



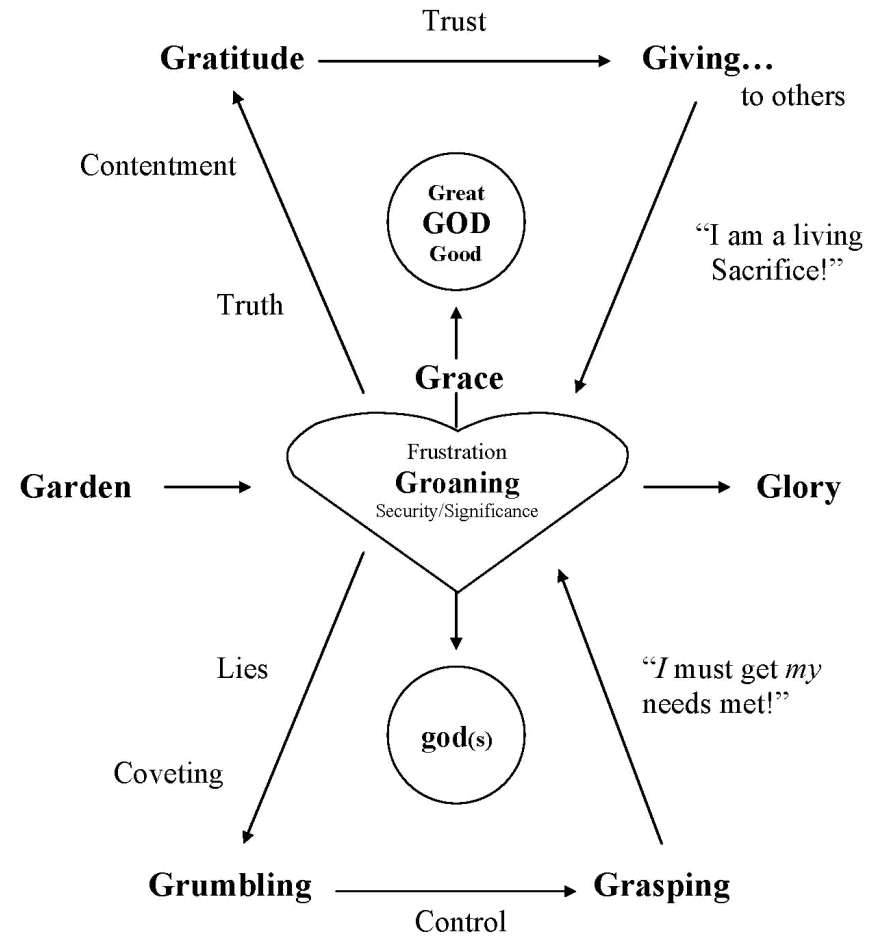
# TRUE NORTH

CHOOSING GOD IN THE  
FRUSTRATIONS OF LIFE

SMALL GROUPS  
DISCUSSION GUIDE

# The 12 Gs of Spiritual Formation

How everyday problems can direct you to God



## Staying faithful

Remember: This world is not home. To stay faithful in the groaning of life we must live for and wait for the day of glory, when we'll see Jesus run toward us with open arms saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21 NLT).

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot

## Questions for discussion

1. Do you approach your church, small group, job, marriage, friendships, or other relationships primarily as a giver or taker (grasper)? How do you handle things when you don't get what you want from those groups or relationships? Rate yourself on a scale of one to ten. If a ten means, "I'm a living sacrifice," and a one means, "It's all about my comfort," what number would you say best describes the way you live?
2. Whose "window" do you need to learn to look out more often? How will learning to see life from their perspective aid you in giving to them?
3. Is there anyone you need to forgive so that you can begin to give to them? What do you think giving to this person might look like? Do they need more grace or truth or both? Why?
4. Where do you think God might be calling you to take more risks in giving in order to love him and others? Describe a moderate risk, a big risk. What fears might be holding you back from taking these risks?
5. Share a time when you experienced joy as the result of giving. How did your giving impact others as well as yourself?

## Notes:

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# Session One

## Our Calling, Challenge and Choice

**Our calling- “Live a life of love.” Eph 5:1**  
“Always making disciples.”

Being a disciple or follower of Jesus is all about heart. God wants the affections of our heart.

Heart: Desires/Longings/Dreams  
Beliefs/Values  
Emotions  
Choices/Behavior

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37)

“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (Ephesians 4:1-2)

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love.” (Ephesians 4:31-5:1)

Our challenge - Loving God and others in the face of tension, frustration and disappointment (groaning). This is not easy.

“In this life you will have trouble.” John 16:33  
“Life is difficult.” *The Road Less Traveled*

Flat tires, flooded basements, wounding words, loss of a job, broken body, a troubled marriage. “Trouble” comes in all shapes and sizes.

Causes of groaning:

- Our self (our flesh/sin, weaknesses)
- People (personality differences, their sin)
- Circumstances (slow traffic, computer crash...)
- Natural disasters (tornados, floods...)
- Health (Cancer, aging)

### The Virtue of Loneliness

When we relate with family, friends, co-workers, cashiers, waitresses and gas station attendants, God asks us to consciously and consistently to do what does not come naturally- we are to live a life of love (Eph. 5:1-2). We are to develop the strength of character such as humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness that enables us to stay committed to loving others from our heart even when others sin against us or seem unconcerned about our struggles. God’s lofty command to always love him and others isn’t easy. We stubbornly demand that others meet our needs. We so want to turn legitimate desires into idolatrous needs.

Yet the need to be cared for and to rest in the love and protection of someone stronger than you and me is such a deep and legitimate longing of the human heart. Because this longing to abandon ourselves to someone is so strong, we feel a natural resistance, if not irritation, at the call to faithfully give to others. Yet being faithful is exactly what living a life of love requires.

This is our struggle - The more we love and serve God by giving to others, the more painfully aware we will become of our deep desire to have someone care for us. Living a life of love brings the joy of fruitfulness but it also brings us into the deep and profound experience of loneliness. Here’s our dilemma- Even if we could abandon ourselves to another human being, it wouldn’t work because we’re all self-centered. We’re often preoccupied with our own lives and we lack the understanding that is needed to fully care for and touch the deepest longings of one another’s heart.

Therefore, we must become men and women who not only know about God but who know him. The path to knowing God always takes us through the desert of profound loneliness. We will realize a longing to be loved and respected that no human being can come close to touching fully and consistently. And as we continue to pour our lives into the lives of others and depend on no one to meet our needs, when we humbly and gratefully accept the littlest encouragements that people do give us, then our souls will feel their deepest loneliness. It is in these desert times, when we refuse to grasp for relief and we abandon ourselves to God alone that we will know him deeply. And then godly character will grow.

Jesus gave us a promise. He said if we will obey him (love God and love others), he and his father will come to us and disclose themselves to us. They will make their home in us. That is worth living for. That is what we need in order to be strong and courageous men and women who love well. It is then we become the shelter from the wind, a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and a shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land (Isaiah 32:1-2).

This led to, among other things, taking greater responsibility for the family finances and being willing to discipline the children. It meant leading in prayer and getting the family up for church instead of sleeping in. The shift was difficult for the whole family at first, but over time they began to experience the fruit of Greg's giving as he became the leader of the household. His children began to have greater respect for him as their father, and after years of fiscal responsibility and hard work, they were able to climb out of debt. This only happened as Greg was willing to start depending upon the power of God by stepping out into an arena of life where he felt neither competent nor confident. He did it for the sake of love for God and love for others.

Spirit-led giving will always include some element of risk because we are addressing others needs while learning to trust God with ours.

### **A word about boundaries**

**Giving with truth and love** Psalm 62: 11-12; John 1:14

Our strength can be our greatest weakness when we relate with just truth or love. We can do one or the other on our own (We become dominants or doormats). It takes the power of the Spirit to live in balance of truth and love.

### **Bond servants and stewards** Exodus 21:1-6

When we see ourselves as God's grateful, willing servants, we come to understand that we are also stewards of all that we have and all that we are. In biblical times, it was common for a master who had to travel to a distant place to leave the management of his entire estate in the hands of trusted servants. Even though they did not own the property, they were responsible to see that it flourished and prospered in the master's absence. We have been entrusted with our lives, time, talents, abilities, and money to be managed for the Master and for the sake of his kingdom. *Everything* we have is really God's. Because of the Master's love for us, we voluntarily surrender our freedom to use these gifts for our own prosperity and pleasure, and instead use them to build up the church and bring the message of Christ's love to a dying world.

I once heard Don Cousins comment that while many organizations in the world have volunteers, the church has servants. Volunteers may give their time and resources to support an organization, servants serve a master—a Person.

"All creation has been *groaning* as in pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering." (Romans 8: 22-23)

"The creation was subjected to *frustration*, not by its choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope." (verse 20)

Suffering is not a sign of immaturity. Deep faith, hope and love are forged in the fires of pain and adversity, not from a comfortable life. Dying to self is a painful process. The Psalms have many stories of godly people who struggled. But they used their problems to find God instead of using God to solve their problems.

Since our goal is to be whole hearted followers of Jesus we must learn how to use our groaning to help us know God and become grateful, giving, children of God.

### **Our choice- Will we go north or south?**

When we experience pain and suffering we either turn toward God (north) or away from him (south).



Two battles in loving:

*Inside*—How do I come to *want* to love someone who hurt me?

*Outside*—What does it look like to love people who let me down?

Next 11 weeks we'll discuss the biblical paradigm in True North.

### **Group discussion**

1. What common frustrations, disappointments or challenges do you face in everyday life?
2. What has helped you love God and others in the midst of difficulty?
3. Do you typically go north or south when you experience groaning?

## Take it home

Reflect through the week as you experience challenges. Do you turn north or south? Be prepared (not required) to give examples.

### Notes:

While giving doesn't always have to be a white-knuckled roller-coaster ride, true repentant giving often leaves us feeling vulnerable to the groaning we fear. If we take the risk to give our money, we may come up short for things we want. If we risk giving our time or our talents, we may fail, experience criticism, or feel unappreciated. If we risk letting go of control, we may be hurt or disappointed. If we risk giving our love, we may be misunderstood, rejected, or taken advantage of. People may take what we give and never reciprocate.

Love involves risk.

For Patti, repentant giving meant beginning to be more honest with others about her desires, feelings, failures, and limitations. Most of her life had been spent seeking to meet her own needs for security by always appearing strong and by pleasing and coming through for others. The thought of telling certain people in her life no, or of asking for help with projects and responsibilities caused her anxiety. She felt vulnerable and weak when she let others know her needs. Yet when she was overwhelmed with trying to meet the expectations of those around her, she was secretly resentful of anyone who would ask for more. As she grew in her relationship with Christ, Patti came to see the idolatry behind her determination to have the approval of certain people which led her to constantly work herself to a frazzle in order to please them. As she shifted her dependence for her ultimate need for approval to the Lord, she was able to risk the disapproval and rejection of those who had come to expect constant compliance to their wishes. Surprisingly, as Patti found freedom to say no, she also found freedom to say yes in a new way. Though on the surface it looked like she was giving less, in reality she was giving more. Now what she gave was given freely and cheerfully, not under compulsion or out of guilt or fear. Her giving began to be giving that brought glory to God. Her courage to say no when it was called for drew others to respect her, and enabled them to see her as a person they could trust to give an honest answer.

For Greg, Spirit-led giving meant becoming a servant leader to his family. Like Moses, he wanted God to send somebody else, but he, like all husbands and fathers, was the chosen man for the job. Though he had always been competent and well respected in his work life, his pattern of passivity and avoidance at home had created a lot of pain, frustration, and loneliness for his wife and had helped foster a spirit of rebellion in his children. For Greg to begin moving north in repentance meant risking failure and rejection as he stepped into the lives of his family members with greater involvement and direction.

Of course, the better we know another person and their story, the clearer we can see out their window and the more specifically we can respond to their needs with prayer, love, and truth. There should be at least a few people in our lives whose stories we have taken the time to know in depth—our spouses, children, close friends, and small group members. What people or events have impacted their lives the most deeply for ill or for good? What lies are they tempted to believe about God, themselves, and others? What helps them to believe God's truth? How can we best be used of God to communicate that truth to them? Learning to ask good questions about such matters should not be left to the counselors and therapists among us, but should be the practice of every Spirit-filled person.

**We can only give to the degree we forgive**

We'll forgive as we realize how much we've been forgiven. Matt.18:21-36; Eph 4:32

How do you *evaluate* the groaning of your life? You can't give when you're grasping and hanging on to unforgiveness.

A (painful event) +B (evaluation of that event)=C (emotional response)

Forgiveness moves us past reacting to the sin of another. It enables us to see their deepest need and responding to it from our hearts. Forgiveness enables us to have compassion for people who are lost in their own self-centered worlds, going south, grumbling and grasping to make a life for themselves.

**Four ways to give (not an exhaustive list)**

- Prayer
- Random acts of kindness
- Intentionally pursuing others
- Learning to respond redemptively to conflict and offense

**Giving involves risk**

Growing in other-centered giving often means moving away from what is safe, easy, and comfortable. Just as grasping involves attempting to control people or circumstances to minimize our groaning, giving often involves relinquishing our need to control while submitting to, and trusting in God's control, provision, and timing. Trusting God instead of trying to control others often feels risky.

## Session Two Summary of the 12 Gs

**Introduction**

Choosing north in a southbound world requires intentionality. We must take to heart the ancient adage: "Know thyself." Jesus puts the same idea differently: Matthew 7:3.

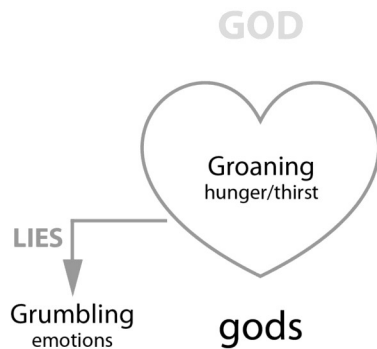
Read and reflect on Proverbs 16:32. The true hero is the one who can subdue and control his spirit (which is a fruit of the Spirit) by turning north and abiding in Jesus (See also James 3).

**A summary of True North (12G paradigm)**

Between our banishment from the *garden* and our future home in *glory*, the Bible says we groan (Rom. 8:22-23). *Groaning* means we experience frustration and disappointment every day- flat tires, flooded basements, wounding words, the loss of a job, a broken body, a troubled marriage. Why does God allow us to be frustrated? While we legitimately hunger and thirst for security, love and purpose in life, we do not naturally depend on God for those needs. Because we are fallen, and therefore foolish, we often forsake God and depend more on people and things of this world to meet our needs. We're often blind to how we do this. Consequently, people and things become our false *gods*. God loves us too much to let our false gods work. Therefore, he frustrates our efforts to find life in these things so we will learn to humbly and gratefully depend on him for the longings of our hearts. The experience of frustration is a sign of God's gracious pursuit of us (Hos. 2:5-7). God is a jealous lover who's determined to win our hearts' devotion.

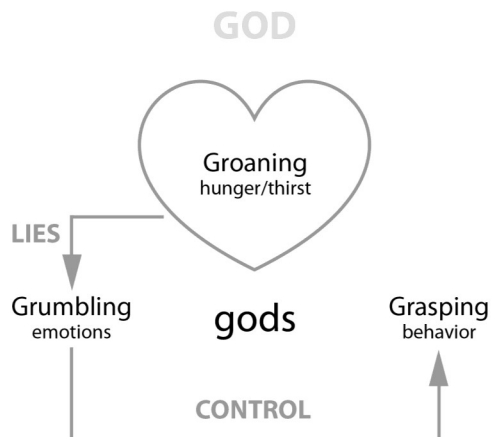


When God frustrates our efforts to find life in our false gods, we typically don't turn back to him. Instead, we forsake God and go south into *grumbling*. Grumbling involves emotions like unrighteous anger, worry, jealousy and self-pity.



Those emotions serve as signals. Just as a smoke alarm alerts us to fire, grumbling emotions alert us to the fact that we believe lies about where security, love and meaning are found. That is, emotions come from what we believe. When we grumble, we believe that something or someone other than God, and what he has provided, should meet our needs.

If we don't learn how to stop, tune into these emotional signals, and turn back to Jesus for our needs, these destructive emotions will influence our behavior. We will be moved to do something. Yelling, hitting, manipulating, avoiding, overeating, people-pleasing, gossiping, overspending, or viewing pornography are a few examples. Call such behavior *grasping*. We are grasping for life from people and things of this world. Grasping behavior is self-centered. It seeks to get our hunger and thirst for love and respect satisfied by controlling and manipulating people and circumstances instead of humbly trusting and depending on God. Furthermore, grasping behavior hurts people. When people fail to meet our needs, we verbally attack or emotionally withdraw from them. Instead of loving God and loving others, we're forsaking God and manipulating others.



But the long-anticipated trip proved a disaster: her father behaved true to form by grouching at length about the ugly, garbage-littered creek by the side of the road. She, on the other hand, saw no litter whatsoever in the beautiful, rustic, unspoiled stream. She could find no way to respond and eventually, lapsing into silence, they spent the remainder of the trip looking away from each other.

Later, she made the same trip alone and was astounded to note that there were *two* streams—one on each side of the road. “This time I was the driver,” she said sadly, “and the stream I saw through my window on the driver’s side was just as ugly and polluted as my father had described it.” But by the time she had learned to look out her father’s window, it was too late—her father was dead and buried.

That story has remained with me, and on many occasions I have reminded myself and those I care for... “Learn to look out the other’s window. Try to see the world as the other sees it.” The woman who told me this story died a short time later of breast cancer, and I regret that I cannot tell her how helpful her story has been over the years, to me, my students, and many others.

Growth is enhanced if you enter accurately into the other’s world. People profit enormously simply from the experience of being fully seen and fully understood.

Jesus saw the world as other people saw it:

“When he *saw the crowds*, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’ Matt. 9:36-38

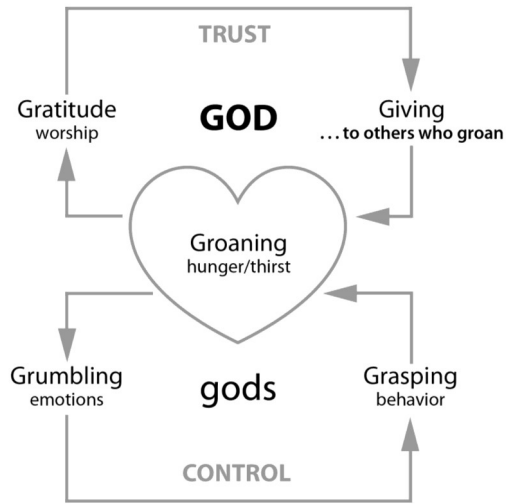
All around us people are hurting more than we know. The people we come into contact with on a daily basis—whether spouse, friend, cashier, custodian, pastor, or prima donna—each have a story, a window through which they view and respond to life. Often we simply react to the ways they hurt, offend, or inconvenience us without considering what might be at the heart of their behavior. Pain never excuses sin, but it’s often behind it because in a fallen world, everyone’s story involves groaning of some kind. Though there are times that we need to confront and hold others accountable for their sin, when we allow ourselves to imagine the world from their perspective, we are much less apt to be harsh and judgmental and more prone to be compassionate and tenderhearted.

## Session Eleven

### Giving to Others Who Groan

#### Review

Gratitude comes as we receive all God has given us. Joy comes as we gratefully give it to others.



#### Giving is the fruit of a grateful heart

“Some people are always greedy for more but the righteous love to give.”  
Proverbs 21:26 NLT

It’s easy to grasp and approach life, marriage, church and small group as consumers, asking, “What’s in it for me?” Humble, grateful servants ask, “How can I give back?” They become living sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

Read and reflect on Luke 7:36-47. What does this say about repentance and gratitude that leads to lavish gift giving?

The more we understand the gospel, the more we’ll *want* to “live a life of love” (Ephesians 4:32-5:1-2).

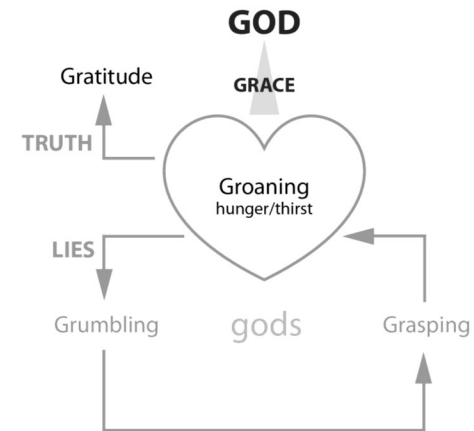
#### Learning to look out the other person’s window

By Irvin Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy*-

Decades ago I saw a patient with breast cancer, who had, throughout adolescence, been locked in a long, bitter struggle with her nay saying father. Yearning for some form of reconciliation, for a new, fresh beginning to their relationship, she looked forward to her father’s driving her to college—a time when she would be alone with him for several hours.

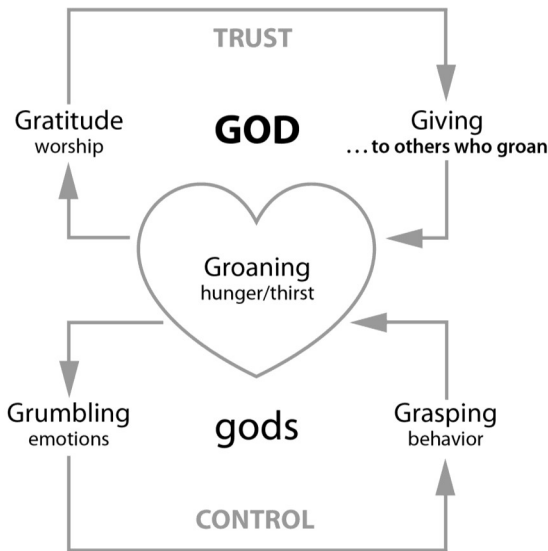
As the Holy Spirit shows us how we forsake God through our grumbling and grasping and how we damage people in the process, we become broken and humble before God. We see our need for forgiveness. Forgiveness is rooted in God’s *grace*. Grace means “unmerited favor.” While God resists (frustrates) the proud, he gives grace (favor) to the humble person who turns to him for help (James 4:6). This is the beginning of genuine change. We’ll never change until we desperately and humbly turn north to God for help. We turn to God not to help us get people or circumstances to change, but to make God alone the source of our security so we can glorify him by loving others—even our enemies.

As we learn how to humbly and intentionally turn north to God and depend on him alone for the hunger and thirst of our souls, we grow in *gratitude*. As we believe the truth of Christ’s sufficiency, we become grateful worshippers of God for who he is and for all he does for us.



While we legitimately desire and enjoy the love and respect people freely give us, we come to see that Jesus is all we *need* to be secure and to live life well. His transcendent power, his lavish love, and his enabling presence are more than enough to sustain us in the groaning of life. Through daily processing of life’s struggles, intimacy with God grows over time. We grow in peace and contentment in Jesus.

Gratitude and dependence on God help us grow in confidence and self-esteem. We are God’s dearly loved children, known and kept by him. Trusting in God’s *goodness* and *greatness* leads to *giving* to others who groan. We want to live for God. We want to love and serve others just as God has lavishly loved and served us. We become “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1). Everyday becomes a life-giving adventure of learning to walk with God and love others. This is the source of true security, significance, and meaning in life. It’s the life we were created for.



Of course, coming to live this way is not a one-time process. Choosing God in the groaning of life requires us to be intentional every day, all day. Every minute of every day we choose to go south toward grumbling and grasping when we face frustration and disappointment or north to God. Living with Jesus at the center of our lives enables us to reveal God's greatness and goodness by gratefully giving to others who groan.

**Notes:**

**Questions for discussion**

1. How would your life be different if you practiced "the discipline of noticing"—seeing and thanking God for all his ordinary gifts each day? Make a list of those gifts.
2. Do you typically depend on natural gratitude or gracious gratitude for your sense of well-being? Why do you think that is true? What are the consequences of depending on one or the other?
3. If a quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the true test of your dependence on God, what does that test reveal about you? Are you typically living north or south?
4. Is your life characterized by gratitude that comes from contentment in Jesus or by grumbling that covets something in his place? Why is that true? What will help you take your next step in experiencing the gracious gratitude that comes from depending on Christ alone for your longing to be secure and have eternal significance?

**Notes:**

Aging is inevitable, while becoming mature is uncertain...Growing up, as opposed to merely growing old, compels us to embrace both joy and sorrow. To mature we must learn to suffer and not yield or turn hard. To mature we must also learn to engage joy and not demand that it hang around, nor fabricate a counterfeit when it departs. There are many other ways to measure maturity, perhaps, but they all dance to the music of sorrow and joy. How we embrace—or refuse to hold—sorrow and joy will define our lives. If we capitulate to sorrow, we will become cowards. If we allow sorrow to make us hard, then we will grow cold and eventually cruel. If we demand that joy remain constant, we will become self-consumed. And if we create a counterfeit joy, our lives will be riddled with impulsivity and addictions. Life demands that we either grow or stagnate.

-Dan Allender, *How Children Raise Parents*

### Gracious Gratitude

We naturally praise what we most deeply value. If the supreme value of our heart's affections is on one thing—God—our lives will be characterized by gratitude and praise because we can never lose him. It's good and right to seek and find our deepest contentment, joy, and personal satisfaction *in God*. That is the number one goal of walking with God. The second is giving to others. But true, sacrificial giving to others flows from gratitude for who God is and for all he's done (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:1-2).

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." John Piper

Read Psalm 73:25-26, 28; Habakkuk 3:17-18; Phil. 4:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:18

It is the real evidence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Gracious gratitude can grow in the midst of pain, trouble, and distress. We hear it in the intimate whispers of the psalmist who longs to know God more deeply even as enemies surround him. We see it in the otherwise inexplicable surety of Job: "Though You slay me, yet will I trust in You." We feel it in the apostle Paul's contentment regardless of his circumstances. If threatened with death, he says: "Fine. To die is gain!" If kept alive, fine again: "For me to live is Christ!" He was unstoppable, unquenchable, full of thanks and peace and joy, not because of what he had, but Who he knew.

Ellen Vaughn, *Radical Gratitude*

## Session Three Groaning

### The Garden and Glory

*The vision for wholeness and peace...is wonderfully gathered up in the Hebrew word shalom...a full-bodied concept that resonates with wholeness, unity, balance. Gathering in (but much broader than) peace, it means a harmonious, caring community with God at its center as the prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant. This great vision of shalom begins and ends our Bible. In the creation narrative, God brought order and harmony out of chaos; in the Apocalypse of John, we have the glorious wholeness of a new heaven and a new earth.*

Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*



### Groaning (Romans 8:22-23; Genesis 3:16-19)

Birth pains

Frustration (Romans 8:20)

Why does a good God intentionally frustrate his dearly loved children? Because of *longings, lies* and *God's relentless love*.

*Longings* (Isa. 55:1-3; John 4:13-14; John 6:35; Rev. 22:17)

Examples (Sandy; Little girl bakes cookies; Worst sin on big screen)

The questions everybody asks:

1. Do I have what it takes?
2. Am I desirable? Will anyone choose me?

Our hunger and thirst is the basis for God's invitation to come to him.

*Lies* (Romans 1:25)

We're born believing lies

Who or what do we believe can satisfy our hunger and thirst?  
(Psalm 63:1)

Needs vs. Desires (Painting the garage story)

Broken cisterns (Jer. 2:13)

*God's relentless love*

*In our desire to be 'as gods'—a lasting deformity impressed in our nature by original sin—we...demand that all our wishes be satisfied and that our will should never be frustrated or opposed.* Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life*

The danger of getting our own way. (Deut 8:11-14; Hosea 13:6; Psalm 73:4-11)

God's severe mercy

Frustration is meant to drive us back to God. (Genesis 3:16-19; Hosea 2:5b-7)

It's okay to lament

Lament means voicing our pain and grief to God. (Ps 6:6; 22:1)

The ability to cry and grieve is a gift from God.

The lament psalms give us language to express our groaning to God. Most of the psalms are laments.

Lament/Groaning is sorrow mixed with faith (Ps 22:2-4, 23-24).  
Grumbling (topic next week) is sorrow mixed with unbelief.

### Questions for reflection/discussion

1. List two relationships from which you try to get satisfaction for the hunger and thirst in your soul. Examples:

"I need to get my husband to share his heart with me."

"I need my wife to be more sexually responsive to me."

"I need to get my boss to affirm me."

"The discipline of noticing"

To notice something—to truly pay attention—is a powerful thing. Children demand it. Spouses feel hurt without it...The practice of noticing is a skill. It involves learning to pay attention to gifts that we otherwise take for granted. Stop for a moment and try it. The breath you just took, the way your eyes are reading these words, the working of your mind to understand and learn—*notice them*. They are not accidents. Nor are they entitlements. They are gracious gifts. And what's even more amazing is that their Giver is lovingly present with you even as you are experiencing them.

The sight of a garden blooming in a riot of color, a cold glass of water on a hot afternoon, an encouraging word from a coworker, a warm blanket on a chilly night, the taste of your favorite food, a long conversation with a good friend. All ordinary, but all grace nonetheless. Train yourself to notice, to pay attention, to become absorbed in the grace of your Shepherd. John Ortberg

### Two types of gratitude

Natural gratitude is what we "naturally" feel and express as a result of a good, pleasant experiences. Gracious gratitude is rooted in our experience of God's grace, independent of externals (Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*). It's important to know the difference between the two or we'll likely become disillusioned with God.

### Natural Gratitude

The material world is good. God created all good things for us to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). Material things are good, but they're a limited good. Richard Foster has well said that "to deny the goodness of the created order is to be an ascetic. To deny the limitation of the created order is to be a materialist."

Enjoy God's gifts but hold them loosely. They can be lost- a cancerous tumor, the loss of a job, the betrayal of a spouse or friend. Our core contentment will be shattered if we're depending on these things for our well being. "The greatest enemy of joy is fear," says Mike Mason. "Nothing can be deeply enjoyed for fear it will soon be gone."

Natural gratitude will not keep us faithful in the groaning of life. To become mature in Christ we must learn to live with joy and sorrow.

## Contentment vs. coveting

Right in the middle of God's lavish generosity, the Serpent sought to breed discontent and coveting in Eve's heart.

He drew her attention to the one thing she couldn't have, causing her to desire something more than God and what he provided. The Evil One fostered a spirit of rebellion within her. The Enemy seeks to breed the same spirit in you and me. And our culture, which is under Satan's dominion, constantly tells us we deserve something more. We live in constant tension with the Spirit and our flesh, with truth and lies. We live in a world system that works to breed discontent and coveting instead of thankfulness to our Creator.

The beginning of men's rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart... The rebellion is a deliberate refusal to be the creature before the Creator, to the extent of being thankful. Love must carry with it a "Thank you," not in a superficial or "official" way, but in being thankful and saying in the mind or with the voice, "Thank you" to God.

Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*

Gratitude is the sign of a humble and surrendered heart.

### Take this test

How can we know if we are coveting vs. content in God?

The Ten Commandments

1st Commandment—No other gods before Me.

10th commandment— No coveting.

Paraphrase: God is saying, "You have me so be content."

I think there are two practical tests as to when we are coveting against God or men; first, I am to love God enough to be contented; second, I am to love men enough not to envy...A quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God at that moment.

Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*

What breaks your contentment in God? What false hope of "life" does that hold out for you? What is one of the consequences of coveting something in place of God?

Being content in God doesn't mean we don't struggle or hurt. It means our "bottom line" is good. We have a core contentment in God.

### Growing in gratitude

Growing in gratitude requires new eyes. We must learn to see that God's good gifts surround us every day (Matt. 6:26).

"I need to get my kids to do what I say."

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

2. While we may legitimately desire cooperation from the people we've listed above, they become our false gods when we *need* them to do something for us. Which of the questions below are you trying to get answered by the two people you listed above?

#### Security

Am I desirable?

Am I wanted?

Am I loved?

Am I cherished?

#### Significance

Do I have what it takes?

Am I important?

Am I respected?

Do I matter?

3. Reflect again on Hosea 2:5b-7. Explain how God could be pursuing your heart's devotion for him by not allowing these things to "work" the way you want them to. What might God be saying to you right now?

### Notes:

## Session Four Grumbling

### Review

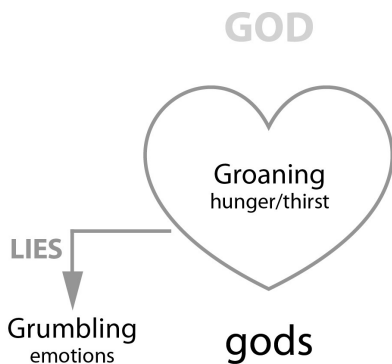
Groaning: Life doesn't work the way we want it to. God has subjected the world to frustration (Romans 8:20). Birth pains.

Life is broken. People sin against us as we sin against others. We hurt and groan. Face it and feel it. Don't minimize it. Embrace lament.

Our greatest problem is not our pain. It's how we use our pain to justify our sin of going south.

North or South? When we experience groaning we either choose to move toward God (north) or away from him (south).

How do we know which way we are going? Going south can be obvious or quite subtle.



### Grumbling: God's people going south

Israel in the wilderness: Exodus 15 & 16

Exodus 16:8- "Moses said, 'You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.'"

Any time we descend into unchecked grumbling we are ultimately questioning God's goodness and sovereignty.

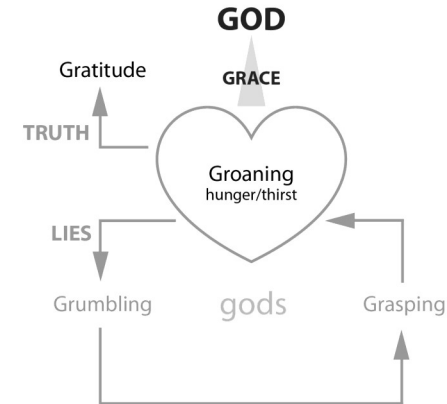
The signal: destructive emotions

We live in a world of signals that we have learned to understand and heed. God has given us an internal alarm system.

## Session Ten Gratitude

### Review

Seeing and processing your entire life in the context of True North (12Gs)



### There's always a reason to sing

When you sin, celebrate God's forgiveness. When you love well, celebrate his gracious enablement. When people wound, overlook or abandon you, celebrate his presence.

"The 'worst' is never the worst. Why? Because the Master won't ever walk out and fail to return...His stockpiles of loyal love are immense." (Lam. 3:30-32, MSG)

God forgives all our sins. He's given us a new identity; we are his dearly loved children. His Holy Spirit lives and breathes within our hearts. He speaks to us, leads us and gives us a new inclination and power to love and obey God. He's written his law on our hearts and given us the Bible. He's given us a family. We belong to his church, the people of God. He's given us the mission of Always Making Disciples. God is always with us. He's always for us. He's always ready to help us. *Nothing* can ever separate us from his love. We have security and significance in Jesus.

### Gratitude is a signal

Just as grumbling is a signal that tells us we're going south and believing lies, gratitude is a signal. It emerges as we live north and believe the truth about the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. discontent and coveting in Eve's heart.

as you talk about your wife, you come across a bit angry. Are you aware of that?"

Before giving advice (truth), ask permission before you speak. "Ruth, would it be okay if I shared some concerns about your new relationship with Bill?" This communicates respect because giving advice that isn't asked for is a form of rejection.

### Questions for discussion

1. How convinced are you that God wants to speak to you and connect with you personally? What will help you take your next step in believing this is true?
2. Do you have any secrets you are keeping from your spouse or trusted friends? Will you take the risk to be fully known with someone? This is a crucial step toward wholehearted devotion to God.
3. How has God spoken to you about the importance of meditation in his Word? Are there any changes you want/need to make in giving greater priority to connecting with God through meditation in his Word? (i.e. less TV, get up fifteen minutes earlier, etc.)
4. Are you connected with good, spiritual friends on a regular basis—friends who know each other well enough to speak the truth in love to one another? If not, will you prayerfully take the risk of asking some people to meet with you for that purpose?

### Notes:

Genesis 4:6 - "The Lord asked Cain, 'Why are you so angry?'"

Psalms 4:4 - "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your bed, search your hearts and be silent."

Ephesians 4:26 - "In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

Job one when we feel destructive emotions is this: Slow down and REFLECT.

What is the source of this feeling? We often point to the person or circumstance involved. The battle is primarily INTERNAL rather than EXTERNAL.

Grumbling emotions reveal that we have believed a lie by confusing a NEED (God himself and what he chooses to provide for me) with a DESIRE (Something I may very much want, pray for, but don't need to be a godly person).

### Destructive/Grumbling Emotions include:

*Anger, rage, irritation* : When a person or circumstance is withholding from me or getting in the way of me having what I believe I need.

*Fear, anxiety, worry*: When a person or circumstance may not provide for me something that I believe I need; when I am uncertain I can control a situation to provide the outcome that I believe I need.

*Jealousy or envy*: When someone else has something I believe I need or could take from me something I believe I need.

*Guilt, shame, self-contempt*: When I have been found to be inadequate to gain what I believe I need (note: this is different than legitimate conviction over sin).

It is important to be able to identify specifically what we falsely believe we need in order to put that lie to death and to embrace the truth.

If we fail to engage in this process, grumbling will move us toward behavior that is designed to get control over people or circumstances. We call this behavior "grasping." It will be our next topic.

### Questions for discussion

1. Talk about how you typically handle emotions like anger, fear, worry, jealousy, guilt or shame. Examples are:

I get busy or do something to distract myself from feeling them.  
I let those emotions control me and I react.  
I just tell myself it is stupid to feel this way and try to get over it.  
I ask God to take those emotions away.  
I reflect and ask the Holy Spirit to help me get to the root belief behind the emotion.  
I \_\_\_\_\_.

2. If you can, share an example of a time you mishandled your emotions in one of the ways mentioned above. What were you falsely believing you needed at that time? How did your grumbling reflect grumbling against God?

3. Why do you think it is so difficult for us to allow God to determine what we need and when we need it? How does pride play into our false beliefs about what we need?

### Notes:

### People of God

Hebrews 10:24 says, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (ESV). The word “consider” means to think deeply. The words “stir up” means, “to inflame or create fever.” Think of a poker. It stirs up hot coals, causing them to burst into flame and create heat.

*Pursue one another*—Be curious about people. I call it “redemptive curiosity.” What are the dreams, wounds, fears, struggles, and strengths of people you want friendship with? Learn to ask good questions that invite others to open up without pressuring them to do so: What frustrations are you facing in life? What do you do when you don’t get what you want? How do you go north/south?

Remember, there is always mystery to life. Pursuing and entering people’s hearts and real life struggles is messy and confusing, and for good reason. We need to depend on the Word of God and the Spirit of God to guide us. We’ll make plenty of mistakes, but we’ll never love well without taking risks and learning from our failures. God’s grace is big.

*Being known*—It’s very important to let others know our sins, strengths and weaknesses so we can pray for and encourage one another to choose God in the groaning of life. Sharing our life stories is one important way to “be known.” It’s also important to disclose any secret sins we may have with someone we trust. Secrets breed fear, hiding and loneliness which pull us to sin more.

*Celebrate the new covenant heart in one another*—Because of the miracle of the new covenant heart—the miracle of Christ living inside us—our hearts are inclined toward God rather than away from him. Therefore, when God looks at his redeemed children, he smiles with delight. When we meet with our small groups, family, or friends, we need to remember that they have a new covenant heart if they’re in Christ. Having such a view of people will help us believe in each other even when we are annoying. This has helped me relax as I relate to others.

Within every believer lies something deeper than greed, lust, jealousy, anger, arrogance, and insecurity. Stir it into flame and celebrate it when you see it. Here’s an example: “Jane, as you share your struggles with depression, I thank God for you. You’ve trusted us with that and that is a gift. Thank you! I think you took that risk because deep in your heart, you want God. That makes me worship Jesus!”

Speak the truth in love to one another—Our new heart defines us but we still go south and sin. We don’t always see how we violate the double-love command as we relate to others. While love covers a multitude of sins, there will be times when it calls us to speak the truth in love. “Bob,

## The Word of God

Proverbs 4:23 says, Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Meditation on the Word of God is perhaps the most important way to guard our heart and keep us from sin (Ps. 119:11, Ps 1:1-3, 63:6 NLT).

My practice has been...for ten years...to give myself to prayer...in the morning. Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that this my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore, to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning.

The first thing I did...was to begin to meditate on the Word of God; searching as it were into every verse, to get the blessing out of it...for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul...

Now what is the food for the inner man: not prayer, but the Word of God: and here again not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts...

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all...to ponder this...How different when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning.

George Mueller

## The Spirit of God

The Holy Spirit is a living person.

The indwelling Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control in the believer (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT).

The Holy Spirit teaches, enlightens, intercedes, empowers, cleanses, transforms, and leads us. The Spirit of God comforts us in our trials.

He guides us in our daily life. Prayerfully ask him for wisdom when you face problems and frustrations. Don't just go south into worry, panic, or anger. Stop! Ask God to help you turn north and quiet your soul. Listen for his still small voice within. Listen to his promptings. The Holy Spirit will help you respond to life's difficulties in redemptive ways.

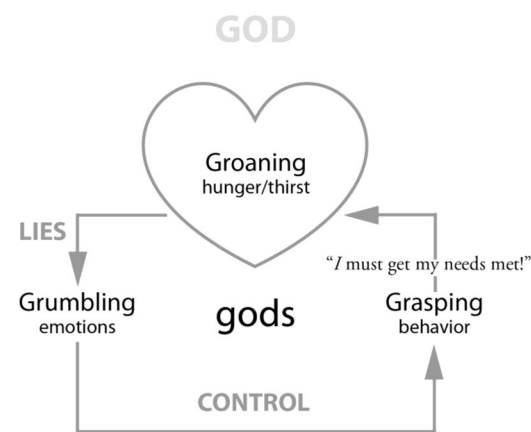
The Holy Spirit convicts us by exposing our sin (John 16:8-11).

## Session Five Grasping

### Review

Grumbling emotions include anger, worry/fear, jealousy/envy, and false guilt/shame.

Those emotions serve as signals. They tell us we believe lies about who or what should meet our needs for security and significance.



### Grumbling leads to Grasping

While grumbling is what we *feel*, grasping is what we *do* when we believe we need something other than God and whatever he provides in that situation (Remember Needs vs. Desires).

Grasping = Anything we think, do or say that's motivated by grumbling. Example: Think of a time you were angry at someone. How did your anger influence the way you related to that person?

Two basic styles of grasping: Dominant or Doormat

*Dominant*: dump emotions/thoughts, aggressive, speaks truth with little or no love, primarily anger driven

*Doormat*: stuff emotions/thoughts, passive, nice but fears speaking the truth if it could cause conflict, primarily fear driven. Most people are a combination of these two styles (i.e., one at home, one in public).

### Grasping: Our attempt to take control

We legitimately thirst for love and respect. But we're foolish. Instead of trusting in God for our needs, we grasp for control. We try to manipulate and control people, circumstances, ourselves, or even God in order to get what we want (love/respect) or avoid what we don't want (rejection, failure or disrespect). When we're grasping, we are trying to reduce or avoid the pain of groaning.

Grasping behavior says, "God and whatever he has chosen to provide is not enough to sustain me in the groaning of life. I must step outside of his provision and take control of what matters most to me."

Grasping requires an active refusal to remember God:

She [Israel] said, "I'll run after other lovers [gods] and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks [the needs of life]...she put on her earrings and jewels and went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about me," says the LORD. (Hos. 2:5, 13b NLT)

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who *suppress the truth by their wickedness*. (Romans 1:18, emphasis mine)

Six primary ways we grasp for control (There are thousands of specific ways):

1. Power
2. Performance
3. Passivity
4. Punishment
5. Possessions
6. Pleasure

Look at the stories at the end of this lesson (pgs 19-20). Which of the above forms of grasping are Kerrie, Scott and Debbie embracing?

### Consequences of Grasping:

We produce the fruit of the flesh:

"sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin." (Galatians 5:19-21 NLT)

We forsake God and hurt people:

"My people have forgotten me days without number. How skilled you are at pursuing love! Even the worst of women can learn from your ways. On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor." (Jeremiah 2:33-34)

## Session Nine Grounded in God: Truth, Spirit and People of God

### Learning to go north

*Knowing God* is the deepest dream we could ever dream. Nothing compares (Phil 3:7-8).

In the O.T. the word "know" sometimes means sexual intercourse (Gen 4:1 KJV; Matt 1:25). God uses the same word to describe the relationship he has or longs to have with his covenant people (Ezek. 1:16; Hosea 2; Amos 3:2 KJV). John Piper says,

"God created human beings in his image - "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27)- with capacities for intense sexual pleasure...And his goal in creating human beings with personhood and passion was to make sure that there would be sexual language and sexual images that would point to the promises and the pleasures of God's relationship to his people and our relationship to him."  
*Sex and the Supremacy of Christ.*

God *wants* to be known. Would God want to walk and talk with you? Yes! That has been his purpose through redemptive history. Believe it!

The central feature of the Old Testament Tabernacle was that God was there, waiting for his people to meet with him. Similarly, dwelling in the presence of God is the greatest and most central truth of Christianity. We are called to boldly enter the most Holy Place through the blood of Jesus. Why? In order to meet with God (Heb. 10:19).

It's God's dream to dwell with us. He longs to walk and talk with you and me personally.

But, what is the difference between people who know God and those who seem content with a mediocre relationship with him?

The one vital quality which they had in common was spiritual receptivity. Something in them was open to heaven, something which urged them God ward...they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives. They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward longing they *did something about it*. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response... As David put it neatly, "When thou sadist, 'Seek my face;' my heart said unto thee, 'They face, Lord, will I seek'" (Psalm 27:8).

A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

Only God our Creator has the authority to tell us who we are. "If God is for us, who can be against us?...Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" (Rom 8:31). We must believe what God tells us. We are dearly loved sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, a good self-image is not *developed* but *received*. We aren't called to just "think positively" about ourselves and one another, but to humbly and gratefully trust in and live from what God says about us. Our true identity is as much a gift from God as getting into heaven- and just as real. And it's ready *now* to be applied.

### Questions for discussion

1. How would you see God and yourself differently if you fully embraced the truth of your identity in Christ?
2. How would you treat others differently if you believed this truth for yourself and for them? Give an example.
3. In what other ways would these truths help you choose to go north? Can you give a current example?

### Notes:

Relational conflict:

"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight..." (James 4:1-2 NLT)

Grasping forms a fist in God's face:

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

We wound God's fame among the nations:

"They profaned my holy name." (Ezek. 36:20)

We "justify" our grasping (sin) based on our groaning (pain): "Okay, I shouldn't have screamed at her *but* do you realize how disrespectfully she spoke to me?" Someone's sin never justifies our sin.

Although grasping is meant to stop or decrease our groaning, it actually creates or increases it over time (i.e., overeating=obesity/heart disease, people-pleasing leads to stress and burnout, etc).

"The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods." (Ps.16:4)

### Questions for discussion

1. Describe one way you grasp for control. What do you think, do or say? Be specific. How is that behavior trying to gain control over people or circumstances in order to get what you want (such as love or respect) or avoid what you don't want (such as rejection)?
2. Try to imagine what people experience from your grumbling emotions and grasping behaviors. Our sin always hurts others (i.e., withdrawing our involvement from people has an impact on them whether they're fully aware of it or not).
3. Think of a time you went south and embraced something you knew was sin. What was your relationship with God like in that moment?

### Kerrie

Kerrie was almost frantic with worry. *How am I going to get everything done?* she asked herself. She'd promised to bake cookies for her daughter's kindergarten class, bring dinner to a lady in her small group who was recovering from surgery, and visit her mother in the nursing home. Kerrie also needed time to prepare her lesson for the ladies Bible study. The pressure mounted. *Why do I do this to myself?* Then the phone rang.

Kerrie answered, "Hello."

"Hi Kerrie! This is Susan. How are you?"

"I'm doing just fine!" Kerrie replied in a buoyant and confident tone.

"Is this a bad time to talk?" Susan asked.

"Not at all," Kerrie said, feeling guilty for telling such blatant lies.

Susan went on. "Well, I have a favor to ask. I have to run a bunch of errands and I wondered if I could drop my baby off at your place for an hour or so while I get things done. Are you busy right now?"

"No." Kerrie replied. "Drop Sarah off. I'll be glad to take care of her."

Susan was delighted, "Thank you so much! You're such a wonderful person! I'll be there in a few. Bye."

As Kerrie hung the phone up, she took a deep sigh, broke into tears, and screamed, "When is it going to be my turn?"

### **Scott and Debbie**

Scott arrived home from a business trip. He had one thing on his mind. That night he started rubbing Debbie's back.

"Don't" she said. "I'm not in the mood."

A shock wave of anger surged through Scott. "Fine!" he said. "Thanks for the *warm welcome* home." He turned his back to Debbie.

Debbie was furious. She shot darts back at Scott. "You're such a *jerk*. I can't believe how selfish you are! I've been taking care of three kids, paying bills, and holding down the house for nearly a week while you're off doing your dream job. And when you come home there's not one question about how my sister's doing since her surgery yesterday or how I'm doing. It's always about Scott and his 'needs.' Well *I need* something more than that."

Scott cursed at Debbie, got out of bed, and slept on the sofa.

### **Notes:**

"If our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are the Holy of Holies." (John Eldredge)

The term, "In Christ" is used 82 times in Paul's letters. This is the bedrock of his theology: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

**Through the New Covenant we have a new inclination and power**  
Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:25-27

Do you tend to think of God as outside or inside your body?

Which would you choose- Christ by your side, telling you what to do, or having the Holy Spirit in your heart? (Tiger Woods illustration).

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

"You are *complete* in Him" (Col. 2:10). That's the practical result of our oneness in Christ. The Greek word "complete" most literally means "having been made *full*." You've been literally filled with every resource for walking the path of discipleship" (*Revolution Within*).

Our calling isn't primarily to *coerce* one another to go north but to help each other see that is what we most deeply *want* to do.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19. "Paul doesn't address believers as sinners needing to shape up but as saints needing to remember who they really are" (*Revolution Within*, D. Edwards).

When faced with temptation don't ask, "What do I want?" but "What's deepest in me? What do I *really* want?" When God writes his law in our hearts, he makes his commands instinctive within us. For example, how do birds know when and where to migrate for the winter? God has written his "migration law" on their hearts, so to speak. In the same way, righteousness, holiness, and love are the instinctive, innate desires of our new covenant heart. While many times these inclinations don't feel real, that doesn't mean they are not real. They're lurking beneath the surface of competing inclinations of our flesh that seem more alive at the time.

If, however, we cannot connect with our truest self in the face of temptation, we must *choose* to do good (not look at porn or have an affair) believing by faith, that our deepest desire is to love and obey God.

### **A good self-image is not developed but received**

Because of the New Covenant heart, we should view one another through very hopeful and optimistic lenses.

## Session Eight "A Great Gift" Part Two (Identity)

### Review

Wounds and lies shape our false identity. They take us south.

### The Miracle of the New Covenant Heart

Eavesdropping on the Trinity

Zephaniah 3:17, Jeremiah 29:10-11, Jeremiah 31:20

How can this be true?

Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 4:13; 1 Cor. 11:25;  
Hebrews 8:7-13

We believe this but often dismiss it as mere "theology." Yet these truths hold profound implications for helping us choose to go north in the groaning of life.

### Through the New Covenant we have a new identity

Costume jewelry is essentially worthless metal covered with an attractive coating. It looks good on the outside but it's worthless on the inside. Many Christians see themselves that way- "Covered by the blood" yet sinners through and through. That is a lie.

Tarnished silver is a much truer image of who we are after conversion. The new believer isn't a sinner by definition but a saint who struggles with sin.

What about Jeremiah 17:9? The old heart was indeed beyond cure. Therefore, we needed a heart transplant. That is *why* a new covenant had to be brought in.

Scripture is clear, we are not just forgiven sinners, we are new creations in Christ- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

It's not that sin has ceased to be real or present, but it has ceased to be our ruling master. We no longer have to obey it. We can and, deep down, *want* to go north (Romans 6)!

If you are in Christ, you have a good heart. The law (double love command) is written on it and Jesus dwells there. "Christ in you" is your truest/deepest identity. Let that sink in.

## Session Six Grace

### Review

Longings, lies, grumbling and grasping

### God's Grace



### How to go north

We all struggle. We want to learn to struggle well. What does that mean? Learning to find our core contentment in Christ alone. That's not easy. But the ability to resist the allure of lies that take us south will never happen long term by just trying harder. We must grow our affections for Jesus. The power of a new affection causes lesser affections to lose their grip. They may still nag and pull at us but they lose their power to tempt us. "When we understand how much Jesus treasures us, we'll treasure him." "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). "In his joy [he] went and sold all he had" (Matt. 13:44).

This may cause you to feel guilt. "I don't treasure Jesus like that. I just want my marriage to work. Does God hate me?" No. God loves us where we are, not where we "should" be. Trust him to lead you.

How can we grow the affections of our hearts for Jesus? Too often we relate to God as if he were merely a set of rules or principles to follow. But God is a real person who wants a relationship with you. "Oh taste and see the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8). "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). "I have seen you in sanctuary" (Ps 63:2, Eph 1:18). These are the spiritual senses through which we can know and experience God. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden. He longs to walk and talk with you too.

Grace has paved the way for a soul stirring love relationship with God. One of the biggest obstacles to growing that relationship is our foolish assumption that it's all up to us to make it happen. Romans 7:24 talks about the man who is trying to make it happen. He is wrestling and struggling to fulfill God's law. Andrew Murray says, "You will find the little words, *I, me, and* regenerate "I" in its impotence, seeking to obey the law without being filled with the Spirit. This is the experience of almost every saint. *God allows that failure that the regenerate man should be taught his own utter impotence*" (emphasis added).

*Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray

## Grace and forgiveness at the heart of Christianity

### Humility

“God is decisively drawn to humility. The person who is humble is the one who draws God’s attention, and in this sense, drawing His attention means also attracting His grace—His unmerited kindness.

What a promise! “God...gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Contrary to popular and false belief, it’s not “those who help themselves” whom God helps; it’s those who *humble* themselves.” C. J. Mahaney

### Brokenness

“The greatest day in your life is the day you face yourself. It’s then you can experience God’s grace” (Louie). When Louie preaches, he often shares his own failures and struggles. Through his life and example, he invites us to honestly and humbly face ourselves.

While reflecting on Matthew 5:21–22, Haddon Robinson shares a snapshot from his life when he faced himself as a murderer:

“My mother died when I was a boy, and my dad raised me...When he got older, he came to live with us. He became senile and began to lose track of time...He was a child, and I became a parent to him. One day we were home, and he wanted to go outside. I got him ready; but it was a cold day, and he quickly came back inside. Then he went out and came back in again. After about the third time out and in, I became very irritated... He wanted to go out again, but he had no sooner gotten out than he knocked on the door. I was furious...He stood there in the door and didn’t go either way, so I hauled off and swatted him. I could have punched him in the mouth, knocked him to the ground...At that moment I could have killed him. It is a horrible memory because of the ugliness inside me that day...We can excuse my behavior and say, “Old people get that way; they can be irritating.” The truth is, I had a flash—the flash of a murderer.

What happens when we truly see our lives? If we wash it from our minds, we travel alone in our self-righteousness. If we have a sense of bankruptcy, that poverty of spirit, we throw ourselves at His feet and cry out for mercy and forgiveness.

We all need the grace of a forgiving God. Those who understand this make it into the kingdom. As Samuel Rutherford said, “Bow low, man, bow low, the door into the kingdom is low.”

Haddon W. Robinson, *The Christian Salt and Light Company*

Brenda spent much of her young adult life exercising and watching what she ate in efforts to be as attractive as possible. She made a habit of sleeping with men, especially those who appeared to have resources. Brenda’s marriage came to a point of crisis when her husband discovered a \$23,000 credit card balance.

### Questions:

1. What were the wounds James and Brenda experienced?
2. How did their wounds shape their self-image?
3. What lies did they believe?
4. How did it impact their choices?
5. What events, wounds, failures, or circumstances have had the biggest impact on how you view yourself?
6. What has been communicated to you about your identity through these wounds?
7. How has this self-image encouraged you to go south when you face groaning?
8. If you truly embraced God’s new identity as a dearly loved child, how would you respond differently to the groaning of life?

### Notes:

If I believe that I can prove the lies are not true (which will provide security and significance) on my own it will lead me to grasping. I am prone to grasping because the behavior is coming from a place of anger, fear, or anxiety. I am wanting to feel secure and significant and I am looking to others to ensure I don't feel the pain of my wounds or experience the shame or rejection of believing the lies.

Being familiar with our identity is not about blaming other people and the past, it's about facing the wounds and lies so they don't influence our behavior. We want to embrace the truth which will enable us to love others. This recognition of the past, naming lies, and choosing God will allow us to take responsibility for our lives and live a more others' centered life of obedience.

Imagine believing what God thinks of us (that I am a cherished daughter and beloved son accepted and desired by him). Imagine having a deep security that comes from truly believing in God's love. Imagine relating to others out of that.

James grew up in a loving home with one younger brother David. David was a gifted child and excelled academically and athletically. Effortlessly David was always on the honor roll, was often the captain of sports teams, and had social finesse. James worked hard at school and sports. He was an average student and not coordinated. Dinner conversations often centered around two things: David's latest accomplishments or his schedule. James began to cry out for attention by acting up in school. Then came the day when a teacher pulled him aside and said, "Are you related to David? It's hard to believe you come from the same family the way you are behaving. Get your act in gear!"

After working hard and spending 6 years college and more in grad school he finished with his MBA James was a successful accountant at a reputable firm. He married, had two children of his own, and was bringing in a high salary. Things began to unravel when Brian was brought on. Brian was young, attractive, and bright. Brian was trained by a partner and spent time with high profile clients. An otherwise outstanding employee, James began to withhold necessary information to Brian and as a result cost the firm key accounts.

Brenda grew up poor. She had no idea she was poor because she was loved at home. It wasn't until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade when another student mockingly pointed out how "cheap" her outfit was. As she turned to walk away she could hear the chants and laughter of other kids. Brenda tried to avoid getting too close to other girlfriends because she was terrified of them ever wanting to come over to her house.

## Locked doors

*Frustration and locked doors are gifts from God. They are God's agents of change. Disappointments, annoying people, and difficult circumstances are all used by God to surface the lies we believe. They are his severe mercies. They are meant to turn us to him (Ps 27:3-5).*

Choosing to believe the truth of Christ's sufficiency won't make all the emotional struggles disappear. Our flesh stubbornly clings to lies. Lies run deep. They've often been forged in the fires of childhood disappointments, wounds, and trauma. Moreover, we are opposed by Satan and his demon hordes; the Enemy hates it when we turn to God. We are opposed.

Yep, the lies often pull at us even when we're turning to God and believing the truth about his sufficiency. God doesn't always give us good feelings as soon as we turn to him. If he did, we'd seek him for good feelings instead of seeking him because he's God. Like withdrawal from drugs or alcohol, we'll go through a period of painful detox. We're addicts to this world. The pain we've covered up with our grasping behaviors may hurt like hell when we stop going south. The transition from south to north is painfully lonely as we stop manipulating people to meet our needs and cling to the naked truth of Christ's sufficiency. Truth must sustain us, not experiences. Yet we must continue to listen expectantly for Jesus to speak into our wounded hearts. He weeps with us and loves us dearly.

Be patient with yourself. Of all the ways Paul could define love, he begins with two words: patient and kind (1 Cor. 13:4). God, who is love, is patient and kind with you. He's committed to your growth and well-being one step at a time (Phil. 1:6).

It's okay to grieve the loss of our false, yet treasured dreams. But the deepest dream we can ever dream is the dream of knowing God. However, the pathway to getting there is always painful. We will suffer. The flesh doesn't die without pain. Jesus said, "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). The cross is not a piece of jewelry; it's an instrument of death. Larry Crabb has said that any time God allows a dream to be shattered, it's to awaken a deeper dream:

Following Christ *must* take us through seasons of disappointment, because Christianity remakes our dreams before it fulfills them. The process is excruciating. It can include divorce, bankruptcy, accidents, murder, near apostasy—anything....

Disappointment, severe enough to be called death, is unavoidable in a true spiritual journey.

Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed*

I had lunch with a young man I'd been mentoring. He'd grown in humility, honesty, and surrender to Jesus as he struggled with locked doors in his marriage. "I've come to realize," he said, "that I need to grieve and lament as I relinquish some of my dreams of marriage. I always thought my wife would want to encourage and affirm me for working hard. I've so longed for her to welcome me when I walk in the door at night and say I'm a good man. I've come to realize that my love language is words of affirmation. That isn't hers. She rarely thinks to say encouraging words to me. I used to resent her for that. I think I went through a time when I even hated her. I've gone south so many times; I've been so needy and demanding. But I'm repenting from my self-centeredness. I'm letting go of the lie that tells me I *need* her to make me feel important. For me, part of repenting means feeling and grieving the painful loss of those broken dreams. It means feeling the loneliness as I let go of my demands and surrender my heart to God alone."

### **Surrender**

When I think about this painful process of relinquishing our "pappies," I'm drawn back to Psalm 131. The weaning process from our false gods is painful but it's there we learn to rest in God, pictured as a loving mother.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Have you faced your sin of forsaking God and grasping for your security and significance from people, or are you trying to justify the ways you go south?
2. How confident are you that God cares about your longing to be loved and treated with respect, and that he wants you to bring those longings to him so he can care for you?
3. In what areas of your life do you try hard to please God but fail? What would it be like for you to admit you are helpless to change yourself (Rom. 7:14–26)? When you experience the pain of groaning, will you come to God and ask him to help you go north instead of south?
4. A locked door is anything, big or small, that blocks our path to getting what we really want. Describe a time you have experienced, or maybe are currently experiencing, a locked door. What does God reveal about your heart in that situation?
5. As you face your locked doors, what helps you move to godly grief and relinquishment instead of grumbling and grasping? How do you depend on God's grace to help you?
6. How do you imagine God responds to you when you honestly admit all the ways you go south? How does his response influence your response to him?

### **Notes:**

## **Session Seven "A Great Gift" Part One (Identity)**

*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. (2 Cor. 5:17)*

### **Wounds and Lies**

We often talk about going south as "natural" or "knee-jerk" and hard to stop. Our identity plays into this. Louie has often said, "Everything we do we do according to our self-image." Our self-image is something we develop over time and our stories influence our view of ourselves. Two powerful forces that can forge deep, lasting impressions on our identities:

1. Wounds/Disappointments
2. Lies

Wounds tend to shape and give power to lies. Wounds are disappointments we have experienced in life, cruelties that have been inflicted upon us, passive or active oppression, or any other belittling moment. Lies tend to influence beliefs and behavior and the outcomes can be deadly, literally. We are born into lies and worse, sin. "Nobody gets through this life without being hurt or wounded relationally. Nobody" (Lisa).

Another significant source of wounds is ourselves. Our past sin and failures are fertile ground for lies to plant themselves into our memory and the harvest is a workload of hiding, self protection, further lies, distance, and shame.

If we work on getting in touch with our wounds (and subsequent lies we believe) it is helpful to notice themes and/or sources. Can you take what has been said and done to you, your own sin and failure, difficult circumstances you have experienced, and then boil it down to a word or phrase that describes you? Could you come up with a name for yourself? (e.g.'s, dirty, failure, strikeout, loser, unwanted).

Your self image determines most of what you do. Lisa describes it as "the lens of lies." Essentially, whatever we believe about ourselves (good or bad) becomes the lens through which we view everything. If we believe we are unwanted, worthless, or incompetent we will do whatever we can to avoid feeling rejected (passively or aggressively).