included in this primer are *Morph Me*, *Conversations with God*, or *Conversations with People* exercises from any week. Some of the readings in this primer refer to these exercises. In the context of this Primer, simply ignore these references.

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There's a treadmill in the basement now used for hanging clothes while they dry. There's a membership at the gym known to be active only because the credit card is charged every month. There's a Bible on the bedside table; it's underneath the remote control. There are three books on the shelf in the living room; they're unread, but they look smart. There's a six month supply of multi-vitamins in the pantry bought to initiate a multi-level business that came and went. There's a leather journal in the desk with one used page dated three years ago—the day a decision was made to keep a journal.

We know the drill. Something gets our attention. Maybe it's something we hear or read or watch. Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a good day. Maybe it's a bad day. Maybe it's something we've thought of for years and finally get around to taking a step. It can be any number of things, but whatever it is, something gets our attention, and we want one thing: we want to change. We're inspired. We're fired up.

We're on a kick.

The kick lasts about a week. By week two the kick tapers. By week three the kick is over. At the end of week four we're reminded of the kick when we open the credit card bill and see the purchases that funded it.

It came. It went. Nothing really changed. It was just a kick.

So let's be honest.

You hold in your hands something that may one day represent another kick in a line of kicks. One day you may pull it from your shelf and remember your God-kick. You'll think back to when you attended that church, met a few people, and got involved for a season. It felt good. It felt like the kind of thing you should be doing. It worked for a bit. Eventually, though, that 'new car smell' wore off on the whole thing, and it was back to normal.

It came. It went. Nothing really changed. It was just a kick.

KICK OBSERVATION

Let's make an observation about kicks. Some won't like the observation. They won't like it, because they think most everything's worthwhile. Yes, life is richer when we follow through on our kicks, but this misses reality. Reality is this: some kicks don't matter much.

We may in fact have richer lives if we'd not dropped out of the racquetball league, forgotten about the interest in medieval literature, or neglected to actually read the book on solving the Rubik's cube blindfolded. These kicks may have been fun and interesting and good. Even more, some of them

would have held greater value than others. But make a list of our kicks, and a great many of them came and went for one important reason: we didn't care that much about them. Actually, this could be said better: we didn't care enough about them to push through the pain of truly accomplishing what we'd briefly hoped to accomplish. This, of course, isn't true of all kicks, but it is true of a great many.

Which leads to an essential question only you can answer. It's a question you're encouraged to sit with for a while. Quick answers are often cheap answers, and cheap answers nearly ensure this will be another kick. Let the question soak and simmer. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with those around you.

Ask yourself this: *Do I really want to do this?*

To answer this question honestly you must know what 'this' is. The pages that follow are for that very purpose. Think of this as kick-protection.

THE VISION

Kick-protection is most effective when we know and embrace the vision. We push through the pain of taking the Spanish class, because we want to realize the vision of speaking Spanish. We push through the pain of consistently going to the gym, because we want to realize the vision of a healthy body. We push through the pain of getting the degree, because we want to realize the vision of a new vocation. Knowing and embracing the vision is essential to kick-protection. It is for this very reason that so many people rightfully reject religion. Religion is rejected because they either do not see a meaningful vision, or the vision they do see is repulsive to them. Let's consider each of these.

Consider the lack of a *meaningful* vision. It's not that the church on the corner is doing anything inherently wrong, it's that we wonder if it's doing anything at all. Once a week, the parking lot fills with cars. The cars come, the cars go, but nothing really changes. The world is still spinning out of control. All over the globe people are experiencing real suffering. There's war, starvation, disease. There are political problems, corporate problems, community problems, family problems. Individuals struggle with depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear. There's suffering among the children; there's suffering among the middle-aged; there's suffering among the elderly. It's pervasive. It's very real, and it's very painful, and that church on the corner seems so terribly irrelevant to it all. It sucks up time. It sucks up resources. Maybe people feel better about themselves for an hour each week, but is it really doing anything meaningful in light of the world's realities? If the vision, the end result, is depth of involvement in a pathetic expression of religiosity that does nothing for the real issues of our world, then there are better ways to invest our time and resources. There's nothing in that sort of vision to make this any more than a kick, if it is a kick at all.

That's the *meaningless* vision. Let's consider the *repulsive* vision.

Maybe we were channel surfing and landed momentarily on a religious program more interested in our wallets than our wellbeing. Maybe it was that co-worker so quick to quote his favorite verses but so slow to help in a time of need. Maybe it was that prospective spouse who attended church on Sundays but whose destructive habits ruined any hope of a lasting relationship. We've seen hypocrisy, it's troubling, and we want nothing of it. Such falsehoods bring questions. Does following God mean I'll be one of those Bible-thumpers always asking for money? Does professing Christ mean I'll be loudmouthed with advice and slow to act with compassion? If I follow Christ, am I going to be judgmental and intolerant? The questions are legitimate. If following Christ means we will become something we find revolting, if that's the vision, the end result, then why would we do it?

We wouldn't.

We'd run.

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We'd do anything and everything, but we most certainly wouldn't do that.

And yet despite each of these known visions, the *meaningless* and the *repulsive*, you're reading this page. Why? What's the vision? What has your attention? Is it inspiring enough to keep you in the game? Will it motivate you to push through the pain associated with most any meaningful endeavor? Many visions could be suggested. Let's consider two. Let's go inside. Let's go outside.

LET'S GO INSIDE

There's something deep within us we cannot deny. Explain it? That's nearly impossible, but we know what we mean. Deep within us there is a hunger, a thirst, a craving for something great, something grand. We survey the world around us, and we genuinely wonder if anything will truly satisfy this inner-thirst. It's not that there aren't good things around us. There are many good things we do, things we enjoy. Even more, there are things we've yet to do and hope to do with our lives. These are both real and good, but then we pause.

We pause and we wonder about that deep inner-longing, that thirst, that hunger. We know instinctively that it will take more than another buzz, another thrill, another adventure, or another win to truly satisfy that deep inner-craving. There are so many good things, but where's the great thing? Where's the reality that goes beyond the fleeting nature of life, the here today and gone tomorrow? Where's something I can count on, trust in, rest upon? When am I going to experience a peace independent from the ebb and flow of daily living? When am I going to sleep deeply not because things went well that day, but because there's a deep inner-contentment that transcends my circumstantial ups and downs?

What's the vision? It's a vision of peace, a vision of contentment, a vision of rest for our souls. It's a vision of ourselves in touch with the greatest and grandest of all realities, the reality of our Creator. It's a vision of drinking deeply from a well that touches more than physical thirst, it satisfies the thirst of our souls. We see ourselves in the future, and we are whole. We're not so naïve as to believe this vision will be fully realized in an instant, or even in a lifetime, but we do believe it can be *ever-increasingly* realized every day, as we *ever-increasingly* experience the Almighty. We long for ever-increasing joy, ever-increasing peace, ever-increasing satisfaction, and ever-increasing contentment. Something in us instinctively knows that real life is not a life of striving. Striving and straining rob us of life, which drives our inner-conviction that we must draw near to the creator of life.

That's the inside vision. Let's go outside.

LET'S GO OUTSIDE

The world is full of controversy, but there's at least one point of agreement. No matter the generation, no matter the political party, no matter the ethnicity or religious persuasion, there is agreement on one critical observation. Some will find the observation pessimistic, but realism, not pessimism, is the intention. A brief survey of the daily news or a casual consideration of the people around us makes this observation abundantly clear. The observation is simply this: Something is off in this world.

A peace agreement settles one war while another war is just beginning. A vaccination eradicates one disease while another disease begins to spread. Wedding bells announce the beginning of a new family while the fall of a gavel announces the end of another. It's not that life is absent of pleasure, or that there are not seasons of great goodness, but all is not well in the world. All is not well when children die of preventable diseases. All is not well when unfounded hatred drives one ethnicity to rid its region of another. All is not well when pain and suffering so often drown out laughter and joy.

Awareness of this reality brings us to an essential question. It's a question often used to accuse our creator, but one we must not just throw out as an accusation but ask genuinely. We ask with conviction and with passion, "What are you doing about this, God? What is your solution? The world is spinning out of control, what are you doing?" When asked with genuine interest and humility, when we truly seek an authentic answer, maybe there will in fact be a response that is not just satisfactory, but maybe there will be a response that is profound.

What's the outside vision? It's a vision where we do something. It's a vision where our lives make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. It's a vision where we don't just complain about the world's pain and suffering, but where we roll-up our sleeves and make a meaningful contribution to the world around us. Now that might not sound unique. That might sound like one of countless solutions competing for airtime today. In a sense, that's true. There are many good and helpful solutions at work in this world today. The vision we will encounter is not intended to minimize the good work done by the many leaders and organizations seeking to bring health and healing to the world's problems. But with that said, there is an undeniable uniqueness to our question. We are not just asking for a good and decent solution, but we are going to the author of life to learn about life. We seek to discover what the creator of the world is doing about the suffering in the world, and we are open to the possibility of a grander vision conceptualized before the world began. It's a vision where we help people with their surface problems; it's a vision where we get to the root of the problems. We give the thirsty a cup of cold water, both literally and spiritually, and we also build a well, both literally and spiritually. Maybe there's a plan unfolding. Maybe the origin of this plan precedes the beginning of time. Maybe we could participate in this plan.

All this, the inside vision and the outside vision, leads us to the way of Christ.

THE WAY OF CHRIST

Christ had a way of cutting through religious clutter. On one such occasion he was asked to highlight Scripture's greatest commandment. His response was both simple and profound.

Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (Matthew 22:37-40, NIV).

It all hangs on two hooks: Love God and Love People. Christ's response was so simple and so profound his critics had nothing to say. Not only does Scripture tell us that the one who questioned Christ agreed with Christ's response, but we are also told that "from then on no one dared ask him any more questions" (Mark 12:34, NIV). The response brought silence to the debate...sort-of.

The critics agreed in theory. They did not agree in practice. One such example speaks boldly.

Christ is standing beside a well. A woman walks up. He's without a bucket, and he asks her for a drink. She's taken back. Jewish men do not speak to Samaritan women. The conversation then moves from physical water to spiritual water. In that movement, a vision is cast, a vision for the way of Christ.

Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:13-14, NIV).

He does not tell her how. He does not tell her what she must do. Very simply, he offers a vision. He lets her know that her inner-thirst, the thirst that has driven her life to relational chaos, it can be satisfied. She can love God. Even more, he lets her know that not only can she have her own thirst satisfied, but she can become a spring of living water refreshing the parched lives around her. She can love people.

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What would the critics say now? A woman with tainted Samaritan blood and the impurity of five failed marriages can drink deeply from God's spring and become a spring bursting with eternal refreshment reviving the thirsty world around her?

Such is the way of Christ.

The way of Christ is not an irrelevant solution making us feel better for an hour on Sunday but doing nothing for the reality of our complicated lives. The way of Christ is also not a plastic religiosity producing revolting expressions of greed, selfish ambition, and judgment. The way of Christ is radical. The way of Christ is transformative. The way of Christ promotes soul satisfaction and life transformation. Realizing the vision of the authentic way of Christ may in fact be worth the pain of bringing that vision into reality.

But make no mistake, there is pain.

If we are to follow the authentic way of Christ, if we are to genuinely love God and love people, if following Christ is to become our reality and not just another kick, then one thing must be true of our experience. An early traveler on the way of Christ put it like this...

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 12:2, NIV).

We are not called to a life of conformity. We are called to a life of transformation. This transformation comes about by the renewing of our minds and trains us to discern the will of God, the way of Christ. The Greek word underneath this call to transformation is *metamorphosis*. If we are to follow the authentic way of Christ, we must love God, and we must love people. If we are to genuinely love God and love people, then we must change from the inside out. In a word, we must **morph**.

MORPH

What is Morph? To morph is to become like Christ, to become a person liberated by love for God and inspired by love for people. We call this morphing, because it is a process, but it is a process where transformation genuinely happens. We change. Yes, morphing happens over time, but it does in fact happen. We do overcome. We do experience healing. We do become more like Christ. We do this not by skimming the surface but by going, with Christ, to the depth of our inner-person and then working our way out to daily living. We go deep into ourselves; we go deep into Scripture.

Which is exactly what *this* Morph experience is designed to facilitate.

As expressed here, Morph is a four-module relational experience designed to inspire a lifetime of transformation. It is an experience reflective of the way of Christ.

- Module One: Love God
- Module Two: Build Character (an application of Love God)
- Module Three: Love People
- Module Four: Be Christ's Body (an application of Love People)

Each module is eight weeks, and each week involves some mixture of six possible categories. All six categories will not be represented each week, but familiarity with the six gives an important over-all perspective of how this experience works. The six categories are...

- Readings
- Conversations with God
- Conversations with People

To make the most of this experience, let's briefly consider the categories.

FIRST CATEGORY: READINGS

Each week will begin with a reading intended to stir both the heart and mind. These readings are designed to take about fifteen minutes, but you're encouraged to read slowly. Read with a pen in hand. If a particular passage of Scripture is referenced, and it gets your attention, open the pages of Scripture and read the passage in its fuller context. Linger. Those that let the fifteen minutes linger to thirty minutes or more will, no doubt, gain greater insight and awareness for themselves and the others in their group.

SECOND CATEGORY: MORPH ME

The second category is titled *Morph Me*. The *Morph Me* category is emphasized in the *Love God and Build Character* modules. These exercises will vary, but they are designed to personalize that week's experience. It's too easy to read something or study something and nod with agreement. *Morph Me* takes you through exercises to both reveal and train what's genuinely happening in your life. These will be both probing and practical. Some weeks, there will be exercises geared to peel back the layers of life to find out what's really going on. Other weeks will address practices to be incorporated into daily living to bring about lasting change.

THIRD CATEGORY: CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

One of the more profound aspects of walking with Christ is the ongoing presence of God in our lives. Throughout this Morph experience, you are given guidance to inspire and strengthen daily conversations with God. This guidance will not be the rote sayings of heartless prayers. Rather, these *Conversations with God* will involve both talking and listening. We will listen to God through Scripture, and we will listen to God by training our ears for the presence his Spirit. Week two of this module will give greater explanation, but for now, know that Morph is designed to deepen your own personal interactions with God. This will take time and energy, as most conversations do, but imagine what it will be like to be ever-increasingly conversing with God. Of all you could gain from Morph, if truly engaged, this will no doubt be the most profound.

FOURTH CATEGORY: CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE

The fourth category is *Conversations with People*. It is not possible to go through Morph alone; it is a relational experience. This relational aspect can be a formalized small group, or it can be as simple as gathering a few friends and agreeing to go through this together. At the end of each week there are conversation guides to deepen your conversations.

The following are suggestions depending upon your circumstances:

► Small Groups (five or more people)

Small groups come in different shapes and sizes, but a typical small group will have five to twelve participants. Throughout Morph, small groups are encouraged to meet as a group every other week, and on the off week, to meet in sub-groups of two or three people (three is preferable). We refer to these sub-groups as Running Partners. This will be new to most groups but is highly

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encouraged. This smaller gathering will personalize the conversation. A degree of personalization can and does happen in other settings, but there's something powerful about getting together with just two other people and hearing how each individual is interacting with that week's experience.

Different groups will do this differently. Some groups will have the Running Partners meet on their own time at the place of their choosing. Other groups will prefer to have all Running Partners meet in the same location at the same time, like a house or coffee shop, but simply meet in different areas so as to not distract each other. Either way is encouraged.

Included in each week's material are conversation guides. These guides are geared to either Small Groups or Running Partners. *Take note that Week One is geared to Running Partners, Week Two is geared to Small Groups, and it goes back and forth in that rhythm.* Also, you're encouraged to mix the Running Partner relationships for each eight week module. This will not be possible or beneficial for all groups, but when possible, it is encouraged.

► Running Partners – (Two to four people)

Morph need not be experienced in a formalized small group but can be experienced by simply pulling together a few friends and agreeing to go through Morph together. Similar to what's explained in the Small Group section above, we describe these gatherings of two to four as Running Partners. If experiencing Morph with two to four people, you're encouraged to meet weekly. At the end of each week's material you will find conversation guides. You'll notice that the conversation guides are titled either 'Small Group' or 'Running Partner.' This titling is for groups of five or more people, so don't let it distract you. You're encouraged to use the conversation guide for that week regardless of the title.

FIFTH CATEGORY: WEB

In addition to collaborating with your group, there is a larger Morph community online. A simple explanation of Morph's web presence would be to call it a mixture of Facebook, YouTube and Morph. The best way to get into it is to simply get onto it, but the following brief descriptions offer a little insight as to what's available.

Videos

Each week you'll find a brief video giving depth of insight on that week's topic. You can think of the videos as a coach. This will be done a variety of ways. Some weeks, you'll hear about the thinking that went into that week's topic. Other weeks, you'll hear from others giving their own experience with that week's topic. And other weeks still, simply expect the unexpected.

Forums

A variety of forums are available at the Morph website where you can comment and read comments on a host of topics. Posting thoughts and comments will not only help others, but it will also refine your own thoughts by encouraging you to articulate your experience.

Resources and Links

Included at the Morph website are a variety of resources and links to take your experience deeper. If, for example, you are reading one of that week's Scripture passages, and you find it confusing, at the website you'll find a link to that passage where there are online commentaries to read and study. Or, if a particular topic speaks to you and you'd like to go deeper with it, at that week's page you'll find links to sermons and articles associated with that week's topic.

JUST IMAGINE

A few pages back you were encouraged to ask a question: *Do I really want to do this?* Now you're asked to dream for a moment. How might your life be different by engaging Christ through this

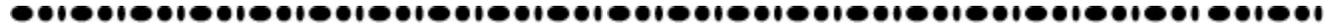
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experience? How might the world be different by an increasingly transformed version of you? Reach within yourself and touch that deep inner-hunger. It's the hunger that drives your life. What would it be like to direct that hunger toward the greatest and grandest of visions? What would it feel like to live freely and passionately? What would it be like to be an ever-increasingly positive influence on the world around you?

Well-lived lives do not become well-lived lives by doing nothing. Well-lived lives engage their Creator's grace and live passionately, not passively, from that place. The experience that follows is a call to action. It will involve time, energy, and resources. There will be aspects you find invigorating, and there will be aspects that feel like work. The extent to which you encounter Christ through this experience is the extent to which you will experience change. Skim the surface, and it will skim your life. Go to the depths, and it will go to the depths of you. Those that truly engage, those that dig in and make the most of this opportunity, they will be different, the world will be different, and we will all be grateful this was anything but a kick.

Week One

WHISPERED WISDOM



THE WISE & THE FOOLISH

There are countless distinctions between the wise and the foolish. The Scriptures offer plenty of examples. Common sense helps as well.

The foolish spend. The wise save.

The foolish vent. The wise offer thought-filled words.

The foolish demand immediate gratification. The wise embrace the demands of delayed gratification.

The distinctions are not absolute, but the list could go on, and most can observe a mixture of both wisdom and foolishness in their own lives. One more observation will serve this discussion. It begins with a question.

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

Much could be said to address this question. Here's a simple thought...

The foolish scream. The wise whisper.

Whisper?

Yes, think about it for a moment. The foolish rant and rave when they think they have something terribly important to say. Yes, the wise may do so when the situation is urgent, when there's a state of emergency, but the wise know the power of a whisper. The wise know when to lower their voice, lean in close, and say something succinctly and with whispered passion.

There's a phrase, a saying, a proverb central in Scripture and central to the Scripture's message. It's not often quoted, but the world would be a better place if we all carefully considered it. It's a simple and memorable phrase, as many Proverbs are, and it contains a secret no doubt the author hoped would be whispered from generation to generation.

The first three words alone are cause for pause. These three words start with a phrase that beckons us to lean in and listen attentively.

Read it slowly.

Read it quietly.

Lean in close and hear a few words of whispered wisdom from a wise old sage...

Above all else... (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

That's a powerful introduction.

It's worthy of reflection before considering the conclusion of the statement.

WHISPERED WISDOM

Consider this...

This phrase can only be used once. This statement, this introduction, if used more than once, is abused, and Scripture does not abuse it. The phrase may be familiar to you or it may be new. You may know how the statement is completed. If so, pretend for a moment you've never heard it. Let the phrase bounce around in your mind incomplete, and wonder how the sentence will be finished.

Above all else...

What would be Scripture's wisest counsel?

Above all else...

...enjoy your life.

...monitor your health.

...manage your money.

...work hard.

Above all else...

... eat dessert.

... rest well.

... choose friends wisely.

... change the oil in your car.

Above all else...

... eat vegetables.

... marry well.

... smell the roses.

... learn Spanish

Above all else...

There are so many, many good things to say. What's the best thing? What's the thing that floats to the top of the list because it's worthy of the introduction "Above all else..."

It must be a cause and not an effect.

It must be something that touches everything.

It must be at the epicenter of life.

It cannot be peripheral.

It must be central.

It must be real.

It must be something that truly matters above all else.

It must be something to consider very carefully and take very seriously.

What is *above all else*?

Lean in.

Read slowly.

Maybe even read it aloud...in a quiet whisper.

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

What a fascinating observation.

THE EPICENTER

All we do flows from the epicenter of our lives, the wellspring of our lives, our hearts. For good and for ill, our hearts drive us. Years after Solomon's whispered wisdom, Christ offered a similar observation. When speaking of good and evil, he said, "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (Luke 6:45).

...the mouth speaks.

Without question, we could play with those words a bit.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the trigger is pulled.

...the gift is given.

...the fist swings.

...the corporate ladder is climbed.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the car is purchased.

...the friendship is broken.

...the generosity is lavished.

...the gossip speaks.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...the check is written.

...the song is sung.

...the drink is embraced.

...the job is quit.

Out of the overflow of the heart...

...everything happens.

...good things happen.

...bad things happen.

...life happens.

Why?

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It all comes back to the heart, to the epicenter of our lives.

James noticed it. He said as much when he wrote in his letter, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but you do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight*” (James 4:1-2, TNIV). What’s he saying? It’s an observation. He simply notices the same thing both Solomon and Christ noticed, that fights and quarrels are driven by desires, by hearts.

Paul noticed it. He noted something surprising though. Would you not think that a person giving money to the poor does so in love for the poor? Maybe. Maybe not. Paul observed as much in his letter to the Corinthians, “*If I give all I possess to the poor...but do not have love, I gain nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13:3, TNIV). That’s odd. If a person gives everything to the poor is there not love? We know better. Maybe it’s a photo op. Maybe it’s to impress the social circles. Maybe it’s something else, but whatever it is, there’s no question it’s driven by heart, it just may or may not be heart for the poor. It very well may be love of power and the drive to get elected. It always looks good on the front page, above the fold, to be face to face with the neediest of people wearing rolled-up shirt sleeves. Photos like that get votes.

Why love the poor when they can be used to get what we really love?

Which gives rise to an incredibly important question and another that must be held at bay, and addressed later.

SHOULD BE

There’s a gravitational pull to a question that must patiently wait in the wings. It’s the question of ‘should.’ What *should* be in my heart? Church circles are dangerously good at the *should* questions. We know we *should* have a heart for certain things. That’s good. We need that and will get to it in due course.

But let’s talk reality.

Rather than asking what *should* be in our hearts, let’s find out first what’s already there. What is in my heart?

No pretending.

No censoring.

No qualifying.

What is in my heart? When the layers are peeled back, what do I discover? Could there be a more important exercise than to address this question? The heart is the wellspring of life. Out of the overflow of our hearts our mouths speak. Should we not know what’s in there?

In a moment this experience will take us to a simple question.

You’ll be encouraged to linger at this question a bit.

The question is coming.

Here’s a preview: What do you want?

It’s coming, but not quite yet.

First, let’s have a little fun.

ROCK STAR

I want to be a rock star.

I want to be on stage, scream *Hello Chicago!*, and hear the roar of the thousands upon thousands awed by my presence.

I will of course use my rock star status for good in the world. I will raise money for war-torn countries and go before congress with appeals for the poor. I will entertain the troops serving in foreign lands. I will write songs that move people and cause them to think.

But I must admit...I love that crowd...I want people to camp out all night to get a ticket to my concert...I want to be revered and held in awe...I want to hear the chant...see the throngs of people...and be discussed on the radio.

Sick you say? Not so fast.

Let's be honest.

Let's be uncensored.

Let's be true to our innermost desires.

Rock star? Not really. I can't sing or scream or jump around like that. I don't look good in tight clothes and wouldn't wear them if I could.

But I wouldn't mind rock star status at the office.

I work in a cube. I do my job. It's done on time and done well. Does anybody notice? Does anybody care?

Rarely.

No, I'm not the rock star type, but this world of hours of work with nobody noticing isn't the answer either. I'd like to be a rock star around the office. I'd like people to care what I have to say in the meeting. I'd like to get a response when I seek people out above me. Better yet, I'd like for there to not be anyone above me. I'd like to be 'The Man.' I've never been 'The Man.' I've always had to work for 'The Man.' And 'The Man' doesn't seem to notice me. 'The Man' notices when I screw-up. 'The Man' doesn't notice when I do well. 'The Man' couldn't care less about me. Rock star status...that'd work.

But maybe not.

I really don't want to work. I really don't want to be a Rock Star or have Rock Star status at the office. It may have intrigued me at one time. Not today. I got over it. I've had blips and bleeps of Rock Star status, and I don't really want that anymore. What do I want?

I want to take nap.

I want a hammock, between two palm trees, and a little drink in the sand below me that once was frozen and now is melted, because I've been lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves.

Forget the Rock Star stuff, literal or metaphorical, and just give me rest.

I'm tired, and I'm tired of being tired. I just want to take a long nap and be at peace with the world and have the world at peace with me. I just want everybody to leave me alone.

But not everybody.

I'd like to be alone now and then, but I never want to be lonely, and there's a very important difference. Crowded rooms can be lonely. Office complexes can be lonely. Families can be lonely.

WHISPERED WISDOM

Churches can be lonely. Yes, I'd like some space, and I'd like to be alone here and there, but never lonely, I never, ever intended that.

I don't just want to be *around* people. I want to be *with* people.

I want to know people and have them know me.

I want to love people and have them love me.

I want to serve people and have them serve me.

I want to enjoy people and have them enjoy me.

Maybe that's why I want to be a Rock Star. It seems like people know them and they know people. It seems like people love them and they love people. It seems like people serve them and they serve people. It seems like people enjoy them and they enjoy people.

But that really can't be it.

It can't be it because the 'Rock Stars' of the world often display, and readily admit, their insatiable hunger for more. Those who achieve rock star status in their respective fields of interest are not *necessarily* the happiest bunch. Yes, some are, but not *necessarily*. Somewhere along the way there's a disconnect, there's dissonance, there's a disconnect and dissonance between the deep longing in a person's heart and the thing they're looking toward to satisfy that longing.

What's dissonance?

Dissonance is the result of clashing sounds. Dissonance is that state of chaos where longing for resolution is created. It's a longing for the clashing sounds to come together. It's a longing for resonance.

What's resonance?

Resonance is the result of sounds working together. Resonance is when one sound, one longing, matches another, and they work together. They resonate.

Consider this...

Resonance is when our stated desires are a healthy expression of our true heart's desire. They work together. They resonate.

Dissonance is when our stated desires are an insufficient expression of the desires of our hearts. They clash. They create dissonance.

THE DESIRE UNDER THE DESIRE

What's with the desire to be a Rock Star? Is it really the desire to be on stage entertaining throngs of people? Is it really to gain rock star status at the office because we want to be revered? This could be fun, but is that really what it's about?

Or is it a desire to have a life that matters, a life that counts, a life with purpose.

What's with the desire for a long nap on a quiet beach with a melted drink? We welcome these gifts, but we instinctively recognize the limitations as well. Relaxing getaways are one thing; perpetual escapism is another. We balk at a life of running from reality.

Or is it a longing for a well-rested soul at peace in the midst of life's realities.

There are desires that are highly identifiable: the beach, the car, the job, the status.

But slow down. Be careful. Don't be deceived.

These are often the buoys floating on top of the water.

Reach beneath the buoy...grab hold of the rope...take a deep breath...and begin the descent. Hand over hand, follow that rope to the bottom of your heart, and there you'll find it...there you'll find them.

The desires of your heart.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

How do we get beneath the surface?

How do we grab hold of the rope?

How do we go hand over hand to the bottom in search of the real desire?

Consider this...

Consider one powerful little word...

Consider a word that will take you one hand over the other deeper and deeper into your heart...

It's a simple word...

Here it is...

Why?

I want to be a Rock Star.

Why?

Because I want people to like me?

Why?

Because I want to feel important...to be important?

Why?

Because I don't want to waste my life?

Why?

Because I want a life that matters...a life that counts?

Why?

I don't know...Because I want something lasting...something big...something real...something that isn't here today and gone tomorrow.

Why?

Because I'm on this quest...I don't even fully know what it is I'm looking for...but I'll know it when I see it...I'll know it...it's deep within me...I'm seeking it...I'm looking for it...I haven't found it yet...

Now we're getting somewhere...now we're below the surface. Have we hit bottom? Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, we're able to make a critical distinction.

Do I want to be a Rock Star, or is there something deeper driving me that being Rock Star may or may not satisfy?

WHISPERED WISDOM

What is that deep thing?

What is that deep desire?

What is that insatiable hunger?

If the heart is the wellspring of life, it's best we get after these questions.

HEARTSTORMING

At this point, it would be far too easy to just read these pages, nod our heads with interest, and set them down. But we're not after easy. We want to morph. To morph, we must personalize this experience and get beneath the surface.

It's time to unload.

It's time to peel back the layers of our hearts.

It's time to consider what's really going on in there.

The pages that follow are the beginning of an exercise that will be woven in and out of the coming weeks. It is called *Heartstorming*. *Heartstorming* is not a fill-in-the-blank-with-all-the-right-answers exercise. It is an exercise where *real* trumps *right*.

Now we get personal.

Now we get uncensored.

Now we get vulnerable.

It gets a little dangerous at this point.

Week Two

THE VOICE

THE SOLITARY WORD

There's something we must read.

We must read it slowly. We must read it carefully. We must listen for a solitary word, an echo—a reverberation of something we've already heard.

The word of God, God's voice, is referred to as...

...living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

Did you hear it?

What is the wellspring of life? What are we to guard?

The heart.

The heart is the wellspring of life. That's where this started. And what did we just hear? We heard an echo of that very word, that very idea, that innermost part of our being—the heart. God's voice, his speaking to us, is sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and get this...

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

That wellspring of existence.

That source of desires.

This should peak our interest. And let's be honest.

This should bother us. Judges? We're not sure we like that.

Let's do something else.

Careful though. Not so fast. Let's be open, if just for a moment. Peel back the layers of our hearts and what do we discover? Some things we love; we treasure these things. Other things we disdain; we long to be free of these things. What does it take to be free of things we disdain? If we have cancerous tumors in our body we disdain them. We travel long distances in search of a cure. We write our last checks. We beg the doctor to *judge* the situation accurately, so the situation can be dealt with properly. Those tumors must be cut out with the double-edged scalpel. We have no problem with this kind of discernment, with that kind of judging.

What would we say to our doctor?

Bring it on, wise doctor, bring it on.

THE VOICE

Consider this...

What if our spiritual self is much like our physical self?

Our physical self has strengths and weaknesses, good days and bad days, health and sickness. What if our spiritual self reflects a similar reality? What if there are aspects of our spiritual self that must be dealt with? If so, would we not welcome, would we not pursue, would we not seek this living and active voice of God that divides between soul and spirit, joint and marrow, while judging the attitudes and thoughts of our hearts.

What would we say to our God?

Bring it on, wise God, bring it on.

SCRIPTURE

Common understanding of the double-edged sword is that the sword is Scripture. This interpretation is well-founded. The writer of Hebrews, when speaking of God's voice in this very context, explains that God "spoke through David" and then quotes David's words in Psalm 95 (Hebrews 4:7). So the very words of Scripture are referenced as the very words of God.

With that said, a misapplication of this truth is also common. When Christ walked this earth he walked amongst a people who greatly revered Scripture. The religious leaders of his day knew Scripture well. Many had great portions of it memorized. They carefully copied and recopied the littlest details and the finest points. And yet, with all of their reverence and all of their caution, many of these leaders missed the very purpose of Scripture.

When addressing these leaders, Christ said this...

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39-40, NIV).

That's fascinating.

These leaders, they diligently studied the Scriptures thinking they'd gain life, but the Scriptures were intended to lead them to another end and not be an end in themselves. Rather than letting Scripture inspire and inform their worship of God, they worshipped Scripture as if Scripture itself is god. Scripture testifies not just to something, a collection of beliefs and ideas, but to Someone, the very personhood of God. The purpose of these passages was and is to bring the reader into an encounter with God. Scripture testifies about Christ, and Christ, the son of God, personifies God and leads us to God.

And the testifying continues to this day.

So engaging Scripture is a movement from the pages to a person, the person of Christ. Scripture, the very word of God, informs a conversation, a relationship, an interacting not just with the sword itself, but with the one who graciously wields the sword for our good.

Why is this important?

It's important, because reading Scripture holds tremendous potential. Deep within us is the wellspring of life, this heart of ours, and the voice of God can get down in there and do great good. If that's the case, we're wise to carefully consider how this happens. How does God speak? What is God saying? What has God said to generations before that may apply to my life today? If the voice of God is truly available, then we'd be wise to listen.

THE VOICE

But let's be honest. As good as all this sounds, common experience is often different. Reading Scripture is sometimes boring.

Maybe we hear it read from the front of a church. The person reading goes on and on, and we're completely lost. We quietly wonder, is anyone really listening? Or, maybe we're inspired to pick it up ourselves. We find a passage that looks promising, and in short order, our eyes cross. If this is supposed to be a meaningful experience, we wonder, how does this happen? How do we position ourselves with Scripture in a manner that truly brings about change by truly bringing an encounter with God? This is a rich and essential question. When Christ returned to the Father's side, he said, "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20, NIV). If Christ is with us, how do we engage his presence? How do we talk to him? How do we listen to him?

Let's consider a possibility.

Maybe Scripture is boring when it's treated as dry words on a page rather than words from God that invigorate a living and breathing relationship. Maybe Scripture is frustrating when rather than coming to Scripture humbly to hear the voice of God, we come to Scripture arrogantly in search of justifying our own ideas and our own agenda. Or, maybe there are aspects of Scripture that are simply an acquired taste. Maybe we're experiencing the normal and understandable reality of reading from pages that are new to us, and we simply need to exercise perseverance. Maybe it's all of these or some of these, but whatever it is, if there is truly the possibility of an encounter with God, there's something in this worthy of our attention.

Consider the possibilities.

What if Scripture not only informed our conversation with God but inspired our conversation with God? What if the stories, the poems, the teachings, and the wisdom gave us insight into this God who walks with us and indwells us so we now know how to recognize his voice and his presence? What if we didn't just read Scripture, but what if we mediated on it, talked with God about it, and opened our hearts up to God in conversational prayer? No, we do not go beyond the bounds of Scripture, but yes, we avoid the error of the Pharisees and let Scripture testify to Christ so we are well-informed to authentically walk with Christ through life. What if we did this? What if we truly talked and listened to God?

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Throughout this morph experience, you are asked to engage a daily exercise that will feel either risky or right, depending upon your perspective, and to be truthful, it's probably a bit of both. This exercise, if engaged well, will be the exercise you carry with you after you have completed this module and subsequent morph modules. Yes, you'll learn from the *Morph Readings*, but the readings will end. Yes, you'll learn from the *Morph Me* exercises, but these too will end. This exercise is one that could end but it must not. End this exercise and this entire morph experience will have been for nothing. Engage this exercise, and continue engaging this exercise, and not only will you morph from this experience, but you will continue to be transformed throughout your life.

The exercise?

You are asked to *Conversations with God*.

Yes, a daily conversation with your creator. No, not a quick read of a passage of Scripture to simply get through it. No, not a rote prayer that means and gains nothing. Yes, an ongoing and intentional conversation with the one who knows you best. Yes, a real conversation where you do what you do in all real conversations. You both listen and talk. No doubt you've had friends who talk but never

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listen or listen but never talk. These are frustrating conversations that lack a healthy give and take. This conversation with God must be both. It must involve thoughtful and reflective listening, and it must involve honest and open talking.

What follows is a suggested path to initiate conversations with God. This suggested path is not intended to impose itself as the only good approach. Like conversing with people, there are countless ways to converse with God. This path is suggested, though, because it is simple while holding potential for profound encounters with God. By walking through three simple phases, both those new to conversing with God and those who have talked with God for years, will discover greater depth and resonance in their conversations.

Very simply, the phases are this...

Read
Memorize
Meditate

READ

Each week you will be given five suggested readings from Scripture. Scripture is eclectic. Some sections read like story while other sections read like teaching. There is poetry and wisdom, parables and prophecy. The five readings for a given week will all come from one particular genre. One week, they will be Psalms, another week, the teachings of Christ or Proverbial wisdom. How you read these passages is informed by what you're reading. When the readings are stories, for example, the selected passages will be a bit longer and can be read straight through. When the readings are teachings they will be shorter, and you'll be encouraged to read them multiple times. With each week, the *Conversations with God* page will give a brief introduction with guidance on how to make the most of that week's selections. With that said, there is an error we must guard against, irrespective of the nature of the passages.

There are two ways to read Scripture. The first is quite common, and the second all too rare: we can read to get through the passage, or we can read to get the passage through us. If we read to get through the passage, to get a little star on our chart, the reading will carry little benefit. If, instead, we read to get the passage through us, there is strong potential for genuine life change. This kind of reading pursues the God behind the words. We want to hear from him. We want to understand him. We want to experience him. In your reading, don't just read. Listen. Listen for the voice of God. If it's story, what can you discover about God and about yourself through that story? If it is teaching, what aspect of the teaching is God impressing upon you? If it is wisdom, how might we confront our own foolishness? This is not just reading. This is listening and connecting to our creator.

MEMORIZE

This second phase compliments the first phase and then leads naturally to the third phase. Each week, as part of the five suggested readings, you're asked to memorize, yes memorize, two short passages. The passages will either come from the readings or be closely related in thought or topic. In this morph module, and in each of the subsequent morph modules, you are given twenty-five passages to memorize. By simply memorizing two passages per week, a doable amount, through this Morph experience you will have a hundred passages committed to memory. Yes, with each morph module being eight weeks long, and by memorizing two passages per week, this practice will continue after each module ends. This is by design. Conversing with God must not end when Morph ends.

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Why memorize?

For starters, let's consider what the purpose is not. The purpose is not so we can lob verses of Scripture at any passerby. It's not so we can become quote-a-holics who have a verse to compliment any situation and circumstance. Yes, there will be times you're in conversation with friends and a passage of Scripture will come to mind that will enhance the conversation. That's a welcomed benefit. The more central benefit goes much deeper and is much more personal.

Scripture calls us to "*prepare your minds for action*" (1 Peter 1:13, NIV). The original language is a call to "gird up the loins of your mind." Odd? To our ears, very odd, but not to the ears of the original recipients. A 'loin' is what they wore. Picture a robe. If they needed to move quickly, they would grab hold of the robe, or gird it up, to keep from tripping over themselves. Spiritually and emotionally, tripping over ourselves is common practice. For this reason, we are called to "gird up the loins of our minds." In our language a closer parallel might be to "roll-up the shirtsleeves of your minds." Memorizing Scripture is one way we do this. We posture our thought-life with strength. Rather than letting our thoughts come against us leading to a downward spiral of negativity, we fill our minds with thoughts that inspire greater and deeper conversations with God.

A second reason for memorizing Scripture is how this practice leads naturally to the third and richest phase of conversing with God. It's in this third phase where the conversation gets personal and comes to life.

MEDITATE

The word 'meditation' conjures up a host of images. For some, these images feel very natural. For others, they're foreign. In truth, whether we realize it or not, we all meditate. As we drive down the road, for example, our minds turn to something. Maybe we mull over a frustrating conversation with a co-worker. Maybe we recall a wound we experienced years ago. Or, maybe the mind goes in the gutter as we drift toward thoughts of vanity, greed, anger, or lust. We rehearse these thoughts, over and over, and whether we like it or not, these thoughts shape us. Scripture says as much...

Blessed are those who ... meditate on God's law day and night. They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).

The imagery is powerful. If a tree is planted by water that is good and pure, that tree is meditating on that water, and it will thrive. If, though, that water is toxic and poisonous, the tree will wither and fade. Those who meditate on God's thoughts, the Psalmist tells us, are like a tree planted by streams of water. By meditation, by thinking God's thoughts and conversing with him about these thoughts, we experience the kind of growth we were created to experience. Trees were not created to shrivel and die. Trees were created to grow and thrive.

So very simply, meditating, as encouraged here, is simply talking and listening to God. The conversation is inspired and informed by the reading and memorizing, but the conversation is now personalized. We carefully consider the passage, but we don't *just* consider the passage. We talk, and we listen. If, for example, we read a story of great faith and great courage, maybe we talk to God about our fears and concerns. Or, maybe we've been reading and memorizing a teaching on grace, and we now talk to God about an area of our lives where we feel especially susceptible to guilt and shame. It's in these conversations where we don't just read and memorize, but we listen and we talk. We pour out our thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys.

Or, maybe not.

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Maybe we sit in silence. Maybe we simply let ourselves rest before God by resting in the voice we've just heard. Meditation, conversing with God, can be as diverse as spending time with a close friend. There are times the conversation abounds with words and ideas, and there are times where the two are simply together and enjoying each other's presence. Meditation, conversing with God, is a lot like that.

With that in mind, this experience will encourage a highly personalized expression of meditation. Conversing with God is not reserved for those whose bent fits the contemplative stereotype. Examples abound, and the following is not meant to be comprehensive, but consider a few ways we may connect best with God.

The athlete – For some, their conversation with God will be worked out as they exercise or run. They're early morning hours are spent in motion and it's while in motion that they have their clearest thoughts and most authentic encounters with God. Try to get this person to sit down and meditate, and their thoughts will consistently wander to other things. But for these, there's something about physical engagement that opens them up and enhances their conversations with God.

The artist – The artist converses with God, but the conversation reaches greatest depth not in the lengthy back and forth dialogue, but when they seemingly partner with God in a creative endeavor. They take a thought, an idea, a passion, or a concern, and in bringing it before God, they are inspired to express this thought artistically. The Psalms themselves are a rich example of this as many are written poetically and with great thought to choice of words and structure. Down through the ages, artists have expressed their thoughts with God in countless ways—songs, paintings, sculpture, poetry, dance—these are all examples of deep communion with God expressed in ways mere dialogue falls short.

The writer – The writer is the person who converses with God most naturally with pen and paper. They write and they listen, they listen and they write. There's something about the exercise of writing their thoughts to God that takes them to depths they would not gain by limiting themselves to thought or even audible words. In the choosing of their words and the expression on the page, their thoughts gain clarity and focus. Not only do they talk to God, but in their writing they hear from God as thoughts are untangled and clarity is gained.

The list could go on. There are those who encounter God in nature, those who talk with God as they walk their dog, those who do best when they engage a project like gardening or cooking. In truth, no one is exclusively one type or another. We all have a bit of each with an emphasis on a few. Even more, the realities of life will limit the availability of certain expressions. We may connect with God best on long walks in nature, but the accessibility of a mountain trail is yearly at best. This isn't to say we then limit our conversations, but the heart of this phase is to not only personalize the conversation with God but to personalize how the conversation happens. If we limit ourselves to a particular method, that method may miss us, and we may then miss what is most important. If the athlete, for example, thinks connection with God only happens by acting like those who are naturally contemplative, an attempt won't even be made. If, though, this person recognizes the uniqueness of his or her design, rich conversation with God awaits that person and possibilities abound.

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

A few practical suggestions will enhance this experience.

Follow Your Wandering Thoughts

Many complain of wandering thoughts while attempting a conversation with God. The frustration is understandable. When talking to a person, the person is in front of you, or on the phone, so the

THE VOICE

conversation has a tangible quality. Although talking with God is no less real, it is by nature, a spiritual conversation and therefore lacks material presence. Wandering thoughts can be a frustration, but when carefully considered, they can also be a tremendous help to our conversation with God.

Consider that the mind may wander with intention. If, let's say, while talking with God, the mind wanders to a project at work, maybe it's the project at work that is creating undue stress in your life, and it needs to be brought before God. Or, if the mind wanders to thoughts of anger, greed, lust, or addictive cravings, maybe these are the issues to address with God. Rather than push the thoughts away, bring those thoughts to God. Talk to him about those desires, those frustrations, those worries, and those concerns. A wandering mind can be a tremendous ally toward honest conversation with God.

In addition, a wandering mind may also be helped by a second suggestion: journaling. There's something very powerful about moving our prayers from our minds to the page.

Journaling

Throughout the Morph experience, you're encouraged to keep a journal. How this journal is done will vary from person to person. As mentioned, some are writers who will take to this naturally while others are not the writing type. With that said, though, there are lessons to be learned from all types, and there are aspects of writing that will enhance most anyone's ongoing conversation with God. For those not the writing type, journaling can be done in a variety of ways, many of which fit other persuasions. Consider a few.

A single page – Journaling need not be lengthy. When Christ taught on prayer he challenged lengthy prayers when he said, “*When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*” (Matthew 6:7-8, NIV). There is no need for flowery language or lengthy prose. God knows what's on our minds and it can be said in as few or as many words as are needed. Journaling then, is often most helpful when we limit rather than lengthen our words. For those new to the exercise, consider limiting yourself to a single page or a single paragraph. As is the case in so many things, less will often mean more.

Bullet points – Another thought some will find helpful is to use the journal to chronicle your thoughts rather than transcribe them. In other words, rather than write the prayer out in its entirety, simply write a bullet point or a short sentence of what you will talk with God about. If you're of the athletic bent, this can be done before the run and after the run is complete. By marking the thought before stepping into the conversation, we gain focus we may otherwise miss.

One word – A third thought for journaling is to consider the finding and refining of a single thought, a single phrase, or even a single word. Much of the Psalms are written as poetry. This can be done for many reasons, but even the many of us who lack poetic skill can learn something from the practice. There is power in one very refined thought. God may not be interested in lengthy dialogue but may rather be impressing upon us a single thought. This single thought can be communicated in countless ways, but one way may be in the crafting of a simple but memorable phrase we carry with us. The thought or phrase may not have the artistic quality of words from a trained poet, but if this phrase is birthed from authentic conversation with God, it will be worthy of the work it takes to get to it. The phrase may come in a single sitting, or it may take weeks or months. Either way, if we allow our journal to be a place where we not only pour ourselves out to God, but also refine a few chosen words, we will discover those thoughts from God that carry great significance and are not forgotten with the turn of a page.

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Carry the Conversation

This third and final suggestion is simply an acknowledgment that a conversation with God need not end. We error when we divide our spiritual life from the rest of our lives. These *Conversation with God* exercises are meant to inspire our conversations with God and not encapsulate them. Yes, set aside focused time to converse with God, this is critical, but view these as the beginning of the conversation. This is not to say we must keep the conversation going as if we're with a friend with whom silence is awkward, but it is to say that God is not interested in being compartmentalized. When we cut off our prayer life from the rest of our lives, we may miss out on the more profound moments with God as he speaks into the daily realities of our lives. In an effort to inspire this, consider making the Scripture memory note cards highly assessable throughout your days. As helpful as it is to review these thoughts in set aside times, it's greatest power will be when we remind ourselves of God's voice while riding the ups and downs of any given day.

MORPH ME

What follows is a brief Morph Me exercise to create a personalized plan for your conversations with God. This plan is important. There is no gain in reading about a conversation with God if we then fail to actually do it. Of all the things you could gain from this Morph experience, the current module and the modules that follow, the deepening of your passion for God's presence transcends all else. Yes, you could cruise through these readings and exercises and learn a few things, but if you miss God's presence, the time and energy invested will be wasted. If we are to morph, we must be active, and this must not be another kick. Scripture tells us it is "*the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out the matter is the glory of kings*" (Proverbs 25:2, NIV). God has purpose in the process. His voice is stunning, but it must be sought. It is ours to search out, to discover, to embrace, and to experience. It is when we do this that we discover the strength of this sword, in the hands of the Spirit, as the Spirit reveals the "*thoughts and attitudes of our hearts*" (Hebrews 4:12).

Where did we begin?

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

We're to take care of our hearts. Our hearts drive our lives. Now we hear the heart experiences liberation by running to God's commands.

There's something in this we must understand.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

We don't like rules. Commandments don't exactly turn our cranks. They often come in thick books with dreaded detail: covenants for the neighborhood, regulations for the football league, codes of conduct for the university. Yuk. They don't inspire us. They don't speak to our souls. They don't beckon us to read and re-read.

Christ took a different approach. Profundity is often found in the simple. Christ made it simple.

All God's commands hang on two hooks.

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV).

Love God. Love People.

That's profound. There's something in that. What is it? Let's get after *Love God*.

Why love God? Take a step back for a moment. As profound as it sounds, it's also odd. Why would God command us to love him? Is he some sort of insecure God wishing the world would just give him some attention? Why look to the people you've created and demand their love?

GOD'S COMPETITION

To get after these questions, consider another odd thought. For a moment, consider God's competition.

Competition?

Yes. Competition.

There are obvious contenders for God's greatest competition. What might we love rather than love God? Christ said we're to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. What else might capture the attention of our heart, soul, and mind?

How about money?

There's no question, money captures the imagination of hearts and dreams. Money gains the full and undivided attention of souls and minds.

What will it be?

Love Almighty God or Love the almighty dollar.

Christ paired the two...

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24, NIV).

THE SEARCH FOR [SECURITY]

Notice the word *love*?

Why do people *love* money?

A list of reasons could be considered. Somewhere near the top of the list would be something about *security, personal well-being*. Money is loved because it offers a degree of security.

Let's evaluate this competition of God's though.

Scripture is not so naive as to belittle money. Contrary to popular opinion, Scripture reveals a great deal of street wisdom regarding money. Much more is addressed than just giving money away. We're told how to make it, spend it, save it, use it, and yes, give it. We're told that money will be involved in everything we do (Ecclesiastes 10:19). The most noble of causes involve a budget. Money is neither good nor bad. Like all tools it's a matter of how it's used. Money is often used for great good in the world.

But what happens when financial security is our ultimate security? What happens when it's the foundation of our lives? What happens when we love money in a manner that only God must be loved?

When we do this, money is effectively our god.

The result?

Something deep within us knows we're vulnerable.

Why?

Because there's never enough money to bring impenetrable security. There's always something, someone, somehow that could cause us to lose it all. There are countless needs money can't meet. Money is loved for the security it brings, but there are holes in that security that breed a great deal of insecurity.

FRIENDS

'Certainly not me, I'd never be so greedy as to make money my god. I saw previous generations do that. I'm not buying into it.'

How about friends?

Friends?

Yes. Friends.

But friends are real. Friends are important. Friends give life meaning and purpose. Even more, the second greatest command is to love people.

True. Right. Good.

Dangerous.

What happens when ultimate security is wrapped up in finding the ideal spouse? Is our well-being resting in the hands of a strong relational world? Is life finally secure when we have friends down the street, a spouse in bed next to us, and kids in the back seat?

It's clear how money can effectively become our god; relationships hold the same potential. We've all experienced friends that cling to us in a way that doesn't feel healthy. We've witnessed parents whose identity is wrapped up in their children. Maybe we've been that friend or parent. Maybe we've looked to others for something they just weren't capable of giving. We hoped they'd satisfy something in us they just were not capable of satisfying.

What's that about?

Make a friend into a god and the friendship will be terribly disappointing. Turn a spouse into a god and the marriage will suffer, if it makes it at all. Squeeze prospective spouses too tight and they run for the hills.

Why?

We instinctively know we're not qualified to do the god-thing.

Yes, we were made to be in relationship with others, but others were not made to be god.

A friend? Yes.

A god? No.

Why love God? Many reasons. Here's one...

We love those things we trust.

Our ultimate trust is our god.

THE HOOK

Christ said this command, this command to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, is a hook upon which other commands hang. Consider another command. Consider the first command of the Ten Commandments.

You shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3, TNIV).

Fascinating. Do you see it? It's virtually the same command as 'Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' When we love something else with all our heart, soul, and mind what have we done? Put simply, we've placed another god before God.

So is God's command for us to love him an indication of his insecurity? That seems unlikely. Might it be that God has our best interest in mind? Could it be God longs to see us build our lives upon a foundation that is worthy of being a foundation? Could it be that one expression of loving God as our God is letting God be our ultimate security, and God knows other forms of security leave us vulnerable?

It's yours to answer.

Let's go deeper.

Let's consider a scenario. It's just one example. Thousands could be listed. The circumstances may differ. The result is quite common.

Call it *The Snap*.

THE SNAP

Dad opens the door. He's greeted by a couple of kids he loves more than he dreamed possible. They're bouncing. They're filled with life. They're thrilled by his presence. He laughs.

It takes mere minutes. Seemingly nothing prompted it, but it happens.

Snap!

The kids weren't exactly behaving, but the response is way out of proportion.

Mom cringes. Dad retreats. Something's off.

THE SEARCH FOR [SECURITY]

As he changes out of work clothes he whispers a quiet prayer, *'God, why did I do that? What's wrong with me? I love those kids? Why did I snap?'* The thoughts continue as he reenters reality. His mind goes back to work.

It wasn't a bad day. It wasn't a good day. It was just a day.

And therein lies the problem. It was just a day. Any old day. Now he's home. Now they're dancing and screaming and tugging and wanting. But it was just a day. A nothing-lost-nothing-gained-kind-of-day.

But he longs for gain.

He's nervous.

No, he's scared.

Is his work ever going to deliver the life he really wants? Is his job ever going to do what he really wants it to do? Is he ever going to be at a place where the money is real money, the respect is real respect, the rewards are real rewards.

It was just another day.

It takes time. Eventually he identifies a nagging question: Is his work trustworthy? Can his work be trusted to deliver what he wants it to deliver?

We can't answer this question for him, but we can make a couple observations.

First, maybe the frustration is legitimate. Maybe he's undervalued, underutilized, and underpaid. It happens all the time. It happens to most everyone.

Second, maybe the frustration is *not* legitimate. Maybe he's looking to his job to deliver something this job, or the next job, or any other job will never deliver. Maybe he's looking to it to bring ultimate security, ultimate satisfaction, ultimate meaning. If so, the job's not the problem. The job's doing precisely what a job should do. And more importantly, it's not doing what a job will never do.

It's not being God.

Snap.

GOD OF OUR SECURITY

Let's come full circle. Let's pull this one together by listening closely to Scripture's counsel.

Three key passages.

First... *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"* (Proverbs 4:23, NIV). Our lives are driven by our desires. We must protect and be aware of our desires.

Second... *"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free"* (Psalm 119:32, TNIV). Guarding our hearts involves listening to the commands of the creator of our hearts. These commands are designed to liberate.

Third... *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment..."* (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV). The command to love God, among other things, is a command to let God be God of our security, the center of our *trust*. Our hearts, our lives, our beings, we are designed to love something, to put something at the center of our trust. Whatever is at that center, that job, that bank account, that relationship, it is effectively our god. They are not wrong things, they are often good things, but they are misplaced. Rival gods, God's competition, are insufficient to truly be God.

DISSONANCE & RESONANCE

Remember dissonance? Remember resonance? Dissonance is the result of clashing sounds. Resonance is the result of sounds working together.

We noted previously ...

Resonance is when our stated desires are a healthy expression of our deepest desires. They work together. They resonate. Dissonance is when our stated desires are an insufficient expression of our deepest desires. They clash. They create dissonance.

Dissonance is also found when we instinctively know something about our stated trust. We're trusting in something to deliver true security. We look to this thing, this opportunity, this being to bring us the kind of security we were designed to want. The desire is good and legitimate. But dissonance comes when we instinctively know the limitations of the object of our trust. We entrust ourselves, our wellbeing, but we instinctively know there's legitimate vulnerability. The search for security, the place where we put our trust, is one of several places where dissonance and resonance are clearly seen.

HEARTSTORMING FOR SECURITY

In our previous *Morph Me* section we identified desires and sought to trace those desires down to more deeply rooted desires. We grouped these desires and then used the "Why?" question to go from a simple desire to the deep desire driving the surface desire. No two people's pages will look exactly alike, but it's not unusual to have at least one grouping of desires to have something to do with *security*. To be human is to have a deeply rooted desire for security. Even those with a strong bent toward extreme risk or radical adventure have their own form of security; there is a certain kind of life they desire and protect. When the high risk and high adventure person sees his or her passion at risk of expression, their desire to secure their life is clearly seen.

This desire for security, in its varying forms, is healthy and to be expected. Problems arise not from the presence of this desire, but from how the desire is expressed. What do we grab hold of for security? What do we make our ultimate trust? Is it truly qualified to give the security for which we long? Or is it a partial fit at best?

Partial fits create dissonance.

"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (Psalm 119:32, NIV). Might we safely paraphrase this verse that initially seemed like such an odd coupling of the words *commands* and *freedom*. Hear it with a broader perspective: *I run in the path of your commands, the command to love God with all my heart, and soul, and mind, because I want a heart that resonates, I want a heart fulfilled in a trustworthy God.*

So now it's time to go deep.

It's time to get personal.

It's time to carefully and prayerfully do that thing we are to do *above all else*.

The pages that follow facilitate an honest consideration of our hearts. You will be encouraged to consider your heart's desire for security. You'll then be encouraged to talk with God and each other about your discoveries.

Revel in these exercises.

Linger and listen.

Let God's Spirit speak to you and guide you as you consider your person, your God, and your heart.