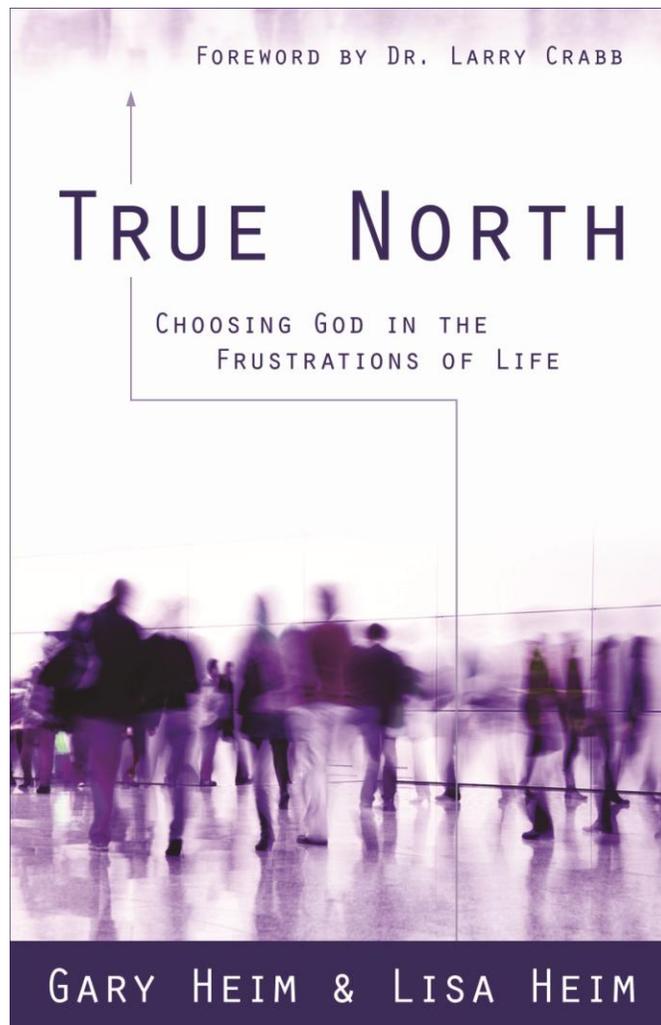


Gary Heim and Lisa Heim

A step-by-step guide for personal reflection
or small group discussion

based on



Introduction

Welcome to this study guide. We're delighted that you're here.

Working through this guide can be done individually or as a small group. This process can be helpful for married couples too. Remember, the purpose for doing this is to learn how to make Jesus Christ the center of our lives so we can love others better.

How to Begin

Begin with prayer. Invite God to meet with you and speak to you. He longs to be your unshakable security. Read and prayerfully reflect on Psalm 62:1-2 (Perhaps there is another passage you prefer). Then read through the following summary of the book True North.

Then find some quality time to be alone with God and prayerfully reflect on the questions that follow.

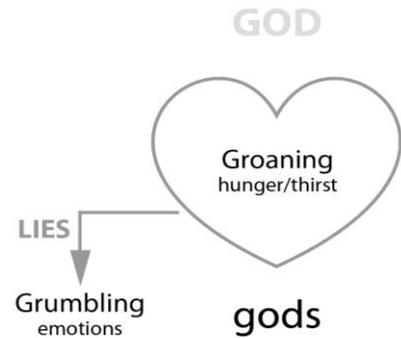
Read

Between our banishment from the garden and our future home in glory, the Bible says we groan. *Groaning* best describes our life in this fallen world (Romans 8:22-23). Groaning means we experience frustration and disappointment every day—flat tires, flooded basements, wounding words, 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 are 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 (Hosea 2:5-7). God is a jealous lover who's determined to win our heart's devotion.

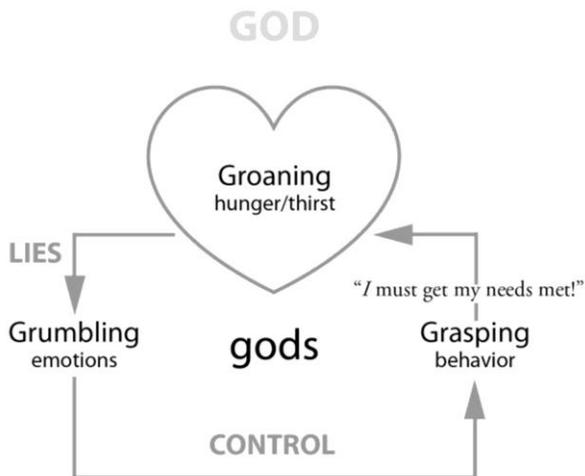


When God frustrates our efforts to find life in our false gods, we typically don't turn back to him. Instead, we forsake God and go "south" into *grumbling*. Grumbling involves emotions like unrighteous anger, worry, jealousy, self-pity, and shame.

Those emotions serve as *signals*. They 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're grumbling, we believe that something or someone other than God, and what he has provided, should meet our needs.



If we do not learn how to tune into these emotional signals, stop, and turn back to Jesus for our needs, these destructive emotions will influence our *behavior*. We will be moved to do something. Yelling, hitting, manipulation, avoiding, overeating, people-pleasing, gossiping, overspending, or pornography are just 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 depending on God.

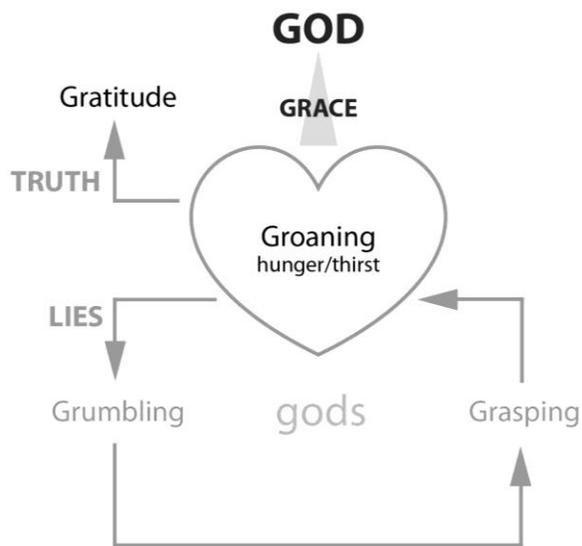
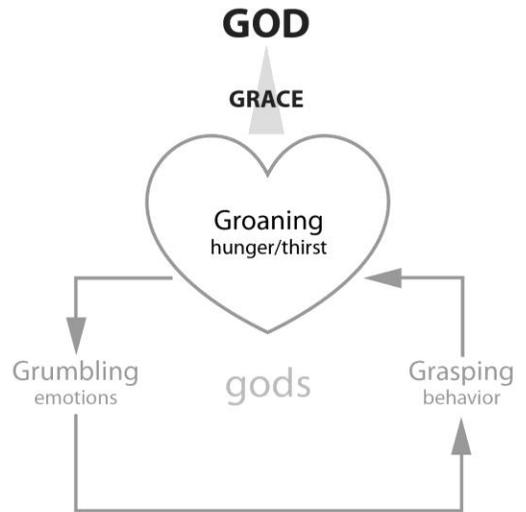
Furthermore, grasping behavior hurts people. When people fail to meet our needs, we may verbally attack or emotionally withdraw from them. Instead of loving God and loving others, we are forsaking God and manipulating others.



As the Holy Spirit shows us how we forsake God through our grumbling and grasping and how we damage people as a result, 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 person, he gives grace (favor) to the humble person who turns to him for help. This is the beginning of genuine change. We will never change until we desperately and humbly turn "north" to God for help; 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**. We become grateful worshippers of God for who he is and for all he does for us.

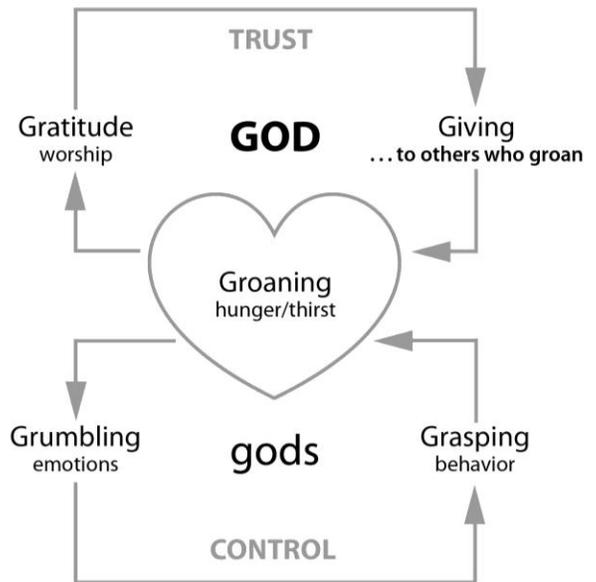


While we legitimately *desire* and enjoy the love and respect people may freely give to us, we come to see that Jesus is all we *need* to be secure and to live life well. His transcendent power, his lavish love, and enabling presence are more than enough to sustain us in the struggles of life. Through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



Gratitude and dependence on God help us grow in confidence and self-esteem. We are dearly loved children of God, 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. 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 is the life we were created for and the life we've always wanted.

Coming to live this way is not a one-time process. Choosing God in the groaning of life requires us to be intentional. That is, every minute of every day we either 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.



Questions for Reflection or Discussion

All day, every day we satisfy our hunger and thirst for love/security and meaning/significance by choosing to turn north to God or south to the false gods of this world.

Without thinking about it, we naturally go south. It takes zero effort. We're surrounded by people and things. We habitually turn to them to satisfy our hunger and thirst for love, security, respect, and significance. But when we *depend* on people and things to meet our needs, they become our false gods and broken cisterns.

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator." (Romans 1:25)

"Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror", declares the Lord. My people have committed two sins: They forsake me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." (Jeremiah 2:12-13)

We want to know when we're going north or south so we can make Jesus Christ our only God. Only then will we become *established* in Christ; becoming secure, grateful, and giving children of God. Therefore, we want to reflect on the following questions to help us learn how to discern if we are going north to God or south to the false gods of this world.

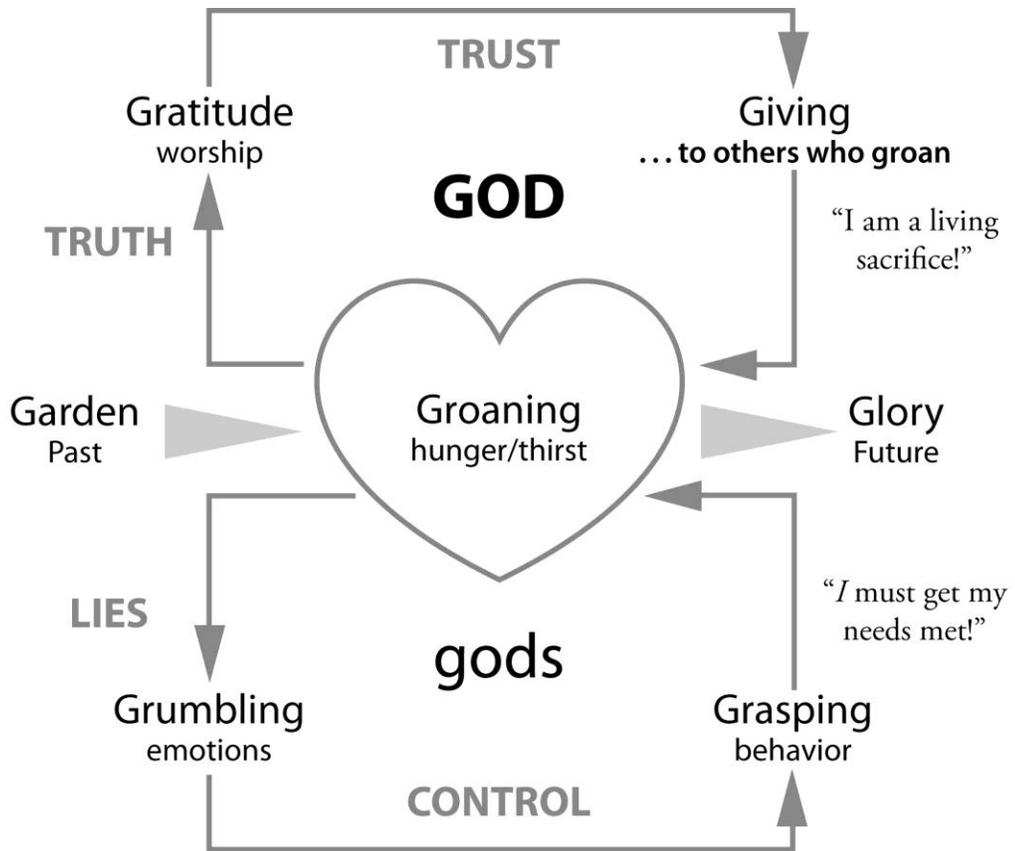
Question #1

Look at the diagram on following page. Reflect on one way you have experienced *groaning* (sorrow, frustration, disappointment, pain, rejection, failure...) in the past few weeks or months that caused you to go south into grumbling (anger, worry, etc). First describe the situation. What happened?

Example: "My spouse spoke to me in a harsh tone of voice. He/She was upset because..."

The groaning I experienced was:





Question #2

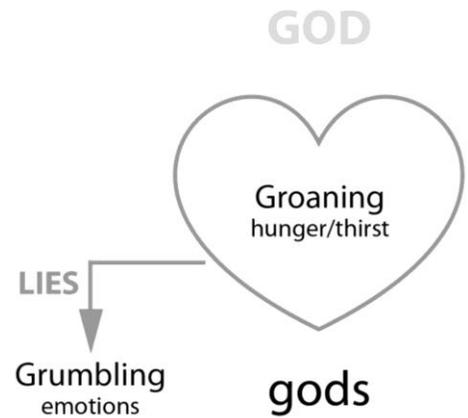
Now describe what emotion(s) you experienced as a result of that groaning.

Example: "When my spouse spoke in a harsh voice, I got angry." (Other grumbling emotions include anxiety, fear, shame, worthlessness, envy, or jealousy.)



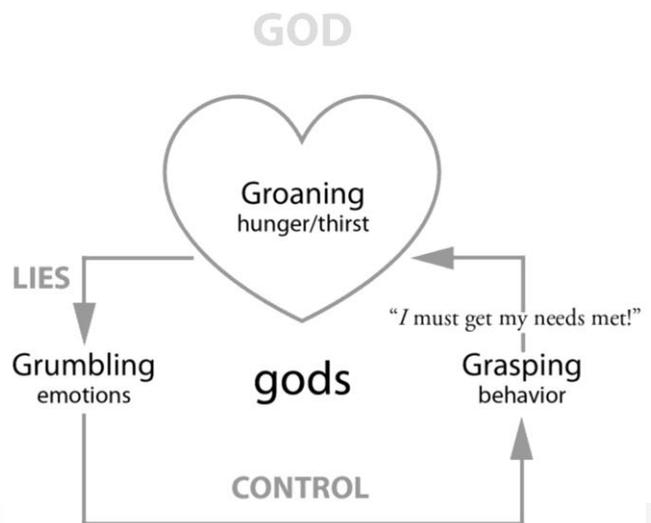
Emotions serve as signals or “lie detectors.” That is, they alert us to the fact that we believe lies about who or what (false gods) we think should meet our needs for security, love, respect, and significance. What lie(s) fueled your emotion of anger, anxiety, envy, or worthlessness? (Again, your self-talk will clue you in to what you were thinking/believing).

Example: “As I reflect on what I was thinking in my anger, it went like this: ‘I do so much for him/her! He/She never recognizes or appreciates what I do! As I think about it, I think I believe I *need* to be recognized and appreciated when I do something nice. When I do something, I tend to look to see if my spouse sees it. If they don’t say something, I feel angry. Mmm. Maybe I believe I need *affirmation* in order to give me a sense of security or significance. That’s a lie because the truth tells me my needs are met in Jesus.’”



Question #3

Lies cause emotions. Emotions influence *behavior*. How did your emotions influence your behavior? Be specific. What did you do and/or say? How was this behavior grasping for control over the person or situation in order to get what you wanted (i.e., love or respect) or didn’t want from them (i.e., rejection or disrespect)? And/or did you grasp for control by trying to ignore your emotional pain by indulging in things like food, pornography, masturbation, alcohol, or excessive TV watching/video gaming?



Question #4

How did your behavior negatively impact or hurt people such as your spouse, child, or friend? How might your behavior have negatively impacted you? Give these questions some prayerful reflection. Our sin always has an impact on others even if we do it in secret. For example, angrily withdrawing our heart's involvement from someone has an impact whether it's obvious or not. Grasping always destroys life.

Explain how your grasping is sin against God and others. How does it violate our calling to live a life of love?

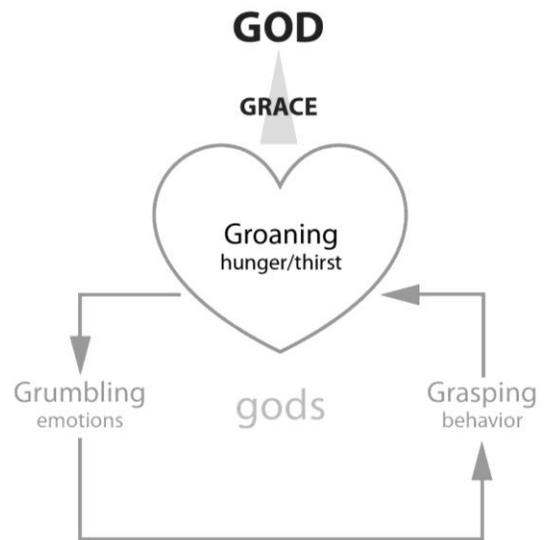


What do you think the person you hurt was longing for from you? How often do you think about the hunger and thirst of others when you're grasping for life from them?

Question #5

Sometimes we try to justify our grumbling and grasping based on what others have done to us. "Okay, I shouldn't have yelled at her, but do you realize how disrespectfully she spoke to me?" Our pain may be real, but someone's sin never justifies our sin. We must humble ourselves, honestly face and confess our sin of grumbling and grasping and ask for God's help to go north.

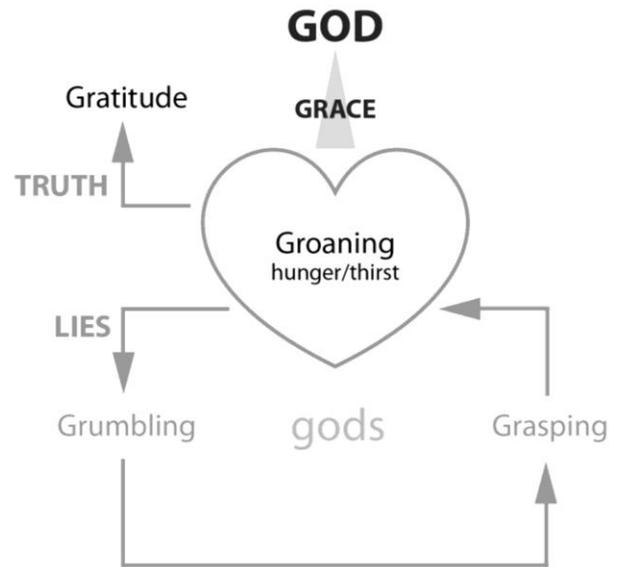
Have you honestly faced your sin of forsaking God and grasping for your security/significance from people? Have you turned north to God for his grace through humble confession? God gives grace to the humble. God always longs to forgive you, meet with you and help you. He favors you when you humble yourself before him. Or, are you trying to justify your grumbling and grasping? Talk about this entire process. Where are you currently with this situation?





Gratitude comes when we receive God’s grace, forgiveness, and unconditional acceptance. He is patient and tenderhearted toward us. He really likes us. When we trust in his love and realize he is all we need, we grow in being free, confident, and secure people. This too brings gratitude. This is a process. It doesn’t happen quickly. Lies die slowly. We may not feel his love but that doesn’t change the truth. We are his dearly loved children (Ephesians 5:1).

It’s important to realize we cannot change ourselves. We can’t stop going south without God’s grace. When you experience the daily groaning and trials of life, how often do you come to God and ask him for his help to go north? How often do you practice gratitude for God’s grace, presence, help, and love in the midst of groaning, even if those difficulties continue? Please explain.



1	2	3	4	5	6
Never		Rarely		Sometimes	Often

Question #6

Go back and read page two again. It says the experience of frustration is a sign of God’s gracious pursuit of us (Hosea 2:5-7). How might God be pursuing your heart’s devotion for him by allowing this current situation or any other situation, to fail or frustrate your efforts to get your security or significance from it?



God cares about your longing to feel loved and respected. When people sin against you or fail to give you those things, how confident are you that God wants you to bring your heart's longings to him? What will help you remember God in these ways? What will help you live more consistently in gratitude for God's love and involvement in your life? Be specific.

Question #7

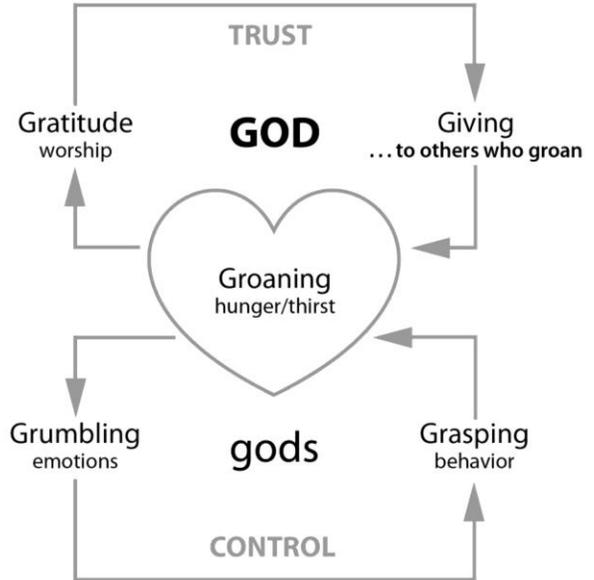
If we are in Christ, Christ lives within our hearts. The Law (love God and love others) is written there because we have a new heart (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Our new heart wants to love God and others. Deep down, we want to go north. That is what truly defines us as believers. We are not primarily sinners. If we are in Christ, we have good hearts because Jesus lives there. How convinced are you of this vital truth about your true identity? Do you see yourself more as a sinner, failure, unloved, or as a dearly loved child of God who, deep down, loves God and wants to go north?

What could help you embrace this truth more deeply? Think specifically. How can the truth of God, Spirit of God and the people of God help you embrace the truth of your true identity in Christ?



Question #8

Consider your example of going south into grumbling and grasping in questions 2 and 3. Repenting from going south means you will turn to Jesus for your needs and stop grasping (demanding or depending on) life from people or improved circumstances. It also means you will choose to depend on God for your needs no matter what happens in those circumstances. This does not make *everything* better. Groaning may continue but you will, by God's grace, choose to believe the truth of Christ's sufficiency for your needs. Repentance means you have changed your mind about where you think life comes from (God vs. people and things). As you repent and make Jesus the source of your security and significance, what will it look like for you to really give to others instead of grasping for life from them?



NOTE: Giving can mean different things in different circumstances with different people. Giving can mean confessing your sin against another without any demand that they reciprocate. It might mean giving acts of kindness from your heart instead of punishing them by being cold or distant. It can mean drawing appropriate boundaries or taking someone to court. It might mean letting someone give to you instead of you always needing to be the giver. It might mean admitting weakness and asking someone to pray for you. The possibilities are endless. *But giving always means caring about the other person and seeking their best interests.* It means treating others as image bearers of God. It means caring about how others desire to be treated with love and respect. Giving only comes through forgiving. Complete forgiveness is often a process that must happen again and again instead of a once and for all event.

What will it look like for you to really *give* to others instead of grasping for life from them?



Question #9

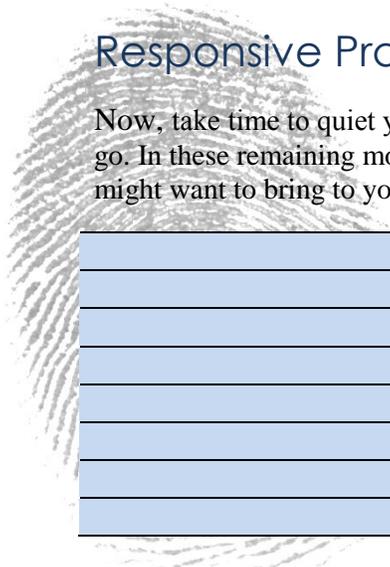
Give other examples of what it will look like for you to “live a life of love” (Ephesians 4:1) everyday, all day, as you continue to gratefully *abide in Christ* for your deepest needs. Give at least three specific examples. Consider the following three categories: What will it look like to be present and thoughtful toward people in order to treat them in ways that reflect God’s heart for them? What would it look like for you to pursue people more intentionally? What will it look like for you to deal with conflict in redemptive ways instead of needing to win or defend yourself? You may use other categories if you like. Be specific. Use real life situations and people you encounter.



Conclusion

Responsive Prayer

Now, take time to quiet your soul before God. This isn't always easy to do. Let the distracting thoughts go. In these remaining moments, invite the Lord Jesus to meet with you and talk to you about anything he might want to bring to your attention after going through this process. Write down anything you hear.



Write down anything you want to say to God now that you've listened to him and reflected on these aspects of your life and relationship with him and others.

Small group sharing

Share your answers to the above questions with your small group or spouse. By so doing, you can know each other better. You can see how to encourage each other to choose God in the frustrations of life.

