

Consider the Lilies

**5 Ways to Stop Worrying and
Enjoy the Kingdom of God**

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**Which one of you, by worrying, can add a single
moment to your life? - Matthew 6:27**

**What lies behind us and what lies before us are
tiny matters compared to what lies within us.**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

PREFACE

It was a bright spring day in the desert. Recent rain had released the sweet smell of creosote, but I barely took time to savor it. I was hurriedly crossing the playground of our school, intent on using the bathroom, the phone, and the copy machine during my short teacher's break.

Suddenly, one of the third grade girls bounded up to me and tugged my arm.

"Mr. Van! Mr. Van! Will you listen to my speech?"

Select students from each grade were preparing for a regional speech meet. Porsha was one of them. She stood before me slightly breathless, red beads woven into her cornbraids, her dark eyes eager and full of life. What a precious child! I mentally placed my own agenda on hold.

"Of course I'll listen to your speech," I replied.

"It's from the Bible," she said. "Matthew, chapter six."

With no other formalities, she reached into her memory and began.

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

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

“That was great, Porsha!” I exclaimed, giving her shoulder a warm squeeze. “I’m impressed by how you memorized it all, and by the *feeling* you put into it. Do you know who spoke those words?”

“Jesus,” she said.

“That’s right. Do you know what he meant by them?”

“Not really,” she said. “My teacher tried to explain, but I don’t really get it.”

“Do you want me to help you understand?”

“Yes. Please.”

“Jesus is talking about worry,” I said. “Do you know what worry is?”

“Sort of. Like when I get nervous before taking a test.”

“Exactly. There are a lot of things people worry about. We worry about having enough money, we worry about our families, we worry about getting sick,

we worry about getting old, we worry about what other people think of us, and we even worry about whether God is there to help us.

“Does your family have any of these worries?”

I knew for a fact that her parents were embroiled in severe financial problems, struggling to make ends meet.

She nodded vigorously.

“It was the same in Jesus’ day, Porsha. People worried about all the same things. Jesus knew that, and it made him sad.”

“Why?”

“Because worry hurts us. It makes us angry and tired and sick. It causes us to be mean to other people. Worry hurts us in many ways. And when *we* hurt, *Jesus* hurts.

“So one day while he was speaking to a crowd of people, Jesus told them not to worry. He told them to look at the lilies—the beautiful flowers that were growing in the field around them.”

I was warming to my topic and I needed an object, something to make my lesson three-dimensional.

“Come with me, Porsha.”

I took her hand and led her to a row of rose bushes near the school office.

“Look here” I said, pointing to a magnificent lavender specimen with hints of cream and purple swirled through its delicate petals. “What do you think of this

one?”

“It’s one of the prettiest roses I’ve ever seen,” she said.

“Look at the way God takes care of it,” I said. “Look at the way the sun warms its petals. Do you think God loves this rose?”

She nodded yes.

“I do, too. I think God loves all of His creation. Every rock and tree and hill is precious to Him.

“Now listen, Porsha. Jesus said that if God cares for this rose that will only bloom for a few days, won’t He care even more for you and me—His own children He has created in His image?”

She nodded again. Slower this time.

“Are you getting it, Porsha? We worry *so much* about whether or not we’re going to be all right in life, that we forget God is taking care of us. We forget that He will make sure our needs are met. We forget that we can trust him with every area of our lives. If He cares enough about this one little rose enough to make it so beautiful, don’t you think He cares enough to make sure *we* get everything we need?”

Some bridge was crossed, some connection made in Porsha’s mind. She smiled broadly and nodded with confidence.

“Thanks for explaining it to me, Mr. Van.”

“You’re welcome.”

At that point, I should have shut up, but the preacher in me was on a roll.

“In fact, Porsha, you have some of Jesus’ most powerful words for your speech. I believe that if every human being were to follow this teaching and stop worrying, there would be a revolution in our world.”

She looked puzzled. I was sailing beyond third grade waters.

“A revolution is a *very big* change. If people were to stop worrying, just think of all the changes that would sweep over our world. People would be more relaxed, more sensitive, more joyful. They would spend less time pushing and striving to get ahead, and more time enjoying the bonds of love. The world would be a much better place in which to live.”

By this time she was looking beyond me to the playground, where some of her friends were skipping rope. I could hear their singsong chant.

“Thanks, Mr. Van,” she said. She gave me a quick hug around the waist, then skipped off to join her friends. Class over.

I watched her bound away, then looked back down at the lavender rose. A bee had landed and was busily filling her leg sacks with pollen, a migrant worker humming happily in her own little world.

Who are you fooling? I asked myself. *Teacher, teach thyself.*

My life over the past weeks, even months, had been drenched in worries. Financial worries. Career worries. Relationship worries. Worries about why I was worrying. I went to bed at night trying to quiet their myriad voices, and I awoke in

the morning trying to fend them off. Those who knew me best were amazed at the cool mask I wore, because they knew of the stress often teeming beneath the surface. To make it worse, I was sorely aware that stress and worry had been the dominant patterns of my life. So much of my God-given time had been spent in worrying. It was an internal static that rarely gave way to silence.

The revolution must begin with me, I thought.

I don't believe in lightning fast changes. I know Paul had his Damascus road experience, but the changes in my life have come through concentration, hard work, and discipline. Yet I do believe there are certain moments that provide definite turning points in life. There are crossroads where we somehow muster enough presence of mind and willpower to change our direction permanently. It is only later looking back that we, like Robert Frost, that taking the one less traveled made all the difference.

Right then and there I vowed to seek God's peace with all my heart, mind and soul. I vowed to move beyond a mere academic understanding of Jesus' teachings on worry. I decided my life would change. No longer would I merely talk the talk; I would walk the walk and practice what I preached. No longer would I follow Jesus half-heartedly, nodding sagaciously at his wise words, yet never making them flesh in my own life.

Don't get me wrong. My decision was not based on obligation. As much as I like to say so, I was not trying to be more faithful. The fact of the matter is *I*

was desperate to be free. In a very real sense, I was choosing life over death, for I felt in my bones how worry had drained me of the joy of living. And I knew—both through discernment *and* experience—that only the Lord could give me peace. I heard His voice within me saying, “*Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*”

That day, I began to prayerfully seek new disciplines that would truly set me free from worry—free to love and be loved, day by day, with all the fullness of my being. It was a decision that resulted in the practical book that I now share with you.

If you are one of those people who never let worry get the best of you, you should feel exceedingly blessed! You have a perspective that is one of life’s greatest treasures, and I’m happy for you. However, if you are like me and too often let your peace and self esteem be robbed by insistent worries, I pray you will journey through this book with me. I pray that it will equip you in some way to live a freer life.

I still remember that turning point and the feel of the sun on my face. I glanced again at the rose, just as the bee lifted into flight and soared toward home. I looked back out on the playground. Porsha was jumping rope, her braids flying high in the air around her, an effortless joy in her smile.

INTRODUCTION

Our English word “worry” comes from the Old English *wyrgan*, meaning “to strangle.” How fitting, for this is exactly what worry does to us! It grabs us by the neck and chokes away the vitality from our lives. Worry steals our peace, weakens our potential, and sours our closest relationships. Just when it seems we have pried away its strangling tentacles, it throws out others we never knew were there.

From a psychological standpoint, worry is one of the most common presenting problems at a counselor’s office. The stress that it causes can lead to depression, addictions, hostility, and a host of other maladaptive behaviors. In more extreme cases, it becomes obsessive-compulsive, leading people into increasingly irrational acts. These acts—checking the alarm clock five times, turning off the oven seven times, or washing one’s hands repeatedly—are rituals intended to bring confidence and security. Instead, they only fuel the worry cycle.

On a spiritual level, worry can be thought of as a “stronghold” of evil in our minds. The Bible speaks clearly of these as strongholds, fortresses of wrong thinking, lies that sink shafts deep into our minds. After awhile, these lies take on the power of truth. They capture our thoughts and take them hostage. If left unchallenged, they will continue to dominate our mind, our emotions, and our behaviors. They literally set up a false reality against which we measure our day

to day lives.

A perfect example of this is the lie that material gain will bring happiness and peace. The Bible makes it clear—from David to Solomon to Isaiah to Jesus—that *things* do not bring fulfillment. As Jesus said,

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out,
a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where
no thief and no moth destroys. For where your treasure
is, there your heart will be also.”

Intellectually, many of us know this is true, yet we still cling to the addictive lie that earthly treasure will fulfill us. We let it produce worries and stresses that drive us into overwork and financial debt.

For the purpose of this book, our definition of worry will be nearly synonymous with the term *anxiety*. Because these emotions are so tightly interwoven, it is not necessary to spend a lot of time with clinical definitions. The important thing is to gain mastery over them. As doctors at the Minirth-Meier Clinic have noted, “...few people realize how serious anxiety can be or how it can progress to a state of disability or that it currently is the number one health problem in America. The confusion is understandable. Anxiety comes in so many disguises and degrees that it defies labeling.”

To make matters worse, we’re not sure whether we even want to let go of our worries. As Henri Nouwen says, “Worrying has become such a part and parcel of our daily life that a life without worries seems not only impossible, but

even undesirable. We have a suspicion that to be carefree is unrealistic and—worse—dangerous. Our worries motivate us to work hard, to prepare ourselves for the future, and to arm ourselves against impending threats.”

The problem with this way of thinking is that it is lie. The life of Jesus proves it otherwise. His lack of worry never took away his passion for his calling, his vocation. He worked tirelessly to preach and heal and minister to the people whom God put in his path. He was prepared for the ultimate future, his union with God in eternity, and not even the threat of the Roman Empire had the power to lessen his enthusiasm.

If we persist in rationalizing the worries in our lives, they will choke away our vitality until the day we die.

The purpose of this book is to help us pry away the strangling arms of worry. And since these arms often seem innumerable, it will help us to identify them as belonging within major categories. It will help us to pause for a moment and do this before we launch into the disciplines of this book.

MATERIAL WORRIES

As I’ve already begun to show, this is the area Jesus focused on most clearly in his revolutionary teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. His direct and honest challenge was needed in his day, but even more so in contemporary America! A sacred part of the American Dream is material wealth. Unless we live

in a cave, there is no way to avoid the incessant demand of advertisers trying to stir our desire for possessions. These ads promise security, youthfulness, greater self-esteem, enhanced social status, and even powerful spirituality.

In his book *Wake Up, America*, Tony Campolo warns of this latest trend—the selling of goods to meet spiritual needs. He gives examples of consumer goods sold with the promise of spiritual fulfillment. He describes an older commercial where a throng of people is gathered on top of a hill. They represent all races and colors of the world, joining hands in a unity this planet has never known. Is it a symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven? Is it a call for racial reconciliation? No, says Campolo, it's a commercial for the Pepsi generation!

Commercials like this are insidious because they link eternal spiritual qualities to temporal products. Campolo puts it this way. “In our TV ads, it is as though the ecstasy of spirit experienced by a Saint Theresa or a St. Francis can be reduced to the gratification coming from a particular car, and the kind of love that Christ compared to His love for His church can be expressed by buying the right kind of wristwatch ‘for that special person in your life.’” In all of this media hype, things are sold to us on the basis that our deepest emotional and psychological needs will be met by having the right consumer goods.”

Campolo's wake up call made me more discerning of the commercials I often see on TV. I began to notice just how many of them really do promise a “new spirit” if we buy the right luxury car, the right jewelry, or take the right

vacation. No wonder thinking like this creates strongholds in the minds of Americans!

The upshot of all this emphasis on material things is actually the reverse of what the ads promise. Materialism causes a decay of spiritual contentment. It increases our alienation from God and each other. Jesus knew this. It is why he said,

It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”(Matthew 19:23-24)

Jesus didn't mean that people with money are categorically impossible to save. What he meant is that possessions cause a preoccupation with the material, temporal aspects of life. All our “things” require payments and upkeep. They absorb our time and energy, worrying us and distracting us from the prime objective of our lives—to know God and to glorify His presence eternally.

I have always likened people with many possessions to Gulliver as the Lilliputians strapped him to the ground. Each of the tiny ropes tying him down would seem insignificant alone, but placed together they were able to immobilize a giant.

TEMPORAL WORRIES

We all know how important it is to live in the present, to treasure each moment as if it were our last. Yet the culture of America is restless and driven.

We are taught to worry about mistakes we made yesterday, or to anxiously anticipate problems looming on tomorrow's horizon. I call these *temporal worries*, because they are "related to or limited by time."

Acutely aware of how temporal worries can kill, Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." And he added an exclamation point to that statement when he said, "Which one of you, by worrying, can add a single second to your life?" He knew that the stranglehold of temporal worries is tragic, and he longed to untangle us from their grip.

No wonder 12-step groups across the country emphasize the slogan "one day at a time." They know that these two eternities—yesterday and tomorrow—can become living hells in the minds of people prone to worrying.

Worries linked to the past and the future must be countered with the emotional and physical discipline of "letting go," an art that can be learned easily by those who persevere. I have devoted a whole chapter to this discipline because it highlights a primary principle of this book. *So many of our worries will vanish as we learn to see and experience life through God's eternal perspective.*

RELATIONAL WORRIES

Another strong area of worries arises in our relationships. All of us live in a matrix of human connection to relatives, friends, co-workers and neighbors. God placed these people in our lives as opportunities to love and serve. However, we often make these relationships source of worry. Worries about other people

center primarily around two issues.

The first has to do with worries about *what other people think of us*. Any of us who come from families where acceptance and love were conditional, may spend the rest of our lives trying to prove our worth. We gauge this worth by the opinions that others have of us. Insecurity drives this desperation, and it can truly become an addiction. It can goad us into workaholic behavior in our careers as we try to secure the acclaim of supervisors and coworkers. It can give birth to mild or severe emotional dependence in our romantic relationships as we allow our self-esteem to rise or fall on the moods of our partners. It can cause us to be emotional recluses, shunning contact with others because we fear their judgements and opinions. There is a powerful scriptural remedy to this emotional disease, and we will talk about it throughout this book.

The second area of relational worries is related to control. This happens when our concerns over the behavior of a loved one become so obsessive we refuse to allow room for God to work in their lives. We may obsess over a child, a spouse, a parent, or a friend. The closer we are to the individual, the more acute our worries.

It is an old adage that we can only change ourselves. However, we often try to mold the behavior of others, and this form of control leads to persistent worries about whether or not they will change. Letting go of this need for control is essential to a worry-free life.

SPIRITUAL WORRIES

Most people polled in the United States believe that God exists, and a great many of us are affiliated with a church that helps us express this belief. However, it is a far different issue to live daily “as if” the promises of God are real. Deep inside many of us is a nagging worry about whether all the promises of scripture really apply to *our* lives.

Take our belief in heaven, for instance. Every day, at countless funerals and memorial services across this country, Christians read the comforting words of Jesus,

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.”(John 14:1-6)

Each Christian claims these central words of faith, but the depth of our belief is tested when we face our own mortality. As we experience the death of a loved one, or our own accelerated aging, we find out firsthand whether or not our belief in heaven is enough to sustain us.

I know a pastor who passionately taught about the reality of Heaven for years, but when his wife died after nearly forty years of marriage, he slumped into a deep depression. Her death called his easy affirmations into question.

Hebrews tells us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for,” but if our personal reservoir of assurance is shallow, we end up with many worries about the promise of an afterlife Jesus made to his disciples.

Another spiritual worry has to do with whether or not God will be faithful in redeeming the failures and sufferings of our lives. As we pass through trials, we may turn again and again to the promises of scripture. Romans 8:28 tells us: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” However, when we’ve had great losses—divorce, bankruptcy, illness or the death of a loved one—it is hard to see the silver lining within the cloud. We may begin to ask ourselves, “how could this tangled mess *ever* be used for good?” and this question leads to worries about the future.

Spiritual worries exist at the deepest level of our being. Victory at this level will help us conquer the other, more temporal worries of our lives. To do this, we need a transforming experience of the power of God’s love *in the present moment*. This experience—the illumination of the Holy Spirit—assures us that God is real and will provide. We come to know—not in theory, but in our very spirits—the perfect love that casts out fear. This is an experience that establishes trust—the foundation to lasting peace in our hearts.

All the disciplines of this book are designed to foster this experience of trust and intimacy with the living Lord of our lives.

I have always loved this excerpt from one of Peter Marshall’s powerful

sermon entitled *Mr. Jones, Meet the Master*.

“It is possible for you and me to live in this world as sure that the Lord is with us as we can be sure of anything—to have no fear at all, to be able to anticipate tomorrow with a thrill of delight, to have no fear of anything—neither of sickness, nor unemployment, nor loneliness, nor death, no anything at all... Tell Him that you want him to guide your life and keep it. For if you let Him take control of your life completely, if you are willing to bow to His will for you, then you will enter into that transforming fellowship which brings with it that glorious exhilaration, that indescribable peace, and escape from all bondage...”

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE

Within Christianity, there are many people who practice the art of deliverance. They lay hands on others and pray over them until a physical, emotional, or spiritual illness is completely released. People with chronic worries are often prayed for in this way. I have no doubt that the experience of deliverance is valid and lifesaving for many people.

However, as I’ve said, my own experience is that lasting changes take hard work and discipline. I am often saddened by the extra layer of guilt and failure that is laid upon people who “get delivered,” then find they really haven’t changed. Recently, a woman I know had this experience. A lifetime of shame and the torture of an eating disorder finally led her to seek help. She was told by a Christian friend that she needed deliverance through the prayers of a particular

pastor and group of Christians. The woman sought this help, but afterwards was more confused. She said to me, “Krin, I wanted something to happen, and I believe I left myself open to God’s presence. But when I woke up this morning, I felt exactly the same. Is it because I don’t have enough faith?”

My answer was an emphatic “NO!” Human behavior is complex, and it takes work to dig deeply and uproot destructive thought patterns. The five disciplines outlined in this book are founded on the premise that God helps those who help themselves. Unless we are willing to learn new behaviors centered in the truths of God, worry will continue to plague us. The disciplines outlined here will focus primarily on two major areas of change.

Renewing our Thinking

In the early 1970s, Dr. Albert Ellis condensed his theories into a style of humanistic psychology called “the rational-emotive approach.” At the core of his system was a simple premise: “What we label our ‘emotional’ reactions are mainly caused by our conscious and unconscious evaluations, interpretations, and philosophy.”² Our thoughts—rational or irrational—have an enormous influence over our feelings and behaviors. In short, we are as we think.

Ellis’ method and its influence over popular psychology helped many people. But long before RET and Transactional Analysis were in vogue, the Bible understood this fundamental truth. Romans 12:2 tells us, “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

Have you ever stopped during the day and tried to track the course of your thinking? Many of us would find such a confusing swirl of thoughts and counter-thoughts that the effort would exhaust us. Our fast-paced lives, the demands on our time and energy, and the cacophony of messages transmitted at us through the media—all these things crowd the confines of consciousness. A quiet mind stayed on God is truly a rare thing.

Forms of meditation that are loosely based on eastern traditions attempt to empty the mind of thought. It is felt that by doing this we get in touch with the present in such a way that it liberates us. Although there is a long and rich history of quietism within Christianity, I prefer a spiritual discipline that is more dynamic. Writers like Norman Vincent Peale became so immensely popular because they did not try to empty the mind. Instead, they trained it in a positive direction through prayer and the repetition of scriptural principles.

This will be one of the disciplines emphasized throughout the chapters of this book. Since most worry stems from wrong thinking, then one of our tasks is to replace these toxic thoughts with eternal, life-giving truths from scripture. The habit of memorizing scripture passages is often thought of as an art of yesteryear, but I believe it is needed by all of us a powerful weapon in fighting worry.

Scripture makes it clear that this is true. II Corinthians 10:3-5 says,

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine

power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

In his passionate book *The Three Battlegrounds*, Francis Frangipane claims that primary way evil works in our lives is through unredeemed areas of our thoughts. Thus, the mind is the first and most important battleground on which we must achieve victory. As Frangipane says, “Pulling down strongholds is the demolition and removal of these old ways of thinking so that the actual Presence of Jesus Christ can be manifested through us.”

Frangipane rightly states that the primary contributor to false mental strongholds is “the world.” Here is his definition. “The steady stream of information and experience that continually shaped our childhood perceptions is the greatest source of strongholds within us. The amount of love (or lack of love) in our home, our cultural environment, peer values and pressures, as well as fears of rejection and exposure—even our physical appearance and intelligence, all combine to form our sense of identity and our view of life.”

Unfortunately for most of us, especially Christians, the steady stream of information and experience that shaped our lives has imbedded many lies deep in our minds. These lies, though highly irrational, become natural thought responses to the circumstances of our lives.

Dr. Chris Thurman, in his book *The Lies We Believe*, does an excellent job of breaking these lies down into the categories of self-lies, worldly lies, distortion

lies, and religious lies. Within each of these areas he pinpoints specific lies that many of us live with. Here are just a few.

- *I must be perfect.*
- *It's somebody else's fault.*
- *You are only as good as what you do.*
- *Life should be fair.*
- *God's love must be learned.*
- *All my problems are caused by my sins.*

Thurman's book helps us identify the lies that cause such great unhappiness in many of our lives. He, like many other therapists in this country, uses a cognitive approach to therapy, helping his patients identify these lies so that they can replace them with appropriate truths.

The disciplines of this book are not meant to be a substitute for therapy. Some of us will indeed need professional help as we seek to sort out the tangled lies producing worry in our lives. However, having been a recipient of therapy in my own life, I know how cognitive therapy can become a matter of semantics—mere words that never touch the core of our being. Again, it is the purpose of this book to lead others to an experience of the Holy Spirit, for I believe it is this cleansing experience of God's majesty that truly sets us free.

Reprioritizing Our Time

In addition to practicing new patterns of thought, we can alleviate worry by setting aside time for certain types of activities.

Time is our most precious asset. Yet we treat our other assets—especially

money—with far more respect. We save diligently save money for retirement, managing our portfolios to make sure our resources are well allocated. However, we skip lightly over the reality that time is our most vital resource. If we have the mindset that only later in life can we relax and enjoy time, we have made a grave mistake. Wise people--especially we who wish to live a worry-free existence, will manage our time and fill it with activities that promote harmony and inner peace through a rested mind

Some of us reading this book have already set aside a regular time for prayer and devotion. We know how vital this is to maintaining a Christ-centered focus in the midst of our hurried lives. For us, the disciplines of this book can simply become a part of our daily devotionals.

Others of us have yet to develop the pattern of regular devotions. For us, this book may finally convince us to do so. Not just because we “should,” but because it will help choose life over death.

Either way will require an investment of time. Don’t get worried; you will not need to set aside a huge portion of your schedule. A small investment will yield great benefits. And if the very thought of adjusting your schedule creates stress, you definitely need to reprioritize your time.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus had an urgent mission during the three years of his ministry. He knew that his audacity in challenging the religious hierarchy would lead to an

early death. This gave him a very limited time to share his message, so he focused on a key phrase that he repeated over and over to everyone who would listen: *the Kingdom of God*.

Entire books have been devoted to examining what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. It was a new reality that contained elements of radical justice, new intimacy with God, and an emphasis on serving our enemies and the poorest of the poor. It also contained within it a promise of peace that passes understanding, a peace that comes from being in touch with eternity while living in the present.

Jesus emphasized this peace on his last night with his disciples. He said, “My peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”(John 14:27) Since most of what causes us to worry is tied to living in this world, we will take an entire chapter looking more closely at how the disciplines of this book can help us enjoy this new state of being called the Kingdom of God.

For now, let it be said that to enter into the Kingdom of God is the most precious experience of a lifetime. As Thomas R. Kelly says, “Once discover this glorious secret, this new dimension of life, and we no longer live merely in time but we live also in the Eternal. The world of time is no longer the sole reality of which we are aware. A second Reality hovers, quickens, quivers, stirs, energizes us, breaks in upon us and in love embraces us, together with all things, within

Himself.

What better place to be relieved of our worries than in the arms of a loving God! No wonder Jesus used parable after parable to coax us into the living presence of the Father. In one of those parables, he likened the Kingdom to a man who finds a treasure in a field. He is so excited at the awesome prize he has uncovered that he goes and sells everything else he owns to buy that field. (Matthew 13:44)

Contained in this one paragraph are some of the truths I've already mentioned. First, the man most likely uncovered the treasure while plowing that field. He was working! The same holds true for us: we will never find the Kingdom in our own lives without hard work. Second, when the man realizes the value of what he has discovered, he goes and sells everything else he owns in order to possess this new treasure. I believe that as we, too, are able to take hold of the new emotional and spiritual life Christ freely gives us, we will readily let go of all the worldly trappings and modes of thought that keep us chained up.

Throughout my years as a pastor, I have seen the unnecessary pain many of us suffer due to harmful thinking and misspent time. I have shared in that suffering. However, I now know firsthand what Jesus meant when he said, "then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."(John 8:32)

My prayer is that this book and its simple disciplines will help promote more freedom in your life. Freedom and the joy that attends it are the birthrights

of our adoption into the family of God.

CHAPTER ONE: **The Death Bed Discipline**

Jesus was a master storyteller, and one of his most powerful tales was of the man who built the bigger barns. (Luke 12:13-21) The man's land had produced abundantly, and he suddenly found himself with a surplus. Did his newfound success put his mind at ease? No! It produced worries, for now he had to figure out what to do with all that grain, all that profit. He devised a plan. "I will tear down my existing barns and build bigger ones. Yes, that's it! And then I will have enough to give me security for many years. I will eat, drink and be merry. What a life it will be!"

I can imagine the people listening to Jesus' story. They were probably thinking to themselves, "Wow, this man has it made! God has truly blessed him!" Jesus has them in the palm of his hand, building up a good dose of worldly envy, And just at that point, he adds a stinger. God says to the man, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

None of us know the hour of our death. We may eat the right foods, buckle our seat belts, and have our breasts and prostates checked regularly, but the fact remains that we, too, could die tonight. Our natural tendency is to live as if we will always have a tomorrow. This is a survival tactic of the brain, and it's pragmatic. Planning for our futures is practical and prudent. We would be fools to

do otherwise. However, as Jesus' parable points out, we are greater fools if we dwell on that future unduly, or if we take it for granted.

The art of a worry-free life is to plan for the future *while living as if this day is our last*. This happens when the reality of our own deaths becomes an integral part of our daily existence. It happens when we no longer cling to life, but let it surround us with beauty and mystery.

The scriptures of both the Old and New Testament attempt to awaken us to life's fleeting quality. Throughout David's many Psalms, there is a clear recognition of life's shortness. In Psalm 102, he laments, "For my days pass away like smoke," and "My days are like an evening shadow; I wither like the grass." In Psalm 103, he continues with this theme:

As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish
like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and
it is gone, and its place knows of it no more."

The wisdom required for a worry-free life begins when these do not merely create wistful moments or nostalgia over the past, but awaken us to life's fullness right now!

Since time began, cultures all over the planet have realized that how we embrace death relates directly to how we embrace life. Chilo, one of the seven wise men of ancient Greece, inscribed a motto on the walls of the great temple at Delphi. It said, "Consider the end." The Romans, who viewed death as the end of pleasure, would often meditate upon it to heighten their enjoyment of present

sensation. It was not uncommon for a skeleton to be brought among the guests at a party, and for the host to exclaim, *Vivamus dum licet esse bene*, “Let us enjoy life while we may.” Some cultures take this emphasis on death a step further. They devote entire festivals to ancestors who have died. Mexico’s Dias de los Muertos and Japan’s Obon Festival are active examples.#

Many monastic orders of the middle ages were determined to get hold of this inner awareness of life’s brevity. To help them, they often carried around reminders of death called a *memento mori*. The term is Latin and means, “Remember that you are going to die.” This item might have been a bone or a small carving in the likeness of a skull. Can you imagine using such a concrete way to remind yourself of death? What about setting a skull on the table at your next staff meeting? Or propping one on a pole at the 12th hole of your favorite golf course? Or giving one to your child’s teacher instead of an apple?

Sound preposterous, even morbid? My experience is that it takes a hard slap of reality to awaken some of us from our stressed out, worried lives. We need to connect ourselves internally with those Bible verses and life experiences that provide this slap on the cheek. I thank God for two experiences that have helped me with this.

One of them happened over a period of three years early in my ministry. During that time, in addition to tending to the sick and dying of a large congregation, I also volunteered as a chaplain at the local Hospice. Time and time

again, I was called to minister to men and women facing the final days of their lives. Their bodies were shriveled, their thoughts often addled by morphine, their loved ones gathered around them for the last time. I helped focus the presence of God in each of those situations through prayer, communion, shared laughter and tears.

All that close proximity to death began to have a curious effect on me. Instead of dragging me down by reminding me of suffering and pain, it lifted me up by focusing the miracle of each moment. I began to consider it a privilege to be allowed into the intimate final moments of a person's life. They looked to me for the gift of eternal assurance, and they gave me the gift of affirming the present.

I'll never forget one man named Bill, and the final moments I spent with him and his family. The bone cancer that racked his body had such a deep and searing pain that morphine could barely touch it. Mercifully, the doctors gave him a dosage that nearly put him in a coma. For a full week he lay barely breathing while his family kept the deathbed vigil. Then, suddenly, he awoke and was sharp and lucid. His family wanted me to pray with him, so they called me and I quickly made my way to the hospital.

When I arrived in Bill's room, it seemed that he had somehow risen above his pain. He had an almost carefree tone to his voice. At least a dozen members of his family had gathered around him, and he spoke personally to each of them. He

reminded them of small incidents from the past that had been stored in his mind. Each of the memories crystallized a positive character trait of that family member, and it served as Bill's final blessing. I could quickly see that Bill had been a remarkable character much loved by everyone present. The presence of God, released through the bonds of human love, steeped the room in a sacramental grace. It felt as if I was a special guest being included in a rare moment of this family's communion.

When Bill turned his gaze on me, the carefree look in his eyes gave way to one of compassion.

"Young man," he said, "thanks for being my pastor in these final moments. I want to tell you something, and I want you to tell it to everyone you meet. *It all goes by so quickly! Life is a blink of an eye! Tell them! Tell them to savor every second!*"

I promised him that I would, and then I joined the family in a circle of prayer around his bedside.

I'll never forget the instant I walked through the lobby doors of that hospital to return to my car. The brightness of the moment froze me in my tracks. Sunlight splashed on my cheek and a dove cooed peacefully from a nearby tree. I felt a slight breeze around me, as if I was suspended in the very breath of God. I drank deeply of the moment, opening my heart, mind and spirit to His living presence. And then I did something that probably seemed queer to anyone who

might have been watching: I lifted by arms in praise to God for the miracle of life.

Bill died that night surrounded by his family, and what a valuable gift he had left with me!

Another, much younger man, has taught me about the preciousness of life. His name is Kevin Jones, and at the moment I write this sentence he is probably somewhere sharing his amazing testimony.

Kevin is an athlete who spent most of his adult life teaching soccer and playing on a semi-pro team. At age 44, he still looks as if he is in his early 20s—fit and trim with clear blue eyes. But that youthful exterior masks the reality of what has happened in Kevin's life. In 1996, he learned that he amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's Disease, a progressive and degenerative condition that attacks all the muscles of the body and eventually leads to death. By the time Kevin was diagnosed, the illness was affecting one of his arms and the vocal chords of his throat, causing him to sound as if he were permanently drunk.

Soon after his diagnosis, Kevin experienced a profound recommitment of his life to Jesus Christ. He received an internal message, a firm sense of call, that Jesus would use him to witness to people about what truly matters in life. With that calling came a complete and absolute peace, a resting in the arms of God that took away all sadness, worry, and fear about his condition.

Kevin spoke to the assembled students and staff of our school. His sense of humor and his child-like trust in God moved all of us to tears. Because he had

submitted himself to God's plans for his life, the Holy Spirit spoke clearly through his slightly slurred speech. I'll never forget his loving presence, nor a particular part of his message.

"I am not afraid. Now I know in my heart, not just my head, the reason God has placed us in this life. It is not to make money or to become famous. It is to live everyday in His love. It is to treasure our families, our friends, and the world God has created for us. It is to serve Him with all our hearts so that others will know the awesome love of Jesus."

Can we *really* accept the wisdom of what Kevin says? Can we hear it and let it sink into our souls, bringing peace and a heightened gratitude for the miracle of this moment? Can we put down this book and walk back into our lives steeped in the presence of God, trusting Him for everything we need?

As another man, Morrie Schwartz, said during his own bout with ALS, "The best preparation for living fully and well is to be prepared to die at any time, because impending death inspires clarity of purpose, a homing in on what really matters to you. When you feel that the end is near, you are more likely to pay close attention to whatever you treasure, especially relationships with loved ones."

Maintaining this clarity is easier said than done. The strongholds of worry in our lives have thick, nearly impenetrable walls, and the powers of this world's way of thinking pull at us in addictive ways.

One of my favorite writers, Henri Nouwen, found this out firsthand. He suffered a near fatal accident while walking along a roadside. The extended mirror of a passing van struck him and caused severe internal bleeding. While he lay in the intensive care unit of a nearby hospital, he had the strong premonition that he was dying, and the presence of God filled him with a love and security that assured him of heaven's reality. It was an intense physical experience of Jesus being present with him, and his description of those glorious moments brought a flood of tears to my eyes.

Why did I cry?

First, I cried because this remarkable spiritual father to millions admitted that even *his* relationship with Jesus was often distant, based on devotion and commitment. I was not alone.

Second, I cried because I realized what a great difference there is between love at a distance and *actually feeling Jesus' embrace*. It took a literal smack on the back to bring Nouwen into this physical awareness of God's glory.

Third, I cried because I thought of how often I and so many others miss the richness of what God wants to pour into our hearts and spirits. So many other issues crowd in to diminish our joy.

Even after such a powerful experience, Nouwen recognized this insidious effect of daily living. Upon leaving the hospital and beginning his recovery process, he remarked that "the clarity of the meaning of life received on a hospital

bed easily fades when the many daily obligations return and start dominating life again.”³

I saw this same thing happen to a man named Marvin.

Marvin was a driven man all his life. He came from an impoverished urban family, and when he left home he never looked back. He moved west, established a successful business, and accumulated a large fortune. His life was his work. He was a man who lived and breathed the demanding details of his little empire twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. His wife and three children submitted to his forceful energy, giving Dad all the space he needed to charge forward in life.

Then, at age 48, Marvin hit a huge roadblock—a major heart attack that nearly killed him. I vividly remember my visit with him in the hospital. He was still in ICU following open-heart surgery. This man whose physical presence had always been overpowering, who had always seemed like an unstoppable force of nature, now lay before me with tubes coming from every orifice in his body. His skin was as pale as his sheets.

“Krin,” he said, “all I can do while I lay here is reflect back over my life. You’d think I’d be proud of what I’ve accomplished, but all I can think about is what I’ve missed. My kids will be in college in just a few years, and I feel like I don’t even know them. I wasn’t there for them. I wasn’t the Dad they needed, and I can never, *never* get those years back.”

Tears filled his eyes and streamed down onto the pillow.

“That’s true, Marvin,” I said. “You can’t get those years back. But you can start living this moment with the wisdom of how short life really is. You can heal, get out of this hospital, and go love your wife and children with new passion and commitment.”

He nodded and we prayed together that God would direct his path through daily reminders of what this near-death experience had taught him.

Just a few months later, Marvin was back at work, filling up his days with the details of his business—gone from home, gone from his family—a tense air about him. When I gently reminded him of what he had said that day in the hospital, he responded with the bluster of his old self, saying, “Yeah, I’m getting there. I’ve got a little trip planned with the kids this Saturday afternoon. And this summer we’re taking a week to go to Hawaii.”

Marvin still hadn’t gotten it. Even death’s cold slap in the face was forgotten. Old thought patterns, grooved deeply into the soft tissue of our minds, die slowly, and sometimes they *never* do. I have presided over the funerals of too many individuals who refused to change, who never slowed down enough to enjoy their lives.

Realizing this tendency within him, Henri Nouwen made a keen observation following his accident. “As soon as I lose touch with the God who is Truth, Life, and Light, I will become entangled again in the myriad of daily

‘realities’ which present themselves to me as if they are of ultimate value. Without a very explicit and self-directed attempt to keep God in the center of my heart, it will not take long before the hospital experience becomes little more than a pious memory.”

Don’t get overwhelmed by the stories I’ve related. I tell them merely to show how tough these old thought patterns are. The good news is we *can* start living more fully in this moment! We *can* let God embrace us in a way that awakens us to each precious second!

Nouwen recognizes the key. It is to have a “very explicit and self-directed” way of keeping God at the center of our lives.

To start with, think of the contrast between Kevin’s life and Marvin’s life. Where are you in the continuum between the two?

Then think of this. Time is such a mystery that it has often been called the fourth dimension. Yet except in movie fantasies of time travel, we think of it as linear, advancing second by second, moment by moment, sunrise by sunrise, year by year. There is a starting block, our birth, and a finish tape, our death. After that is whatever God has in store for us—that eternity we call heaven.

When we live in this linear mode, worrying and planning for tomorrow, we miss the awesome reality that *eternity starts now!* God wants us to draw near to Him this instant and experience the joy of heaven that is already unfolding around us. This is the reality Jesus pointed to over and over again, a state of being

that He enjoyed in communion with His eternal Father, and which He longs for each of us to experience. Quite simply, He longs to set us free. He longs for us to seek His Kingdom first, and trust that the other things we need will be added to our lives through His care.

I'm not going to suggest that you go out and buy a small skull to carry around (although a cross hanging around your neck could do the trick!). And I'm certainly not going to suggest that you have a serious enough accident to bring your into the portals of death.

Instead, I suggest that you try practicing the following discipline. It will only take a few minutes of each day, and could have an enormous impact on your life.

THE DEATH-BED DISCIPLINE

Find a quiet place to sit--somewhere with no distractions. If that's hard for you, do it anyway. The first benefit of this discipline comes from finding quiet space.

*Now, imagine you are lying on your deathbed. You know that you only have a few hours left to live. You look back over your life and realize that all the worries—**all of them**—that seemed so important on all those many days, have now been reduced to nothing. You realize that all the time you spent absorbed in the minutia of those worries was **wasted time**. It only kept you from more fully enjoying the love of God and the people in your life.*

Now, imagine the faces of those family members and friends who are most precious to you. Gather them around the side of your deathbed. Visualize them fully. See their smiles. Hear their voices. Feel the touch of their hands on your forehead or the softness of their lips on your cheek as they lean over to tell you “goodbye.” Feel and begin to savor your love for them. Let the moments you spent with them, the most intimate memories flood back into your mind. Let the love that you feel for them move through your spirit until it possesses you completely.

Now draw a breath and hold it. Do you realize that even that breath was a gift from God, that everything you have ever felt, seen, heard, tasted, and smelled was a gift from Him? Do you know that He has been as close as the air to you all your life, longing for you to experience His Spirit more fully? Awaken to Him now! Turn your heart towards your heavenly Father and thank Him for not only providing for your needs, but for finally allowing you to experience the miracle of heaven that is unfolding this present moment. Choose life and let your gratitude for the gift of every moment become your new point-of-view.

*Now open your eyes. Your whole day—**just this one--** is in front of you. The people you love will give you many opportunities to show how much you treasure them. Seize this one day and live it as if it were a gift you didn't expect. Home in on what it is you really treasure. Be free, grateful, and without worry, remembering the lessons you learned on your “deathbed.”*

CHAPTER TWO: **The Outback Discipline**

Just as full awareness of our own mortality can connect us with the preciousness of life, so can contemplation of the natural world God created for us. Immersing ourselves in nature can reorder our lives and help set us free from worry.

I'm not talking about a hurried visit to the countryside in a sport utility vehicle. Advertisers continually pitch the latest 4x4 with promises that we can live a hectic business life and still squeeze in a few scenic moments outback. Thus, we get images of corporate businessmen parked near beautiful lakes who are still working on their laptop computers and sending email through cellular phones. This approach to enjoying the wilds is symptomatic of our desire to control, our need to fit everything into *our* schedules and *our* frameworks. It is this mindset of domination that continues to destroy so many forests species of animals each year.

What I'm calling for is a true *time apart*, a disconnection from the daily grind and its strangling worries. This is not an easy prescription for many of us. Even on our vacations, it often takes two or more days before our inner springs begin unwind. For some of us, the spring *never* relaxes. Our vacation agendas are more frenetic than our business lives. We have to see and do *everything*, and we will drag unfortunate family members and friends along with us.

I confess to being a hurried vacationer in my own life. Before writing this book and taking a long, hard look at myself, my wife and I made a whirlwind tour

of New Mexico. She had always wanted to see Santa Fe, but I had been there many times, having lived for a time in Albuquerque. Instead of honoring her request and spending quality time to soak in the sights of northern New Mexico, I got her to agree to a swap. If I went to Santa Fe, she would have to drive to Carlsbad Caverns, take a quick tour, then drive across the state line into Texas and climb up Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in the Lone Star state. She agreed, but I could see by the look on her face that she had reservations.

I should have heeded her misgivings. Our vacation was a blur. We zoomed from one end of the state to the other (*in a rented 4x4!*), covering hundreds of miles with the pedal to the metal. We saw Santa Fe, a few pueblo ruins, then sped down the eastern fringe of the state. We pushed ourselves, saw the caverns, climbed the peak, stayed a few moments at the summit, took mental snapshots of the awesome view, descended, jumped in our car, then started the long drive back to catch our plane in Albuquerque. By the time we were finished, we needed a vacation from our vacation. Neither the mental snapshots, nor the bragging rights of “bagging a peak,” made the pace of our visit worthwhile.

In contrast to that trip, I *have* spent many quality hours alone with God surrounded by the beauty of His creation. My hobby for many years has been to hike to the highest points in different states. Not all of these trips have been rushed. Many of them have been special journeys into the wilderness, days that unfolded a deeper intimacy with God. These were times when a connection with the raw basics of life drained away the worries of my hurried life.

It is *this* type of retreat that I mean when I use the term “outback discipline.” I choose the word *outback*, with its Australian overtones, because of a

remarkable book I recently read: *Mutant Message Down Under*, by Marlo Morgan. It is the half-real/half-fictional account of an American woman who travels to Australia in her work as a teacher of preventive health care. While there, she gets an invitation to the country outside of Perth, where an Aboriginal tribe wishes to honor her for her involvement with their people. Expecting a luncheon or awards banquet, she goes, meets a young Aboriginal man at her hotel, and allows herself to be transported by jeep hundreds of miles over rutted roads to a remote location.

She finds no meeting halls or lodgings of any kind, only the tribe. They greet her with her award—the announcement that she can join them on a *walkabout* across the Australian continent. This is a great honor, because no western person--no *mutant*--has ever journeyed with them before. Her first inclination is to refuse, but since she has no return ride to civilization, she reluctantly accepts her “privilege.”

What ensues is an experience that changes her life. At first, the disconnection from modern amenities makes her feel vulnerable, frustrated, even desperate. Soon, however, the unfettered quality of their march across Australia sets her free. She digs into the recesses of her spirit to find physical stamina and emotional courage she never knew was there. But the greatest change comes to her through sharing in the spiritual quality of Aboriginal existence. She is amazed and blessed by their connection with life. Every hill, every animal, every cloud that passes overhead is sacred to them. They believe that God’s Spirit is in and through *all things*, and that by uniting yourself with the texture and rhythms of the natural world, you unite yourself with God’s presence. Only then do you cease to

be a “mutant” and become a real human being blessed with eternal perspective.⁴

Some Christians will immediately write off this type of spirituality as “unsaved paganism.” Part of me agrees. I do not subscribe to an animism that endows even rocks and other inanimate objects with spirits of their own. However, western people have a lot to learn from the Aboriginal religions of every continent. Here in America, we have still disregarded the wisdom of our land’s original settlers (at least before they became champions of slot machines). We have still not heeded Chief Joseph’s awesome words as he sadly surrendered Nez Pierce lands to the invading white man. “Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.”

Worship of God through mystical connection with His creation should not be left to other faiths. We have a rich tradition of it within Christianity. My favorite example is the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis was born and raised in the town of Assisi during the late 12th and early 13th centuries. His father was a wealthy merchant who provided a luxurious life for his family. At age 20, seeking adventure, Francis fought in a war between Assisi and Perugia, a neighboring city-state. He was taken prisoner and spent a year in captivity. Upon his return, he again volunteered for a war in southern Italy, but severe illness forced him home again. It was during that illness that he had one of the most dramatic and significant conversions of history. It led him to renounce all possessions and to begin preaching a love for Jesus that was marked by humility, service to others, and pure ecstatic joy.

That conversion experience was depicted beautifully in the movie *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, directed by Franco Zeffereilli. It shows Francis lying in his bed

at home. He is unable to sleep, tortured by the images of carnage that fill his mind and spirit from recent battles. Surely this was a man who had looked upon the face of death and let it affect the tenor of his life. Suddenly, Francis hears a bird chirping on the sill of his open bedroom window. The sound seems to awaken his spirit because it is so simple, so joyful, so at one with the presence of God. He goes to the window, speaks to the bird, then puts out his hand for it. It climbs upon his finger, completely unafraid of his gentle spirit.

We'll never know exactly what happened to Francis at the moment of his conversion, but it is a well-known fact of his life that he celebrated the presence of God in nature. To Francis, God could be seen clearly in flowers, birds, the ripple of a stream, or the swirling colors of a sunset. It is said that he loved nature so deeply that he once preached to the sparrows in his joy. Another time, he is said to have tamed a marauding wolf solely through the power of his love. I believe these stories, because his famous words to the hymn *All Creatures of Our God and King* are a sublime recognition of God's presence in the natural world. Do you know its lyrics? Listen to three of these beautiful verses.

All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, Alleluia! Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam, O praise Him, O praise Him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong, Ye clouds in heaven that sail along,
O praise Him, Alleluia! Thou rising morn in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of heaven find a voice, O praise Him, O praise Him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou flowing water, pure and clear, Make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia, Alleluia! Thou fire so masterful and bright,

That givest man both warmth and light, O praise Him, O praise Him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Throughout the Psalms, we hear this same resounding of nature in praise to the Creator. Like Francis, David's poetic heart captured this beauty in many ways. Consider Psalm 98.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break
forth into joyous song and sing praises...Let the sea
roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live
in it. Let the floods clap their hands, let the hills sing
together for joy...."

To both David and Francis, all of creation sang to God because that was His purpose in creating it. Just as painters or writers want their works to "sing" to others, so does God want all of creation to enjoy the light and love of his presence. This holds true for us as human beings. Our chief, and some would say sole, purpose for living is to enjoy God and worship him forever. It is so much easier for us to remember this when we are in the presence of God's natural handiwork, and this remembrance frees us from our anxieties. There are many reasons why this is true. Let's take a look at a few of them.

First, *nature is worry-free*. This may sound funny, but it's true. Only man is self-conscious enough to disconnect from the fabric of life and create an inner chaos of anxiety. Nature—from spiraling atoms to spiraling planets—submits naturally and unconsciously to the natural order of God's laws. Nature *simply is*, and when we connect with it, an eternal present opens up that staggers us with its

mystery and power.

Second, *nature is steeped in beauty*. There is nothing like a deeply aesthetic experience to awaken us to the sheer joy of living here and now with our Creator.

One of the blessings my father has left with me is the description of a moment when beauty affected his life. He grew up on a mid-western farm during the Depression. One summer night, the farmhouse was so stuffy and humid that he took a blanket outside and slept on the lawn. The night was crystalline, deep and dark with no moonlight to wash out the sky. As he gazed up at the Milky Way, the sheer mystery of all those stars, planets and galaxies was nearly overwhelming. Yet instead of feeling confused or insignificant, he felt joy and power and love. The living presence of God—the intelligence that brought order to all that vastness—was present in his own heart! The breath of God breathed through him. Years later, as he spearheaded the financial logistics for the Apollo program, I saw that same childhood desire to reach out and connect with infinity.

I have another, more distant, relative who witnessed to the presence of God in nature. My great-great-grandfather, Lucius Edelblute, was part of a group of men who blazed the first trail to the famous Cariboo Goldrush in British Columbia during the 1850s. Known as Cariboo Ed, he was a pugnacious man, full of spit and vinegar, with an indomitable energy. Death tried to snare him through starvation, freezing weather, and numerous skirmishes with the criminals

who preyed on miners. But he always bounced back. He embodied the brash pioneer spirit of the Far West's original settlers.

His diary has been published as a book, and there is a moment in it that opens a window to his soul. He had just survived an attack by the Ute Indian tribe in which many men were killed. Seated around the campfire that evening, he wrote this in his diary. "The night was calm and pleasant, and the moon's bright rays lit up the distant mountain peaks, all of which gave me a serene feeling of wonderment and of God's protecting care..."

During the 1960's, many people sought this healing through artificial means. A great interest arose in the use of psychedelic drugs as a way to connect with life's beauty. Those who "tripped" on LSD or mescaline reported a dissolving of the boundaries between themselves and the natural world. It was a feeling of being a part of the pulse of life, at one with every sensory experience of the moment. But it was more than a sensation—it was the recognition that a great energy binds all of creation together.

The late Alan Watts described this experience vividly. He was in a garden at night, awash in the colors of the plant life and the dome of the night sky above him. Feeling a joyful at-one-ness with everything around him, he tried to find meaning in it. "All at once," he says, "it became obvious that the whole thing was love play, where love means everything that the word can mean, a spectrum ranging from the red of erotic delight, through the green of human endearment, to

the violet of divine charity, from Freud's libido to Dante's 'love that moves the sun and other stars.' All were so many colors issuing from a single white light and, what was more, this single source was not just love as we ordinarily understand it; it was also intelligence, not only Eros and Agape but also Logos."

It is sad to me that Watts had to reach this experience through drugs. This loving intelligence—this Logos which suffuses the universe—is what came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John says clearly,

In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."

When we experience the light of love that radiates through all of God's creation, we are experiencing the Holy Spirit of Jesus, the love that brings order to everything. This is not pantheism; it is an immersion in the living presence of our Lord through the beauty of his handiwork.

Finally, there is another quality of nature that helps relieve our preoccupations with ourselves: *nature is a union of life and death*. The cycle of life and death is everywhere around us when we are outback. A moth trapped in a spider web, the fallen leaves of an autumn tree, a stump being mulched by termites, a hawk descending upon a rabbit—all of these are reminders that life and death are intricately interwoven. As we experience this quality of nature, we again

connect with the fact that we are “dying in the midst of life,” and this in turn awakens us just as the death-bed discipline does.

Many a poet has tried to capture this interplay of death and life in words. In *Hydrangeas*, Carl Sandburg notes how even as early as September, “a line of brown” runs through the petals of these flowers, and that “one sunset after another tracks the faces.” Likewise, Robinson Jeffers, in describing the a Pacific Ocean scene, says “Light nor life sounds forever; here where enormous sundowns flower and burn through color to quietness.”

How can we hold on to our self-centered cares in the face of this timeless panoply? How can we do anything else but drink in its liberating beauty through the senses with which God has endowed us?

I know a man who is a professional counselor by trade. Throughout his years of listening to his patients’ problems, he became deeply aware of how much human misery is self-created. More specifically, he realized how much of this suffering is the result of a lack of perspective. So many of the so-called problems that plagued his clients would evaporate, he felt, if they were able to connect with a wider, more eternal view of their lives. Out of this observation, he created a new business that blended his counseling skills with his hobby of wilderness hiking. He would take people on 3-7 day excursions advertised as “ecotherapy,” a unique way to balance one’s life through getting in touch with the rhythms of God’s presence in nature. The business was successful in more ways than one. It not

only drew numbers of people, it allowed the counselor to serve them in a way that went beyond surface symptoms and got to the root of unnatural anxiety.

I'll never forget a mountaintop experience that gave me more than my share of "ecotherapy." By telling it to you, I have to admit my stupidity. Oh well, the illustration is worth the embarrassment.

I was hiking with some friends and family in the Great Basin National Park, one of the newest of our nation's preserves located along the eastern border of Nevada. We had decided to climb Wheeler Peak, 13, 102 feet, the second highest mountain in that state. It was the middle of July, and there were signs everywhere in the park warning hikers not to get caught on an exposed ridgeline during a sudden summer thunderstorm. I knew that. I was an experienced hiker. That would never happen to me. Right?

Wrong! As we got above the timberline, and could clearly see our objective, we also noticed ominous clouds rolling in from the southwest. My family warned me to come back and try it another day. However, my friend—a gung-ho fighter pilot—and I crazily thought we could beat the storm. We took off at a lope up the steep, rocky trail, our lungs burning in the thin air. We made the peak all right, and the view was one of the most spectacular I have ever experienced. Steep, craggy gorges dropped off thousands of feet on all sides. It was like an island of granite suspended in heaven.

However, we also noticed that the incoming storm was right upon us, the

bottom of the gray cumuli forking lightning down into the gorges.

“We’d better start back,” I yelled.

My friend nodded and we turned to retrace our steps. As I moved swiftly down the trail, I began to hear a buzzing sound. I thought it was some kind of insect, perhaps grasshoppers, stirred up by my passage. Then I noticed with a pang of fear that the hair on my forearms was standing on end. The buzzing became crackling, and I saw that it was ignited every time I moved my arms.

The air was literally charged with electricity from the storm clouds! My friend and I had become human lightning rods, seconds away from being lit up. Our first mistake was to be on that peak, and our second mistake came right then. We decided to run, which is the worst thing we could have done. We should have lain flat and waited for the storm to pass, keeping our bodies as close to the ground as possible. Talk about stupidity! We ran pell-mell down the trail, nearly slipping on every rock, racing to get away from our near-death experience.

God was with us that day; our terrible mistakes did not cost our lives. When we were away from the brunt of the storm, we stopped in mid-trail and lifted our arms to the sky in silent thanks. As we neared our family, we saw that another lone hiker had joined them. He was a British immigrant who made his home in San Francisco. His hobby, like mine, was to spend much of the summer roaming wilderness pathways, enjoying the presence of God in nature. He knew we had had a scare, and so he left us with an old Celtic blessing that is one of my

favorites. You'd better believe I was in touch with my own mortality at that moment, so his words ministered to me then, and they still do anytime I repeat them.

*Deep peace of the running wave be to you.
Deep peace of the flowing wave be to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars be to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth be to you.
Deep peace of the Son of Peace be to you.*

THE OUTBACK DISCIPLINE

Schedule a trip of 3-5 days somewhere in a remote wilderness area. It is important that this not be a tourist spot, because the sound of RV electric generators or the roar of speedboats and jet skis will not be work for this discipline. It is also important that the trip not be rushed. Make sure you have a leisurely day or two to prepare for it, and an equal amount of time to settle at home once you return.

I suggest a backpacking trip into a local national wilderness area. If this is too strenuous for you, set up camp somewhere and take a day hike from that base camp. The U.S. Forest Service office in your area can suggest many such places for a short or extended getaway.

While you are there, take a morning or afternoon by yourself and find a tranquil place off of the beaten path. Sit with your back against a tree or a rock, making sure that you have an expansive view of the surrounding wilderness. A meditating spot next to a stream or lake is especially nice, because the presence

of water has a particularly soothing effect on the human spirit.

Now, practice a heightening of your senses, an immersion of your whole being into the majesty of God's creation.

Close your eyes and start with your sense of hearing. Listen closely and deeply to every sound around you. Hear the wind in the trees, the scattered songs of nearby birds, the buzz of insects, the rustle of the grass, the murmur of a stream, or the lapping of waves on a lake. As you focus solely on listening, you will be amazed at the many tiers of sound that surround you in the wilds. This is the music of eternity, a melody and harmony we so often miss.

With your eyes still closed, let your sense of smell gather up every fragrance around you. Smell pine trees, sage, wildflowers, or the odor of dust and wood baked by the sun. Then let your sense of touch operate by feeling the wind and sun on your skin.

Now open your eyes. Scan the wonderful scenery around you. Begin with those things closest to you, perhaps an ant as it makes its way over the bark and stone. See the multi-colored lichen that clings to the trunk of a nearby tree, or the patterns of light on a stream or lake. Then expand your field of vision. Look deeply. This is not a Kodak moment. You are not simply an observer of scenery. You are part of all that you see. Let yourself merge with the fabric of life. See the colors, the textures, the designs, and recognize them as the eternal stamps of God's design.

Later, when you go to bed, try sleeping out in the open. Let the deep infinity of the night sky draw you into God's presence again. Wrap your thoughts around the fact that the nearest of those stars you see is about 25 trillion miles away! Then realize that some of the star clusters you see are actually clusters of galaxies, themselves filled with as many stars and planets as our own Milky Way! Meditate not only on the infinite expanse of space, but of the time in which God has created them.

Do your worries seem significant now? I hope not. I hope you can feel them dissolving in the presence of the Spirit that enfolds not only every one of those stars, but your own life as well.

And if all this experience of vastness makes you feel insignificant, remember these reassuring words from Psalm 8. They are part of the discipline of affirmation we will discuss in chapter 4.

“O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth...When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands....”

My personal prayer is that this time apart in the “outback” will awaken you to God's soothing and uplifting presence in the natural world. When this

discipline is practiced in the wilderness, it stays with us when we return. It is something that can be repeated at a local park or in our own backyards.

It is a gateway to letting God cleanse us from worry.

CHAPTER THREE: **The Searchlight Discipline**

Light is one of the most powerful metaphors of the Bible. Emanating from God, it is seen as a source of wisdom and transformation.

The poetry of the Psalms is alive with images of light. Consider just a few.

- **Psalm 18:28**—You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.
- **Psalm 27:1**—The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?
- **Psalm 43:3**—Send forth your light and your truth; let them guide me.
- **Psalm 89:15**—Blessed are those who learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.
- **Psalm 119:105**—Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

With the coming of Jesus, God's light was revealed in brilliant 3-D glory.

Jesus told us,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

If we were to try and sustain contact with this light through our own

limited means, we would surely fail. Realizing this, Jesus promised a gift that would never fail us. On the night he was arrested, he told his disciples that after he was gone the Holy Spirit would come to them and “reveal all truth.” The Greek word that Jesus used for the Spirit is *paraclete*, which we most often translate as helper or guide. Another translation is “mediator,” one who continually mediates a way between us and God. For those who have embraced God’s presence, the Spirit indeed plays this role—throwing wide the shutters to God’s light through the medium of our conscience.

Throughout history, philosophers and psychologists have tried to make sense of the conscience. It has been described as an innate set of rules inherited through human evolution, an accumulation of values based on individual experience, or a set of behaviors adopted from the behaviors of our parents. All of these definitions are humanistic, meaning they are bounded by the limits of human understanding.

Christians believe something far richer and deeper. We believe that conscience comes to us from beyond the boundaries of human ability. We believe it is part of God given to us, the light of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We believe that heightened sensitivity to this Spirit helps us live in harmony with God and other people. Most importantly, we know that to have a completely clear conscience is vital if we are to live a worry free life. This is so important that I want to restate it: *a completely clear conscience is vital if we are to live a worry*

free life.

Why do I say this? Because if an issue regarding a negative behavior hides in the dark part of our minds, never dealt with, it eventually leads us into one of two destructive behaviors.

First, we may try to ignore the issue and its signals within our conscience.

To do this, we must practice a form of denial, which is actually a hardening of our conscience. And once our conscience is disregarded, it becomes easier to ignore it on other occasions. However, unless we have a sociopathic personality with no moral compass at all, an ignored issue in our conscience *never* goes away completely. It is like a nugget of uranium that we have tried to bury, but which still gives off radioactive poison into our bodies. This poison is noticed as a general sense of uneasiness, a lack of peace, or an *unnamed worry* that works away at us throughout the day.

We may have practiced denial for so long that we can no longer connect this worry to its source, so deeply buried is the original issue or incident. But we still pay a heavy price for not having a clean conscience. The manifestations are stress, irritability, a lack of focus in our work, and insensitivity in our relationships.

The second reaction to an unsolved issue of conscience is *to focus on it obsessively until it is magnified out of proportion.* We know we did something wrong, our conscience has convicted us of it, but instead of letting it go, we pile

on a heap of other worries. These obsessive, secondary worries are usually related to imagined consequences, the fear of being exposed, or concerns about the opinions of others. Each of these secondary worries thrives on the question “What if?” and can fill our waking minds so thoroughly that we find it hard to work, eat, or sleep. I have heard many a person describe these obsessive thoughts swarming over them in their bed as they awoke in the middle of the night.

Both of these responses to our conscience cause unnecessary stress, even physical illness. It is important to cultivate new disciplines if we are to live freely in the present.

We can start by bringing ourselves more fully into the searchlight of God’s love. We can practice transparency before God. One of my favorite scriptures, Psalm 139, shows that for those who are in relationship to God, this transparency is natural, even unavoidable. David eloquently expresses his awareness that God searches us at all times and all places. The penetrating light of His presence is at the center of our lives.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand on me... Where can I go from your Spirit?... For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb... In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them yet existed.”

What a sublime description of God's omnipresence! The old saying is absolutely true, that "even when no one else is watching, God is." His knowledge of us started before we were born and extends into eternity. There is literally nowhere we can hide from the searchlight of God.

We can react to this realization out of fear and obligation, as if God is like Big Brother in Orwell's 1984, some sort of Thought Police trying to make us adhere to the rules. Many stubborn and rebellious souls have fought against God's watchfulness. Or we can realize that His presence is actually the *light of love aflame in our minds and hearts*. When we see the presence of His Spirit in this way, we want to submit to His guidance because we know that God desires only health and abundant freedom for us. We begin to welcome his companionship even if it requires radical change.

David came to this point in his life, especially after his sinful chapter with Bethsheba and Uriah. He threw himself prostrate on the ground before the Almighty and prayed the beautiful conclusion of Psalm 139.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me
and know my thoughts. See if there is any hurtful
way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The Apostle Paul put it another way in Ephesians.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them...

everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. (5: 8-11, 13)

In the 12 Steps of AA, adapted to work miracles in the lives of millions of people, allowing the searchlight of God to expose our dark areas is called “taking inventory.” Inventory is a rather clinical, business-like term, but it fits. When we open our hearts, minds and spirits to God’s shining love, we objectively need to put our own passions and judgements—our emotional baggage—aside for a moment. Only then can the Holy Spirit, working through our consciences, highlight the issues we must release into His love. These can be small details or large. Here are just a few things we might find.

- Harsh words we have spoken to a friend, family member, or co-worker.
- Times we have gossiped about other people.
- Lies we have told.
- Resentments we are harboring.
- Unhealthy sexual thoughts and/or acts in which we participated.
- Opportunities for loving service we callously disregarded.
- Ways we have cheated others.

The content of what we find will vary in each of our lives, but it is important that the inventory is absolutely searching. This may be especially difficult for those of us who feel we have done nothing wrong. Deeper issues like pride, competitiveness, self-centeredness, or a lack of sensitivity to those who are hurting—qualities that permeate our personalities—are more difficult to see in the light of God’s love. But without seeing and releasing them, it is impossible for us to live a worry-free life.

The more we practice allowing the light of God into our lives, the more the Holy Spirit can assist us throughout every minute of every day. The Bible calls this discernment, a wisdom that eventually allows us to see more and more of life through the eyes of Christ. This happens by allowing every detail of the world around us to be examined in the light of His love.

Thomas R. Kelly describes this kind of life as living on two levels at once: the level of the outward world, and the inward level of the light within us. He says, “the religious man is forever bringing all affairs of the first level down in the Light, holding them there in the Presence, reseeing them and the whole of the world of men and things in a new and overturning way, and responding to them in spontaneous, incisive and simple ways of love and faith.”

As we bring our lives into the light of God’s love, it will become clear what we are to release. The next step, then, is to confess these issues to God and another person. Again, this comes directly from the 12 Steps. This is called “cleaning house,” and it is absolutely essential for us to have minds and hearts that are free and serene.

It is not the place of this book to examine the long history of confession within the Christian church. I recommend Richard Foster’s writings further reading. We all know that without confessing our sins to God on a regular basis, we lose true fellowship with God. Confession is a daily acknowledgment that He is Lord and we are his children. It is a recognition that we always fall short of his

glory, and that apart from his love we can do nothing. Most importantly, it is a discipline that reminds us of the core of our Christian faith—the free gift of grace-filled forgiveness that is ours through the cross of Jesus.

What I am more concerned about in this book is that our confessions before God become an *actual, physical act of letting go*. As a pastor, I know how many people can take part in corporate confession during worship, then leave with their sins still plaguing them. It is vital that confession not just be a mental and verbal exercise, but a physical release. We will examine this in the next chapter. But let's just take a look for a moment at the issue of confessing to another person.

12 Step programs emphasize that confessing to another person *the exact nature of our wrongs* is essential for peace of mind. In some ways, I agree with this. In all my experiences as a pastor, counselor and teacher, I have seen the power of transparency. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable to others is a powerful way of airing out our consciences. It gives others the chance to love us unconditionally, putting into flesh the love of God in a unique way.

Yet there are some issues we may want to confess only before God. 12 Step programs frown upon this because they believe that people who are addicted and dysfunctional are adept at the art of self-deception. If we confess only to God “as we know Him,” we have no one to hold us accountable.

Accountability is indeed one of the benefits of confessing to another

person. This can happen with a single prayer partner, or within the context of a small group that is pledged to confidentiality and unconditional love. God will use these people to help keep us on a path that is centered in His good will. They provide evaluation points along the path of our recovery, and help remind us of our commitments.

However, non-Christian 12 Step groups underestimate the personal, physical relationship that believers have with Jesus through the light of His Spirit. Our walk with Him is not a connection to some abstract higher power. It is a living, breathing friendship, and I see no problem with confessing certain sensitive issues to Him and Him alone. If He is truly alive in our daily lives—actively speaking words of love to us through His Spirit—then He will surely hold us accountable to that we have lain before Him.

THE DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION

The preparation for this discipline is similar to the others we have already discussed: find a quiet place set apart from your busy schedule. This is God's time, committed solely to Him so that He can grace your life with new freedom.

Close your eyes and begin with these words from Psalm 139. Commit them to memory so they are a natural part of your times of confession.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

With your eyes closed, remain still and allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate areas of your life that need to be confessed and released. We may see things we have done, words we have spoken, and thoughts we have harbored and relished. The faces of people we have sinned against may come to mind.

If you are a person prone to “building mountains out of molehills,” this first rush of conscience might seem overwhelming. Do not fight this flow. Let the Spirit be real for you and begin to cleanse your mind. Stay with it, for the next step is a way of releasing one step at a time.

Now, with your eyes still closed, allow a single issue to be held in your mind. It is this single issue, or any other worry, which you will use to practice the next step.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Open-Hands Discipline

We've all heard the phrase "let go and let God." 12 Step programs have popularized it until it has become part of our national jargon. I've seen it displayed on bumper stickers right next to "One Day at a Time." Like many aphorisms, these two have infinite wisdom. If we were able to put them into immediate action, we would experience liberation of the heart, mind, and spirit.

However, cliches are long on prescription and short on instruction. I don't know about you, but sometimes I actually find them irritating. I remember a particular incident. I was in the middle of a stressful, worried time week. A well-meaning acquaintance smiled at me and said "just let go and let God." I confess that a part of me felt like shouting, "Stop saying that! I already know I **should** let go and let God, but I don't know **how**. *It's not that simple!*"

That's the problem with simplistic mottoes: they take practice and discipline to put into effect. Ask people who are working recovery programs from alcoholism or drug addiction. You can be sure they heard the national slogan "just say no" a million times, but it wasn't until they allied themselves with a

conscientious program—a detailed set of steps—that they could actually reach their goal.

The same thing holds true for much of the advice we find in the Bible. Consider the Proverbs, that collection of wise sayings passed on through generations of Israelites, then to the Gentiles, then down through history into our 20th century pews and homes. Open to one of the chapters of this book and hear again how the lifelong wisdom of a single verse jumps out at you. For instance, take chapter 3, verses 5-6.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not
on your own understanding; in all your ways
acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

Great advice, right? Easy to put into practice, right?

Wrong! Everything about our stubborn willful natures wants to put ourselves first in life, as if *our* understanding and *our* willpower are the source of a truly successful existence. To do the opposite—to place God daily at the center of all our decisions and efforts—takes humility, surrender, and years of prayerful devotion. This proverb is far from simple.

Jesus' sayings are also deceptively simple. Consider what he said to his disciples at the Last Supper: "Love one another as I have loved you." Nothing could be easier, right? Actually, nothing could be more demanding! Just ponder the sacrificial love shown on the cross, and this saying suddenly demands a lifetime of learning and self-discipline. There is nothing simple about it!

If we are to “let go and let God” in our lives, the motto alone won’t cut it. We need concrete, physical disciplines that we can practice on a daily basis.

Allow me to make an analogy to the sublimely frustrating game of golf. Ever since I picked up a club and took my first swing, I realized that golf requires a state of mind that seems like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. At first I called this state of mind “forced relaxation.” I knew that if my brain were concentrated on any stressful thoughts whatsoever, the fluidity of my swing would be lost. I would hook, slice, top, and even miss the ball. More than once I slammed my clubs into the ground and wondered why I ever continued with such a ridiculous, frustrating game! But I did. Why? Because when I hit a good shot and watched it sail towards the green, it was so, so good!

As I committed myself to learning the golf swing, I changed my term for the state of mind I needed. I now call it “disciplined relaxation,” and it comes from a curious thing that golf players call “muscle memory.” When a correct golf swing is practiced countless times at the driving range, our muscles memorize the complex movements until they become unconscious—as natural as swimming, walking, or running. When this muscle memory is in place, a golfer can start focusing more on course management and game strategy.

Or consider a baby learning to crawl, something I recently watched happen with my youngest child. First came rolling over, then pushing himself up on his arms, then settling back on his knees and rocking. Finally, when the muscle

memory of these components was in place, he was ready to launch forward. Of course, he fell on his face more than once, but even that was part of the process of getting this complex motion imbedded in his unconscious.

We need this kind of automatic physical response if we are to regularly let go of the worries that plague us. Letting go is a discipline that is not natural to most of us. We are more apt to live in quiet desperation, carrying our accumulated emotional baggage from day to day, week to week, year to year.

I recently spoke to a man whom I care about very much. He is a competent public school teacher with a bright mind and caring heart. Yet as a single man he is also very lonely. This gnawing desire to share his life with a partner drives him to clinging and clutching. He has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and rationally he knows that only Jesus can satisfy the emptiness in his life. However, there is another stronghold in this man's mind. This lie tells him it will be a woman—one who needs him and accepts him—that will *really* fill the emptiness.

On the day we spoke, he was especially aware of how this futile and addictive line of thinking was driving him into unhealthy relationships. He had gotten himself deeply involved with an alcoholic woman who used him to meet her needs, but refused to return his overtures of love and commitment. He was severely agitated, filled with fear, frustration and tension, worried that this deeply grooved pattern of thinking and behaving in his life would never end. Words like “never” and “hopeless” lead to depression, and as my friend spoke, I could fully

empathize. There have been too many times in my life when I was unable to “let go and let God.” Being stuck brought a sense of despair.

My friend finally turned to me and said, “Krin, help me. How can I let go of all this worry and stress?”

What I said to him, I remind myself of daily. The first step is to bring ourselves full into the presence of God. We must first experience his peace physically—not just as an idea. We must develop a discipline that accomplishes this, because until we know how to call upon His presence and let it set us free, we will always be strangled by our worries.”

By now you realize that all the disciplines of this book take place in a times set apart for God. This time alone with the Lord is half the battle in ridding ourselves of worry. And it is not small feat! Everything about our fast-paced lives will conspire to make our time of devotion a last priority. If, instead, we put it *first*—if we commit ourselves to *never* letting a day go by without solitary communion with God—His light and wisdom will permeate all aspects of our lives.

The physical discipline I’m about to suggest is also set during a time carved out for God. But before we look at it, I want to briefly revisit our discussion of mental strongholds, and how fortified they become in our minds. I do this to emphasize once again the need for disciplined perseverance.

To use an analogy from nature, think of a coral reel. Each coral polyp is a

small animal in and of itself, but they build on top of each other until they form huge reefs that defy even battering waves. The same holds true for the mental fortresses that rise up in our minds. They start off as a simple lie, but as that powerful lie draws other thoughts its way, these thoughts add layer after layer until walls and turrets, even drawbridges and gargoyles are in place!

As I've stated, we have the confidence that God's Word working through us is sufficient for the work of tearing down these strongholds. But it takes *concentrated attack time*. Our persistent efforts, brought about through disciplines like the ones in this book, will batter away at the walls until they fall. Like the Israelites who surrounded Jericho until it collapsed, we will have victory!

It is important not to become impatient in this battle. Consider Biblical history. The Israelites only arrived at the border of Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the desert—a time of overwhelming worry! And even after the decisive battle at Jericho, it took many more times on the battlefield before the Promised Land was theirs.

God's timing will be different for each of us. Upon practicing this discipline, some of us may experience deep release after a only short amount of time. Other of us, however, may only be able to let go of portions of our worries, still aware of the stronghold standing dark and tall in our lives. Do not be afraid; its walls will crumble as we connect with the power of God's presence.

This will be true not only with our worries, but with the other strongholds

that have long taken too much space in our minds. The discipline of letting go can be used with resentment, fear, guilt, and even grief. Since each of these emotions may seem resistant to attack, we need patience and perseverance.

THE OPEN-HANDS DISCIPLINE

At the onset, this discipline is best practiced at that time and place we have set aside for prayer and conscious contact with God.

Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet placed on the ground and your hands on your lap. Begin by praying the end of Psalm 139 mentioned in chapter three. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any hurtful way in me...”

Let the word hurtful apply to any worries you are presently holding on to. Are you worried about finances, or your job, or someone else’s feelings about you? Are you worried about whether a plan of yours for the future will materialize? Are you worried about your health or the health of a loved one? Are you worried about the welfare of one of your children? Perhaps your worries are a mixture of several of these.

Take one worry in particular and concentrate on it. Since worry creates a definite physical response—tightening of muscles, adrenaline, nervous stomach, and shortness of breath—concentrating on it will not be comfortable. That’s exactly the point; now you can feel how worry affects the entire body.

Now ask yourself out loud, in a whispering voice, “Are you willing to let go of (name the worry)? It is important to do this out loud and to name the worry as specifically as possible. For instance, instead of saying “Are you willing to let go of your worries about money?” say “Are you willing to let go of how much that new water heater will cost?” Instead of saying, “Are you willing to let go of your resentment?” say “Are you willing to let go of your anger over that insensitive comment your boss made?” Instead of saying “Are you willing to let go of your fear?” say “Are you willing to let go of your fear about making that presentation at work next week?”

Try to be very specific in naming the worries and other hurtful feelings that are holding your back from freedom.

No, answer your question to yourself. This may sound silly, but believe me: there are people who would rather hold on to their misery than let it go. By focusing your own response in a question and answer, hopefully you will get in touch with your deepest desires.

DO YOU WANT TO BE FREE! DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BE FREE OF THESE HURTFUL EMOTIONS YOU ARE CARRYING IN YOUR HEART, MIND AND SPIRIT?

If so, say, “YES, I WANT TO LET GO OF (NAME THE SPECIFIC FEELING OR ISSUE).

God has the power to set you free. It is not an effort of your will, but of His

perfect and liberating love moving through you.

Now, gently close your fists and place them palms upward on your lap.

Repeat this prayer or any other similar prayer that springs from your heart.

“Lord Jesus, I praise you for the gift of this day and for the grace of your Holy Spirit living inside me. I praise you for your power over all areas of my life. At this moment, I confess my trust in your plan for my life. I believe that all that has happened before this moment, and all that will happen after it, are safely in your hands. I confess to you that my deepest desire in life is to know you and trust you more fully each waking moment. Because of this, I now let go of (name the worry or hurtful emotion), and place it in your hands. Lord, fill me with the gift of your peace so that I may live to praise you and serve you in the freedom of your Spirit. Amen.”

When you get to the “letting go” part of this prayer, open your fists and expose your palms upward. Physically feel yourself letting go of your hurtful emotions. You have been holding tight to them, but now feel them being released. Give them over fully to God. This is a powerful way of focusing yourself in the present, and you may want to repeat the line “I now let go of (name the worry or hurtful emotion)” a number of times, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit move through you with liberating, cleansing love.

CHAPTER FIVE: **The Battle Cry Discipline**

When we practiced the Outback Discipline, we immersed ourselves in the exquisite textures of God’s creation. We were filled with awe by the wonder of this world He created for us. We reminded ourselves through Psalm 8 that human beings are the crowning glory of this creation—an insight not meant to inflate us, but to bring us into union with God’s presence. We were reminded that we truly have been created in God’s image.

With this chapter’s discipline, we will expand on this view God has us.

To put it plainly, at the heart of the Biblical story is God’s unfailing affirmation of humanity. From the moment He made a covenant with a nomadic desert tribe, to the moment He sacrificed His Son on the cross, he never stopped believing in our potential. Nothing we could do caused him to turn His back permanently on us. A rainbow followed the flood. A promised land followed the wilderness. Rebuilding followed the exile. A Savior followed the prophecies. And despite our rebellious ways, this Savior died for us in the most magnificent act of love the world has ever known. As Romans 5:6-8 says,

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Even before His ultimate sacrifice, Jesus spoke fluently of his love for us. He likened himself to a shepherd who attends to our needs, a light that calls us out of the darkness, and a door we pass through to find eternal peace. At the Last Supper, his prayer for his disciples is a prayer for any of his followers. In it, he said “Father...I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

The Gospel narrative is God’s resounding “YES” to the existence of His children here on earth. And if you read the life and ministry of Jesus closely, it becomes clear that he reserved a special love for those who are sinful and hurting. He came under great criticism for his association with “unclean” people like prostitutes, tax collectors, Gentiles, and those with mental or physical diseases. And when those criticisms came his way, he simply said, “Those who are well do not need a Physician.”

What a positive and enduring love our Lord has for us! It is this divine view of humankind’s eternal and precious significance that sets Christianity apart from other religions. When you consider this high opinion God has of us, you see

why it is essential to find disciplines that help us see ourselves as He does.

This sense of our eternal worth will now come from the world around us. Despite the lofty words of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution, American society—like the social order of all empires before it—is based on inequity. Money, physical beauty, athletic prowess, political power and prestige—these forces still rule the day. Worth is tied to temporal accomplishment. To be free, we must fight against these forces. We need weapons to cut through the lies that will try to enslave us.

In this fight, scripture is one of our most powerful allies. When we commit it to memory and use it to battle the lies in our minds, it works miracles—bringing strength and peace where there was weakness and chaos. II Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Notice that belonging to God is not enough; we must also be in training. Any of us who have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, yet *still* struggle with worries, can attest to this. We know we are Christ’s and that he lives within us through the power of His Holy Spirit. But when it comes to tearing down these mental fortresses, we need a concentrated discipline. We need scripture to correct us and train us in righteousness. Paul says this is what makes us proficient—able to live and serve in this world with Christ-centered clarity of purpose.

A mere humanistic view of the Bible—one that equates it with other sacred texts—only creates a shield against its miraculous power. I see this clearly in the life of a long-time acquaintance.

This man has a voracious intellect. His incisive and inquiring mind is able to take on almost any mental task. He is extremely well read, often tackling volumes of history and science that would scare other people away. As part of his general education, he has studied most of the world's great religions, trying to get a feel for their basic beliefs. His own faith, however, is non-existent. He is a confirmed existentialist, believing that we come from nothingness and return to nothingness. He has no place in his life for that which cannot be verified by his senses or his reason. To him, all the elaborate belief systems of the world, though they have their beauties and truths, are simply attempts to wish away the finality of death and life's absurdity. Don't get me wrong, he's not a bad person. He is simply a man without faith. Because of this, all his wisdom seems like foolishness to me. As Psalm 14:1 says, "Only the fool says in his heart 'There is no God.'"

I have witnessed to this man, but nothing I've said has been able to penetrate his intellectual defenses. He is living witness to the fact that once the mental fortresses of humanism get firmly established in our psyches, they are nearly impervious to destruction.

I remember the summer he read through the entire Bible. He wanted to understand the historical basis for our Judeo-Christian heritage, and I sensed that

he also wanted to find out more about this man named Jesus. Despite his confident presumptions about life, I sensed a stirring of dissatisfaction in him, a longing to connect in a more meaningful way. I prayed fervently that God would use the scripture to awaken faith within him.

It didn't happen. After he had finished his summer reading, he could intelligently discuss the role of prophets in the history of Israel. He could comment on the apocalyptic flavor of the early Christian church. But he was no closer to a relationship with Jesus. To him, the Bible remained a historical document, dead letters attesting to a distant past. He had begun with that viewpoint, and the mental fortress stood strong. Because his lips could not confess "I believe," his mind was closed to the voice of God.

Faith makes all the difference. Once we receive Christ into our lives through faith, the Holy Spirit begins to illuminate our minds. This illumination, in turn, allows us to start understanding the infinite depths of scripture. We see, as I've said, that the Holy Spirit not only inspired scripture when it was written, but that the *Spirit still lives and breathes through it!* The Bible is not simply a historical document with partial relevance to the modern world. It is a living testimony to the living God. It has the power to change lives when its truths are grasped by a faith-filled mind. Paul pointed to this quality of faith in one of his letters to Corinth.

Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received

the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us. Therefore we teach, not in the way that philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us; we teach spiritual things spiritually. An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God: he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be understood by means of the Spirit. A spiritual man, on the other hand, is able to judge the value of everything, and his own value is not to be judged by other men. As scripture says, *Who can know the mind of the Lord...?* But we are those who have the mind of Christ.” (I Corinthians 2:12-16)

Think of this miracle that happens to you when you receive the gift of faith. You are given the Holy Spirit as a new way of understanding the world. The Spirit begins a work of regeneration within you that eventually gives you the mind of Christ. This is a powerful statement of communion with our Lord! It actually says that once we become a part of His Body, we can look out upon this world of ours through His eyes!

I recently saw a dramatic example of this in the life of my teenaged son. Throughout his childhood, I raised him to know the Biblical story. It took if for granted that he had a solid relationship with the Lord.

Then he hit his teens! What happens to so many youth also happened to him. In his own quiet way, he began to question his spiritual foundations. He was struggling to determine whether this faith of his was inherited or authentically his own. He pulled back from involvement at church, and rather than fight him, I did two things: one, I remained in constant prayer for him; two, I kept our lines of

communication open in a non-judgmental way.

As an answer to prayer, God sent one of Pieter's friends to invite him to the youth group of another church. Pieter instantly found a home there. The magnetic personality of their youth director captivated him. He heard the Word of God communicated in a new way, and he experienced the fellowship of like-minded peers.

Praise God! Pieter recommitted his life to Christ—a decision that authentically gave witness to his personal faith. Once that faith was reconfirmed, his mind began to be renewed through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. I vividly remember him telling me: “Dad, I’m starting to see everything in a different way—TV, movies, the behavior of other kids at school. I am always wondering what God would think of the things I see.”

The mind of Christ was being established, through faith, in my son!

Only when faith generates new life in each of us, will we begin to see the living power of scripture. We now have, as Paul says, a spiritual mind that can understand God's eternal teachings. And another amazing thing happens. As we surrender more and more of our daily lives to God's presence, we see that scripture has ever-new depths of powerful meaning. It's applications, like the limitless love of God, continue to unfold—meeting new challenges with new understanding.

I have seen this demonstrated so vividly in Bible studies. When examining

a particular piece of scripture, I always leave ample time for participants to see what God wants to say to them through it. I come prepared with my lesson, but I also come prepared for surprise. I have found that even with familiar passages, the Spirit may leap out at people and give them startling new insights. These insights, rather than my preparation, may become the starting point for our discussion. Such revelations are often accompanied by exclamations of, “I never saw it this way before!”

Even single verses apply differently to our lives as circumstances change. The truth of a particular passage may only be unlocked once we have experienced something to which God wants to apply it. At that moment, the mind of Christ—activated by the Spirit within us—gives us the life-changing insight that we need.

It should now be clear why scripture is so important in combating the lies that take residence in our mind. It should also be clear that this will never happen until we spend time with the Biblical text and commit key portions of it to memory. Unfortunately, I know many Christians who rarely crack open their Bibles. They leave it to their pastors on Sunday morning. I attended a church recently where people did not have their Bibles with them, and there were no Bibles in the pews. The pastor read a brief passage, then went on to preach a sermon that was only topically related to that text. He said some fine things, but he never helped his congregation dig into the actual words of scripture. I left feeling hungry. The living Word of God is like food that satisfies us deeply. When

we don't serve it up in our churches, it will be hard for our members to grow in their faith.

In this chapter, I will point out scripture verses that will us combat particular worries in our lives. However, for this to work, each of us must be aggressive in using them. I want to stress the word *aggressive*. Practice, practice, and more practice is the key! While the other disciplines of this book have accented peaceful meditation and prayer, this one must be thought of in terms of battle. The volume of scripture must be turned up if it is to drown out the cacophony of lies we have allowed to take up residence there. Let me give you a simple but vivid example of how this works.

During my time as an Army chaplain, I served for awhile in a Basic Training battalion. Every eight weeks, new classes of recruits would arrive to fill the barracks. They came from every walk of American life—urban, suburban, and rural—and represented the great racial and cultural diversity of this country. However, they all quickly had one thing in common—the stress of their Drill Sergeants driving them through the emotional and physical rigors of basic training.

In the first two weeks of every training cycle, I counseled dozens of young people who were convinced they would not survive this stress. They were physically worn out and emotionally drained. Yet it was not the demanding training schedule that was defeating them. It was the fact that each of them had

allowed themselves a lie to remain freely in their minds. That lie said, “*you can’t accomplish your goal! This training is too much for you*”

I let them vent their stress and pain, but I **never** accepted their false thinking. I told them to start practicing an aggressive use of scripture every time their Drill Sergeants got in their faces and started yelling. On the exterior, I told them to salute and say “Yes, Drill Sergeant!” but on the interior I told them to repeat this simple phrase, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” (Phillipians 4:13)

I had them practice it in my office until they were stating it with confidence and conviction. This would be their battle cry, I told them. As they endured the physical training for external combat, they could use this battle cry of scripture to win an inner victory of the Spirit. I told them that with such a powerful ally on their side, there was nothing this world could use to defeat them. The louder their Drill Sergeants got, the louder they needed to repeat this scriptural battle cry as an internal response.

This simple discipline helped many trainees endure to accomplish their goal of graduating from training. When I watched them march across the parade grounds during graduation ceremony, I had the inner satisfaction of knowing they were marching with Jesus beside them.

I ask you, too, to think of scripture as a battle cry in the most literal sense. Throughout history, warriors have used battle cries to bolster courage and to

intimidate their enemies. We can use scripture to make us bold in combating all the false idols and dark thinking this world will throw at us. We can battle our Enemy with Words of truth that will send him fleeing.

Before I recommend specific Bible verses, I want to make a disclaimer. In no way am I claiming simple answers with this method. I believe that the content and power of our secular mindset is so fortified that we will need to work quite hard to tear it down. However, I do believe that when false thinking is replaced with scriptural truth *on a regular basis*, miraculous changes begin to happen in our lives. We are freed up to be the people God intended us to be. We discover firsthand what Jesus meant when he said, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

I want to stress again that we must be bold and persistent in this effort. As Paul said to Timothy, “...God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

Amen!

FEAR OF THE FUTURE (FEAR OF FAILURE)

Some of the most paralyzing worries in our lives stem from fear of failure. We can drive ourselves mad with unanswered “what ifs?” about plans for our careers, finances, or relationships. Some of us answer these “what ifs?” with disaster scenarios. We imagine irrational, hellish outcomes to our plans, and the toxic effect of these visions sinks into our present lives until we living *now* in a

hell on earth.

This fear could also be called fear of the future, the eternity of tomorrow looming fearfully before us because we have failed to place it in God's hands. We cling to it as if all our anxiety will somehow make a difference. What makes us think we are so powerful? We would do well to listen to the instructive browbeating God gave to Job. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know...Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place...? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?"

Tell us, O God! Speak the truth until we see our worries as pride lifted up against your sovereignty!

With such self-centered lies at the center of our lives, we need strong, insistent, repetitive declarations of God's truth to reproof and correct our minds. God spoke to Job for four chapters. So let's identify some strong passages of scripture to help us in our battles.

Romans 8:35, and 37-39 (Memorize all of it!)

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I believe this is the most powerful statement of Christ’s love offered to us through the Bible. Its majesty attests to the divine inspiration of scripture!

Commit this passage to memory, using whatever version of the Bible you prefer. Once it is emblazoned in your mind and has raised a fortress for the Lord in your thinking, begin to personalize it. Do this by replacing some of its words with particular worries or situations of your own. Paul meant to span all things in his writing, assuring us of Jesus’ unfailing hold on our lives. So let the breadth and depths of these words encompass your personal worries.

For instance, you might repeat the passage yourself in a way such as this.
Who will separate me from the love of Christ? Will financial worries, or stress at work, or family problems? No, in all these things I am more than a conqueror through him who loves me. And I am convinced that nothing that happened yesterday, nor anything that will happen tomorrow, will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord.

You can get more specific as you go along.
Who will separate me from the love of Christ? Will my latest VISA bill, or my deadline for that report at work, or my son’s problems at school...

You get my point. Be creative and specific. Fill in the blanks daily with the worries or stresses that have dared to chip away your joy. The purpose of this

is to remind us that the greatest victory of all time is ours—the love and saving grace of Jesus poured into our lives! Let the sufficiency of His love overrule all other worries and concerns, for no matter their size and power, they pale in the light of what He has done for us!

Here are some other powerful verses to use when you are worried and fearful about your future.

Romans 8:28 – *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

Luke 12:32 – *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

Psalms 46:1-3 – *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.*

Isaiah 43:1a-2 – *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned; and the flame shall not consume you.*

Psalms 27:1, 3, 5 – *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.*

John 14:27 – *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

Psalms 91:9-13 – *Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in*

all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

Isaiah 54:17 – *No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper.*

Isaiah 41:13 – *For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Do not fear, I will help you.”*

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

POWERFUL VERSES FOR HELP IN LETTING GO OF OTHER ISSUES

- When you have asked for forgiveness, but the guilt lingers.

I John 1:9 – *If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Psalms 103:12 – *As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.*

II Chronicles 30:9 – *For the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.*

Isaiah 43:25 – *I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*

II Corinthians 5:17 – *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything is new!*

Romans 8:1-2 – *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

- When you're feeling down and long for the joy of the Lord.

Isaiah 55:12 – *For you shall go out in joy; and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.*

Habakkuk 3:17-18 –*Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines...yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.*

Psalm 30:4-5 – *Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

Nehemiah 8:10b –*Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

Psalm 16:11 – *You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Psalm 51:8, 12 – *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

John 16:20b – *You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.*

1 Peter 1:8-9 –*Although you have not seen Jesus, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Romans 14:17 – *For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

- When you are worried about your physical health.

Jeremiah 17:14 – *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise.*

Jeremiah 30:17 – *For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will, says the Lord.*

Isaiah 53:5 – *But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.*

Psalm 103:1-5 – *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who*

forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as your live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's

- When you are impatient about the slow unfolding of your plans.

Romans 5:2-5 – And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope; And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Hebrews 6:10-12 – God is not unjust; he will not forget our work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherited what has been promised.

SUMMARY:
One Day in the Kingdom

Listen to these life-giving words from Psalm 84.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even
the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest
for herself, where she may have her young—a place
near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my
God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they
Are every praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have
set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through
the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go
from strength to strength, till each appears before God
in Zion. Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty; listen
to me, O god of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God;
look with favor upon your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is
a sun and shield; no good thing does he withhold from
those who walk is blameless.

O Lord Almighty, blessed is that person who trusts in you.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere! Only a man

who thrilled to God's Presence could have written those words. They came from the lips of one who understood that eternity begins now, and that the glory of our Lord—*the Kingdom of Heaven*—is the greatest treasure a human being can possess.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. You can call it poetic overstatement, but the Psalmist was saying this: “You can have all that I am, O God—*even the span of my life*—just allow me to stand in the brilliant illumination of your love!”

As you have read this book, I hope that your soul has developed a deeper yearning for God's Presence. I pray that in your times alone with Him, you have passed through His gates into a new knowledge of the joy and freedom that is your birthright as a born-again child of the living God!

You have read of (and hopefully *participated in*) five disciplines to help you enter the Kingdom. Now, think of this: these disciplines, as they are practiced persistently, can become an organic part of every waking moment. This is what I believe Paul meant when he said, “pray without ceasing.” (I Thessalonians 5:17) It is this moment to moment contact with God, this daily reality of holy living, that Thomas Kelly entered into in the final years of his short life.

He put into beautiful, timeless words. “There is a way of life so hid with Christ in God that in the midst of the day's business one is inwardly lifting brief prayers, short ejaculations of praise, subdued whispers of adoration and of tender

love to the Beyond that is within...One can live in a well-nigh continuous state of unworded prayer, directed toward God, directed toward people and enterprises we have on our heart. There is not hurry about it all; it is a life unspeakable and full of glory, an inner world of splendor within which we, unworthy, may live. Some of you know it and live in it; others of you may wistfully long for it; it can be yours.”

Do you hear that? The Kingdom can be yours. Practice the Presence of God until the Kingdom surrounds you with its glory. Do not be discouraged for long, but press on, for the prize you seek is worth more than all the pale substitutes this world can offer.

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