

DAY 1

YOUR LIFE SO FAR

Luther Gulick was the physical education instructor at the YMCA training school in Springfield, Massachusetts. In December 1891, he stood at his office window and looked across the school grounds covered with a blanket of decaying autumn leaves. Bare trees shivered in the north wind, and Gulick knew that the eighteen rugby-loving men that he would be in charge of over the winter would despise his indoor games. They hated the games of Leapfrog and Drop the Handkerchief. They were tired of tumbling inside while snow fell on icy creeks. They needed stimulation, something to keep them from going stir-crazy.

So Gulick challenged James Naismith and other physical education instructors to develop new indoor games. He gave them two weeks, which would be a daunting task, but Naismith jumped at the challenge and tried combinations of several games, mixing and matching them. Nothing seemed to work. Then he remembered a rock-throwing game that he'd played in childhood. Maybe he could come up with some variation of it. He doodled out a diagram, placing two goals at each end of the running track. He felt that he might have something, so he quickly summoned the school janitor and asked for two boxes. He was going to fasten each box at opposite ends of the running track.

But the janitor couldn't find boxes and brought back two half-bushel peach baskets. Naismith decided that this would have to do, and the janitor secured them at opposite ends. Then he divided the eighteen men

into two teams and tacked thirteen rules to the wall. After each goal, the janitor lugged out the ladder and retrieved the ball. This is how the staff at the YMCA invented basketball.

SPIRIT

“The men where you live,” said the little prince, “raised five thousand roses in the same garden—and they do not find in it what they are looking for.” “They do not find it?” I replied. “And yet what they are looking for could be found in one single rose or in a little water.” “Yes, that is true,” I said, and the little prince added: “But the eyes are blind. One must look with the heart. . . .”

—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXPUÉRY, *THE LITTLE PRINCE*

Luther Gulick and James Naismith believed in the possibility of new indoor games. They focused on the solution instead of the problem. The first goal on the journey to freedom is to believe in the possibility of change. Everyone has the potential to secure a lifetime of hope, health, and happiness. Change is available to everyone. The future can be different.

Maybe you are staring into a difficult situation. Maybe you feel like a bare tree shivering in the winter of discontent. Like Gulick, you know that something needs to change. But the journey to freedom can be confusing. There are so many remedies and philosophies of change. How do you find the one that’s right for you?

The first stage of finding the right program or philosophy is pre-contemplation. You need to know where to apply the process of change. Maybe you need to lose weight or change jobs or stop being an approval addict. Maybe you need to overcome regret. Perhaps you’ve hit a dead end and you are completely confused. You only know that something needs to change. This is okay—pre-contemplation is the spadework.

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But pre-contemplation of change cannot happen unless we first believe in the possibility of change.

ANGEL IN THE STONE

One day Pope Julius II watched Michelangelo hammering away at a slab of marble. “Why are you working so hard?” he asked. Michelangelo replied, “Can’t you see there’s an angel imprisoned in this block of stone? I’m working as hard as I can to set him free.”

Inside us is the person that we were meant to be. We only need to chip away the parts that keep us in bondage to fear, to addictions, to low self-esteem, to feeling unworthy to be loved by God and others. Change is what happens when we break free from these hindrances.

But we have to believe in the possibility of change before we can be set free. Your interest in this book is evidence that you desire change. Somewhere inside, possibility still exists. This is a good thing. You are going to be okay. Change is possible. See yourself as stone and God as the sculptor who is working to set you free. We only need to remain still and let God chip some things away. Yes, it will be painful. Yes, it will be difficult. Unlike the stone, we will feel it. But we have to trust the process.

We have to ask tough questions: “What holds me in bondage? What areas of my life need change? Why do I feel hopeless?” These questions will arise during the process of change, but don’t feel broken beyond repair. Psychiatrist and spiritual counselor Gerald May says that, when we fail at managing ourselves, we feel defective. We all feel like this at times, but it shouldn’t hold us back from believing in the possibility of change.

The Israelites stood before the Red Sea with Pharaoh closing fast behind them, trapping them between the two. Moses said to the Israelites, “Don’t be afraid! Stand still. . . . You only need to remain calm; the LORD will fight for you” (Exod. 14:13–14). The possibility of victory was the first thing that God communicated to them. He wanted them to know that freedom was available. To be still and wait in the present requires hope

and a sense of promise for the future. This is the essence of change. Possibility abounds.

The second goal on the journey to freedom is to realize that we need help. Gulick recognized the possibilities of change, and this led to Naismith's invention of basketball. Our belief in possibility can lead us to the One who can invent change in our life. Saint Augustine once said that God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them. Put another way, God is always trying to produce change in us, but we can't stop worrying long enough to receive it.

Worry is the enemy of change. We worry that we will not be able to change. We worry about not being worthy of change. We worry that change will broadcast our faults to the world. But as long as we are in bondage to worry, we will never reach out for the possibility of change. Gulick did not despair over the state of the eighteen men whom he'd have to play Drop the Handkerchief with that winter. He focused on finding an answer to the problem. Instead of worrying himself into despair, he cleared his mind, so he could do as Oswald Chambers said: "Let God's truth work in you by soaking in it, not by worrying into it. Obey God in the thing He is at present showing you, and instantly the next thing is opened up."²

This seems to be how it happened for Luther Gulick and James Naismith. They believed in the possibility of change, and they did what God was showing them in the moment. For Gulick it was to commission physical education instructors to come up with new game ideas. He needed outside help. Sometimes it takes others to get us further on the journey to freedom.

Freedom is found in numbers: "An enemy might defeat one person, but two people together can defend themselves; a rope that is woven of three strings is hard to break" (Eccles. 4:12). Those who bind themselves together conquer foes, because two are better than one. And when everything within us says, "You can do this alone," be careful. Secrecy is enslavement, and if enslavement is the result of doing it alone, let's tell someone so that we can be free. We can overthrow secret thoughts of

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despair, destruction, and addiction—but we have to come out of hiding. We need true friends. We need the help of others.

The third goal on the journey to freedom is to make the process of change concrete instead of a theory. There are many who can talk the theory of change, but somewhere change has to be made in concrete steps. Gulick wanted indoor games to change, so he took a concrete step and challenged those around him to invent new ones. This is pre-contemplation at the beginning of the journey.

We must consider whether we want to take concrete steps toward change. Christ asked the same question of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda. He asked, “Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:6 NKJV). He did not doubt the man’s sincerity. He’d been lying by the pool for thirty-eight years. The paralytic man thought that he wanted to be made well, but Christ was asking something different. In essence He was saying, “A healing will change your life. You will have to get a job to support yourself. You will have to learn a new way of life.” Christ was not questioning the theory of healing, but the concrete steps that he’d have to take to enjoy his freedom. At some point, healing and growth require concrete steps. This is the opportunity set before you. This has been your life so far, but it can change. Look upon the next six weeks as a challenge.

Gulick challenged Naismith to invent new games; your challenge is to come up with a new game plan for your life. The journey to a lifetime of hope, health, and happiness begins when we say, “I want to change. I want to be made well.”

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4. How would you respond if Christ asked you personally, “Do you want to be made well?”

GOING DEEPER . . .

Read John 5:1–15 to learn the full story of the man who wanted to be healed and how he was made well.

DAY 2

THE LIFE THAT YOU WANT

The students at the YMCA training school in Springfield, Massachusetts, loved basketball so much that they took it back to their hometowns during Christmas break, and the game began to spread like wildfire. On January 15, 1892, Naismith published the first official basketball rules, and an indoor winter sport was born. Women quickly picked up the game—local schoolteachers were the first to play. The first “official” women’s team was formed a year later, with Naismith’s future wife among the players. With this kind of phenomenal growth came changes.

When we think about basketball today, we think of dunking; we think of Michael Jordan as he double-clutches the ball and slams it home. We think of the three-point line and zone defense. We think of March Madness and the NBA playoffs. But in the beginning, basketball was rugged, with inept rugby players who had to learn a different type of ball handling. And for the life of them, they couldn’t remember the thirteen rules that Naismith posted on the wall. We can picture all eighteen men, plus Naismith and the janitor, huddled around the thirteen rules, trying to deal with a dispute. Probably some of the men questioned a foul or the way someone was handling the ball. Knowing human nature as we do, some may have felt that they could come up with better rules.

But if we could have attended the very first basketball game, we would have noticed their lack of ability. They weren’t very good. A high-school junior-varsity team would have given those eighteen men a run

for their money. The first game consisted of two fifteen-minute halves with five minutes of rest between, and ended with the score of 1–0. They stunk. They needed practice, and they needed to learn the rules.

So it is with all of us who attempt change. In the beginning, we'll stink. We'll need practice. We'll take one step forward and two steps back. The harder we try, it will seem, the harder change becomes. Expect this. No one masters their problem areas overnight. "No one ever saw a country begin in one day; no one has ever heard of a new nation beginning in one moment" (Isa. 66:8). We must never demand "overnight delivery" of ourselves. We are not a package headed for Pittsburgh. We are on a journey to freedom. It takes discipline and trial and error. So keep this in mind. Give yourself room to fail.

Annie Dillard writes that the life expectancy of a crop-duster pilot is five years. "They fly too low. They hit buildings and power lines. They have no space to fly out of trouble, and no space to recover from a stall."¹ Give yourself room to stall and space to recover. It may take a while to see the results of change.

It will take some time to reap the benefits of change. Nothing grows overnight. If you don't feel as though you are reaping any benefits, give it some time. Make a spacious place for God to work when you stall. This way you will never crash because, just as the life expectancy of a crop duster is five years, the dropout rate of most programs of change is around 50 percent. To keep yourself out of this statistic, leave space for God to work. Don't give up. Change never happens as fast as we'd like. We have to learn the steps, just as the first basketball team had to refer to their rules, so keep coming back to this simple rule: Change, recovery, growth, and healing are all about hope.

Hope is a fundamental part of change. Henri Nouwen writes, "Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes. Therefore hope is always open ended."² Hope believes in spite of the circumstances. Hope is open to change. It is not dedicated to doing the same things over and over again with the same old results. Hope thinks new thoughts.

THE BOTTOM OF THE PEACH BASKETS

In the beginning of basketball, when someone scored a goal, the janitor climbed the ladder, retrieved the ball from the basket, and threw it to a player. Then they carted the ladder off the court. But as the accuracy of the players increased, so did the number of times that the janitors had to retrieve the ball. Then someone got the ingenious idea of cutting the bottoms out of the peach baskets. This revolutionized the game. They tried something different in hopes of making the game more efficient. Eventually, metal rims and cord nets replaced the baskets.

The first goal for today is to concentrate on making life better, not perfect. Avoid the idea that change is a matter of perfection. We are learning new principles to live by, which means that we need patience. The reason people drop out of a program of change is that they feel like permanent failures. But remember that mistakes are not fatal. Problems are only temporary. Circumstances change.

Start a journal. Write down the negative things that you worry will come true. Then go back in six weeks and see how many of them actually took place. Begin to concentrate more on how things can change, instead of worrying about how bad things are.

The second goal for today is to understand the presence of a crisis. Usually we don't change until our problems cause a crisis. For the game of basketball, it was the crisis of wasted time retrieving the ball. In our lives, we begin the process of change when life becomes unmanageable. Our problems dominate our time and energy. We get tired. We reach the point that we just can't face another day of pain. As C. S. Lewis said, pain is God's megaphone. It is a shipwreck of our own making. And to get back to the surface, we must suffer the consequences of our actions.

We do this by refusing to involve loved ones. We stop blaming others. We no longer manipulate other people for selfish gain. We cease to run. We face our crisis and take responsibility for it. Thomas Merton called this the "darkness of the beginning."³ We become overwhelmed and, in a sense, fall to our knees. We cry out for help from the blackest

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hole. It's the moment when we cut the bottom out of our peach basket problems, making way for a revolution in our lives.

MIND

You need to claim the events of your life to make yourself yours.

—ANN WILSON SCHAEF

When all of our human resources and efforts fail us, we tend to empty our hands so that God can fill them with Himself. This happened to me after I suffered through a divorce. I'd reached the end of myself. I struggled with low self-esteem because I felt like a failure. I could not fill the hole in my heart. I'd tried acquiring worldly possessions. I pursued power. I sought human relationships. I tried sports. I tried writing screenplays and pursued different jobs. Nothing seemed to help. I believed that perhaps a new relationship with a woman could fix me and make me complete so that I would feel good about myself again. I felt hopeless. "I will never change," I told myself. "This is all I will ever know."

Then it was as if God called to me, and the only thing I could think to do was get in my car and drive to Percy Warner Park in Nashville, Tennessee. I've always felt close to God in nature, and I knew I had to get alone with Him. It was fall, and the trees of Tennessee were on fire with dashes of orange and red and the yellows of diminishing green leaves. I parked my car and made my way beneath oaks and ashes, hackberries, locusts, and maples. I heard nothing and saw no one but the leaves as they began their descent, glancing ever so gently off those that remained on the trees. The air was full of them and the ground was blanketed. They crackled beneath my feet as I walked deeper into the woods, searching for a place to collapse on my knees. It was my "darkness of the beginning," the place where I finally cried out to God about the hole in my life. I wanted to be made well. In the midst of nature's changing season, I fell to

my knees and cried for six hours, until nothing remained. It was the beginning of a new life for me.

After that day in the park, I got into a twelve-step program and began the most difficult part of change—self-examination. It was the moment when I cut out the bottom of my peach basket. I tried something different. The same old thing with the same old results had to change, so I stopped looking for fulfillment in a relationship with another person. I learned to love God and be loved by God. Whether we know it or not, this is what we all desire. I discovered this in the presence of my crisis.

The third goal for today is knowing where to place the X. Clifton Fadiman tells a story about Charles Steinmetz, an electrical engineer genius who worked for General Electric in the early part of the twentieth century. After his retirement, they called him in because the other engineers were baffled about the breakdown of a complex of machines. They asked Steinmetz to pinpoint the problem. He walked around the machines for a while, then took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and made a big cross mark on one particular machine. When the engineers disassembled that part of the machine, it turned out to be the precise location of the breakdown.

A few days later, the engineers received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000—a staggering sum in those days. They asked him to itemize it, and he returned the bill with a note that read:

Making one cross mark: \$1
Knowing where to put it: \$9,999⁴

Changing our lives always starts with putting the cross mark on the right spot. This is the work of pre-contemplation. Gerald May writes, “How much can I respect myself if I do not even know what I really want?”⁵ I’ll add, “How can I change if I haven’t identified the problem?” Pre-contemplation is learning where to look for the problem. A weight problem may be the result of emotional eating due to some overwhelming hurt. An addiction problem may be the result of a deep-seated inse-

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curity. Until we perform a self-examination, we will not have a clue about how to change.

My guess is that this is the reason why most people drop out of groups. Either they feel broken beyond repair, or they don't know why their life is broken. They can point to many things that are wrong, but they do not know where to draw the X. We need outside help. Other people can help us find the spot if we are willing to look. Looking is the key.

This is what Luther Gulick did when he stood at his window that day in 1891. He thought about the eighteen rugby-loving men who did not want to play Drop the Handkerchief. He didn't place the mark on their chests, blaming them for their dissatisfaction. He placed the mark on the fact that the current indoor games were not meeting their needs. He then took the crisis and changed the face of indoor games with the help of James Naismith.

The presence of a crisis may be the beginning of a new life. God loves to redeem shattered lives. He's the source of power to help us on the journey to freedom.

REFLECTIONS

HOPE IS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF CHANGE.

1. When have you lost all hope of changing? Share about that time in your life.

2. If someone instructed you to mark an X on each part of your life that is broken, where would you put the X?

3. Describe a time when you have been most willing to surrender to God.

GOING DEEPER ...

Read Philippians 3:12–14 to see where the apostle Paul admits his own lack of perfection.

DAY 3

FINDING HOPE

One of James Naismith's former students, Phog Allen, is considered the "father of basketball coaching." Allen told Naismith that he was going to Baker University to coach basketball. Naismith said, "Why, basketball is just a game to play. It doesn't need a coach." But the University of Kansas counts Naismith among its coaches. Evidently, he changed his mind about a coaching career and coached basketball there for nine years.

The inventor of the game is the only coach in University of Kansas history with a losing record: fifty-three wins and fifty-five losses. The man who invented basketball could not coach his way to a winning record. But to see Naismith as a basketball failure would be a gross injustice. He invented it, so his losing record only makes him human. He is a great example of how we live with the tension of both failures and successes.

Everyone has failures. If we don't win at certain things, it doesn't mean that we are permanent failures. We may win next time, or we may lose three more times before we win. But the trap that most of us fall into is what psychologists call disqualifying the positive—that is, drawing conclusions from only the negative. Naismith could have thought of himself as a failure because of his losing record. But this would have disqualified his positive contribution of inventing basketball.

Everyone has positive things of worth in their lives. Our jobs may be unrewarding, but our children may bring us much joy. To focus only on the negative aspects of our careers is to disqualify the joy of having children. Our financial circumstances may be challenged, but our marriages

may be great. To focus only on the finances disqualifies a great relationship. The moment that we allow the negatives to ruin the positives, life gets out of balance. Relationships end in turmoil; jobs become drudgery.

We are never without hope. We can never disqualify God's help. He offers the great possibility of life. The Bible says, "We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him."¹ God will take bad things and bring something good from them. This is the hope that we are looking for—the hope of God's help. Remember, Augustine said that God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are often too full to receive them. This is what it means to disqualify God's help. There are times when we believe that life is manageable on our own, so we stick to what we think is working. But in reality, each day moves us closer and closer toward becoming a negative person who gives up on life.

C. S. Lewis deals with the differences between heaven and hell in his book *The Great Divorce*. In this fictional piece, people from earth take a day trip to the bright borders of heaven, where they seem to become ghosts against the brilliance of that place. The narrator embarks on an incredible voyage through heaven and hell, meeting a host of supernatural beings that teach him the nature of good and evil. One ghost wanders into the narrator's path with a little red lizard on his shoulder. The lizard whips its tail back and forth while whispering lustful words into the ghost's ear, tormenting him with thoughts of evil. An angel offers to kill the lizard, but the ghost says, "Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now."²

BODY

Strength training is the fountain of youth. It maintains or increases our lean muscle mass, which permanently raises our rested metabolic rate, the amount of calories we burn at rest; it maintains or increases our bone mass and helps prevent osteoporosis.

SPIRIT

When a man is at his wits' end, it is not a cowardly thing to pray; it is the only way he can get in touch with reality.

—OSWALD CHAMBERS, *MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST*

It seems rational for us to believe that we can keep our own lives in order, just as the ghost in Lewis's story believed that he could keep the red lizard in order. Sometimes we can keep our own "lizards" at bay. Sometimes we feel as if we are free of them. But then the whispers begin again. The trap that we fall into is trying to maintain the normality of a life that isn't working. We believe that we can handle our problems on our own. This is the lie of normality.

The first goal of the day is to end normality. We have to admit that the life we are now leading isn't working. Decide to switch from mere survival to a new way of life.

A recent television program showed a method for trapping monkeys. The natives made a hole in a log and put bait inside. The hole was just big enough to allow the monkey's hand to get inside the log. The monkey reached his hand in to get the bait, but when his fingers closed on it he couldn't get his fist back through the hole. The monkey was determined to hang on to what he had, and soon he was captured, trapped by his own greed. We are much like this monkey when we hold on to a life of normality. We fail to do the one thing that would free us, which is to let go and try a new way of life.

The second goal of the day is to identify the traits of our normality so we can begin to eliminate them. Think about the areas of your life that need change. This means even the areas that you may think you are managing with normality.

In Day 2, we discussed how our problems are temporary. Now we begin the process of listing the areas where we desire change. This is not

an action step, but merely a way to get you to think through what can or cannot change in your life. So, take a few minutes and list your problem areas.

The areas in which I desire change are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Once you've listed these areas, begin to think about some areas that will never change. Unchangeable areas need pinpointing in the pre-contemplation stage. This way you will not get frustrated and quit with all-or-nothing thinking, which is the belief that our life has to be perfect in every area or it is a failure. Keep in mind that many areas can change for the better, but life will not be a work of perfection. Make peace with this before you begin the journey to freedom. This is the thought behind the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference—living one day at a time, one moment at a time; accepting hardships as a pathway to peace; taking as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all

things right which I surrender to Your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

The wisdom to know the difference is the key. Focus on what can change. Many times we become obsessed with things over which we have no control, such as other people. We cannot control their behavior and make them treat us nicely. We can also blame our circumstances on others. It's easy to say that we've tried it all and nothing has worked, and we refuse to give our circumstances a new look.

This happened to Jesus' disciples. They had fished all night on the Lake of Galilee and caught nothing. Early the next morning, Jesus stood on the shore and called out to them, "Friends, did you catch any fish?" They answered, "No." He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they did, and they caught so many fish that they could not pull the net back into the boat.³

The disciples were fishermen by trade. They knew the lake. They knew the shoreline and the depths. They knew all about fishing—what worked and what didn't. But they failed to do one thing: they failed to see the trap of normality.

Jesus didn't order them to park the boat and take up a rod and reel. He didn't force them into doing something that contradicted their knowledge of fishing. He only suggested another style—the other side of the boat. This is the God factor. An old fishing hole becomes a full net. Attain new heights with God's help. Remain open. If you feel shoved into change, you will disqualify the positive and quit.

The goal is to make life better, not perfect. Fight normality, which is the fear of living in a different way. If Naismith feared change, then today's basketball retrieval method would still be climbing a ladder. He could have said, "This is how we play the game. There is no other way." But he was flexible and open to trying something different if it improved the game. This is the decision that we make in pre-contemplation. We

open our minds to a new kind of life. We make the commitment to think in new ways to improve life.

The third goal of the day is to discover a vision. On Day 2, I told the story of reaching the end of myself at Percy Warner Park. In that moment, everything was dark. I had no vision. I was too deep in the blackness to see my way out of my circumstances. I needed God's help. It was the "darkness of the beginning." And the important word here is *beginning*. The darkness may have been great in the beginning, but now we need the light. We need vision.

In pre-contemplation, we find the vision that is the opposite of the world's—the opposite of obtaining wealth, power, and prestige. Society believes that happiness is a result of these three things. I thought that one more relationship would make me complete, but it never did. I found myself exhausted and hopeless. We need to begin to think about where we want life to take us from here. This is vision. It's a simple goal, done one day at a time. And the goal of every day is to trust at all times that God is with you and will meet your needs. Finding hope is a matter of trust.

When the disciples were done fishing on the other side of the boat, they found hot coals and fish already on the fire when they reached the shore. Jesus provided breakfast. He had a plan for their day. And the key to hope is to believe every day that Jesus will appear with the resources that you need to walk out the new life that He calls you to live. Christ's presence brings success. Stay close to Him, and He will bring the power that you need. He knows how to guide you. He knows where the fish are located. He sees all things. The Bible says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you cross rivers, you will not drown. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, nor will the flames hurt you."⁴

Finding hope involves making new decisions about our old way of life. It's about God's presence on the journey. As Saint Teresa of Avila said, "The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too."

REFLECTIONS

THE MOMENT THAT WE ALLOW THE NEGATIVES TO
RUIN THE POSITIVES, OUR LIVES GET OUT OF BALANCE.

1. Like the monkey, have you ever felt trapped by something you could not let go of? What are some of the things in your life that you feel trapped by?

2. Why do we have a hard time letting go of some things, even when we know they are bad for our lives?

3. How have you experienced God's presence in your life during difficult times?

GOING DEEPER ...

Read Isaiah 43:1–7 and 18–19 to see how God is always present in our lives, even during our trials.

DAY 4

REAL CHANGE OCCURS IN THREE AREAS

In 1893, basketball developed a huge problem. Overzealous spectators in the balcony were interfering with the game. They'd reach down and knock the ball away from the basket, infuriating the players and endangering the fairness of the game. Something had to be done about the interference. But what? They could not move the spectators out of the balcony or reposition the goals. The search for a remedy soon led to the creation of the first backboard, which was made out of wire mesh. And it worked! The backboard defended the goal against the spectators who were impeding the game.

One of the things that we will face while trying to change our lives is interference. Numerous self-defeating behaviors can interfere with our process of change. We can undervalue ourselves and be unaware of our inadequacies or the life skills that we possess to overcome them. But knowledge can raise awareness and build a safety net of protection against these self-defeating behaviors, just as the game of basketball used the backboard to defend the goal from interference. Energy that we expend against ourselves will weaken our power to change. It interferes with success.

THREE INTERFERENCE ATTITUDES

There are three interference attitudes that will impede our attempts change. "I tried it once, and it didn't work." Many of us attempt change,

only to give up after one try. We believe that we are what we are and can never change. We try to quit smoking and fail after only one day. We tell ourselves that we don't have what it takes. We tell ourselves that it's impossible. We go on a diet, but after a week of failing to lose any significant weight, we say, "I can't lose weight. There's nothing I can do about it." Others try harder, believing that willpower can change them, but soon that, too, fails.

Willpower is an element of change, but it is not the deciding factor. The way to overcome the self-defeating behavior of giving up is to *train*, not to *try*. Training versus trying is the key to success. John Ortberg writes, "Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely. . . . There is an immense difference between training to do something and trying to do something."¹ When we try to change and do not succeed, we tend to give up after a few attempts. But when we train to do something, we set our minds on learning. No matter how many times we fail, we see ourselves as being one step closer to succeeding.

An Olympic athlete doesn't just show up and try really hard on the day of a particular event. He trains his spirit, mind, and body long before the Olympics even begin. You may not be an Olympian, but training is the key to reaching every goal. A weight lifter progresses toward his goal by training his muscles a little at a time. If he fails, he trains his muscles until they exert the power needed to reach the desired goal. Ortberg writes, "Trying hard can accomplish only so much . . . you will have to enter into a life of training."² Trying is the raw use of willpower, nothing more. Training is learning the life skills needed for long-term change.

Start where you are with the mind-set of training your spirit, mind, and body over the next thirty-six days. Allow your spirit to be inspired. Learn health tips. Raise the awareness of your mind, so you can train for freedom. This is the success that Phil discovered at Restore.

Phil first came to Restore Ministries at the YMCA because he'd tried hard to change with willpower and failed. Multiple drunk-driving incidents and an accident landed him in jail for a year, and during all of this

turmoil, he lost his home, business, and fiancée. To make it worse, after being released from jail, he soon was stopped again for drunk driving. This is when Phil hit rock bottom. He came to the realization that alcohol was his downfall. But he wasn't sure whether another recovery program would help. He'd tried numerous programs and failed. Instead of training and learning from his mistakes, he plunged deeper into a vortex of darkness as he continued to try harder, only to fail. Nothing seemed to work. He felt that he would never change.

At Restore, Phil learned that lasting change takes place when we bring into harmony the spirit, mind, and body. And once we helped Phil plug into the spiritual dimension, he was transformed. His mind had been divided from his body and spirit, and as long as this was taking place he could not change. Gerald May believes that maintaining a healthy balance between the spirit, mind, and body is how we change. He writes, "Both Eastern and Western medical sciences have long understood that maintaining natural balances is the body's greatest priority; if the systems of the body are going to work at all, they must work together in harmony. When equilibrium is thrown off balance, the result is stress."³

SPIRIT

"It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they lose their souls."

—MATTHEW 16:26

The key in the process of lasting change is to balance the spirit, mind, and body. This has been the YMCA's focus for over a hundred years. The YMCA knew early on that, even though a person might be a physical specimen of robust health, his spirit may be malnourished, and before long there is a disconnection. In Phil's case, he had medicated his mind,

but he'd damaged his body and spirit. Anytime we leave out one of the three, it produces stress in the body, low self-esteem in the mind, and displacement in the spirit. It causes us to long for the wrong objects—power, prestige, and possessions.

DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE

The backboard defended the game of basketball from overzealous spectators, and it revolutionized the game on the court, turning a negative into a positive. Players learned to shoot using the backboard. We often hear people at a basketball game yell, "Use the board." Now this is good advice, but in 1893, the backboard had only one function—to stop the interference. Later, the players discovered that the backboard had multiple positives. It helped their shots and propelled the game forward to become what it is today.

SPIRIT

I saw the angel in stone and carved until I set him free.

—MICHELANGELO

Every situation has a positive element to it that can lead to change. The way to overcome negative interference is by eliminating what has been called the "yeah, but" syndrome. Let's say your boss gives you the promotion that you've longed for, and someone congratulates you—but you say, "Yeah, but it means that I'll have more responsibilities." Or maybe you lose twenty pounds and someone pays you a compliment, and you respond, "Yeah, but I'm not at the weight I was in high school." You may never get back to your high school weight, so don't disqualify

the progress that you've made or injure the positive. Any energy that we expend disqualifying the positive takes away from our power to change. It interferes with success.

Martin Seligman, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, writes: "Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope. People who make permanent and universal explanations for their troubles tend to collapse under pressure, both for a long time and across situations."⁴ So hope is an integral part of change. If James Naismith had allowed the overzealous spectators to take over the game, their actions could have permanently injured the game. But he saw it as a temporary setback that needed a solution, not a detrimental blow to the game of basketball.

Maybe you've hit an obstacle. Something is interfering with your hope, health, or happiness. Is it a temporary setback or a permanent one? If you interpret it as a temporary hindrance, you can discover ways, as Phil did, to overcome it. But if you disqualify the positive, you may feel helpless and hopeless. You may remain stuck in a pattern of defeat. The awareness you can raise is to understand that your problems are temporary. You can overcome them.

APPROVAL ADDICTION

The third interference is "approval addiction." Everyone desires love and acceptance, but when we search for fulfillment in all the wrong relationships, it can disconnect our spirit from God. Dr. Gerald May writes, "All human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure. It gives us meaning."⁵

The way to block the interference of seeking approval at all costs is to see it for what it is: a need for love and a desire for God, the source of all love and acceptance. Without God's love, it feels as if there is a hole in our soul where life leaks out. We frantically seek to fill this hole with

objects of desire, such as addictions, bad relationships, impulsive behavior, and other things that ultimately don't satisfy our craving for God's love. I spent almost my entire life running to different objects. Now I understand the hard truth that I entered every area of life with an emotional deficit. It was here in total isolation that I felt hopeless. I longed for someone to love and accept me so that I could feel good about myself. But no human or substance can fill the God-sized hole in our soul.

MIND

The life which is not examined is not worth living.

—PLATO

In the movie *The Last Samurai*, Nathan Algren provides a great example of a man with a hole in his soul. He had regrets. He wished that he could change the horrors of war that haunted him, because somewhere on the unforgiving plains near the banks of the Washita River, Algren's soul was wounded. He became an empty cup with a hole. No matter how hard he tried to fill it with alcohol, it didn't seal the hole. While held captive in a Samurai village, he became severely ill as a result of alcohol withdrawal. He told the Samurai leader that he didn't care if he lived or died. But during his captivity he was awakened to the hole in his soul and went through a spiritual transformation.

We seek today what Nathan Algren sought—something that will make us feel alive again, something to seal the hole in our soul. Phil's drinking never cured his emptiness or set him free. Addictions never fulfill our longings to love and be loved. Turning to God and trusting Him seals the hole. Then He helps us learn to balance the spirit, mind, and body in such a way that they no longer interfere with one another, but complement each other's growth.

Day 4

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Phil plugged into the spiritual dimension and moved from bondage to freedom. Maybe you need to integrate the exercise of the body into your life to get the change that you seek. Or maybe you need to integrate the right thoughts by refusing to give up, and by rejecting the impulse to disqualify the positive. Maybe you have a hole in your soul and the desire to love and be loved by God. Whatever the case, real change occurs in three areas: spirit, mind, and body. When we train in all three areas, the training propels the process of change.

REFLECTIONS

THE KEY TO THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IS TO
BALANCE OUR SPIRIT, MIND, AND BODY.

1. What might be a first step for you to grow in spirit?

In body?

In mind?

DAY 5

THE GIFT OF FEELINGS

The movie *Ordinary People* has the best portrayal of what happens when we do not allow ourselves to feel our true feelings. The movie is a stark reality about a younger brother, Conrad, living in the aftermath of his older, more loved brother's death. Throughout the movie, we see Conrad running away from his feelings, trying not to feel the pain of his brother's accidental death that has left him plagued with shame and guilt. Conrad begins counseling with a therapist, Dr. Berger, because he has attempted suicide in order to escape the pain. After a sequence of events, including a friend's suicide, Conrad has a flood of feelings that frightens him and forces him to once again revisit feelings and emotions that he had suppressed long ago.

MIND

Imagination is an internal focus on the desires of the heart that lead to full living. It is courageous willingness to make the visions of the heart's desires our highest goal. Imagination includes the knowledge that we may have pain in obtaining our desires, but ultimately our desires are more powerful than our pain.

—DR. CHIP DODD, *VOICE OF THE HEART*

Those feelings brought him to a place of contemplating suicide instead of feeling the pain. In his pain and confusion he reaches out to Dr. Berger for help. At the end, Dr. Berger finally gets Conrad to open up about where the hurt in his life actually began. Conrad talks for the first time about the day his brother drowned. He finally broke down and let the feelings pour out because Dr. Berger pushed him even further to truly feel the pain that he had been hiding for so many years. Conrad finally begins to embrace those feelings and Dr. Berger says, “Feelings are scary. And sometimes they’re painful. And if you can’t feel pain . . . you won’t feel anything else either.” This was the beginning of his healing and true recovery.

SPIRIT

To have shame as an identity is to believe that one’s being is flawed, that one is defective as a human being. Once shame is transformed into an identity, it becomes toxic.

—JOHN BRADSHAW, *HEALING THE SHAME THAT BINDS YOU*

We all struggle with feelings on a daily basis. Most of us are afraid to feel our feelings because of what we think it means or what might happen. We also have been taught that some feelings are bad and we shouldn’t feel them. Feelings are not bad; it is the actions that sometimes result when we experience an impaired version of a feeling that can be bad. If we don’t understand the purpose or functions of our feelings, we could end up like Conrad in the movie *Ordinary People*, stuffing our feelings into self-destructive outlets and into other addictions. They can push us into states of depression, anxiety, isolation, and confusion.

I did the same things. When I would feel sadness, fear, or loneliness, I would want to medicate. For years when I was struggling with addictions, at the core of those addictions were incredible feelings of loneliness and

sadness. I was terrified to admit that to anyone. Usually on the weekends, these feelings would rear their ugly heads. The weekend is a very difficult time for a lot of people because you are always being asked on Friday at work, “So what are you doing this weekend?” When you don’t have an exciting answer, those feelings are bound to come pouring out. I dreaded the expectations of specific dates such as holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, or anything of that nature because they would make those feelings come back again.

I would medicate on those days so I would not have to feel those feelings—because those feelings brought such discomfort for me. When I finally began my recovery, someone told me that if an addict has to choose between feeling pain and feeling nothing, the addict chooses to feel nothing. In recovery I do choose to feel my feelings; that means often having to feel pain. That pain will let me feel my feelings. I had to let them teach me, allow God to use them, and let me live from my heart and not use the various forms of avoidance that I was medicating with. We must learn not to avoid and escape our feelings. If we do we will miss the greatest gift that they can bring us: freedom.

Dr. Chip Dodd says, “Feelings are the voice of the heart. And you will not have fullness unless you are adept at hearing and experiencing all of them. When you are not aware of your feelings, your life is lived incompletely. Whenever you don’t feel, you are blocked from living life to the fullest.”¹

Our journey to freedom must take us through our feelings. Our feelings must be embraced and be processed if we are to find freedom and fullness of life. When we avoid our feelings—by medicating, becoming depressed, or whatever that response is—we are going to stay stuck.

Dr. Dodd talks about eight feelings that we all experience in the human condition and how they help us purely experience and understand the depth of the heart. In the Journey to Freedom program, we have our participants name their feelings as a part of the healing process. There is power in identifying and understanding the eight feelings. They are: hurt, loneliness, sadness, anger, fear, shame, guilt, and gladness. Many people often look at this list and ask, “Why is only one

feeling positive and all the others are negative?” The truth is that all eight feelings are good. Each feeling is positive because of where it can lead. Each feeling has its own specific purpose in helping us live life fully. Let’s look at how each one benefits us on our journey.

Hurt leads to healing.

It is important that we identify what has hurt us. If I can identify that hurt, it will lead me to what is causing the pain, which will in turn guide me in the process of healing. Just think about when you go into a doctor’s office: the first thing that he asks you is, “Where does it hurt?” He cannot give you an assessment or make you feel better until he knows what the problem is. It is the same with our pain. We cannot begin to heal until we admit that we were hurt. Then and only then can we deal with it. Dr. Dodd says, “For in the admission to hurt you also expose yourself to healing.”²²

Loneliness moves us to intimacy.

Loneliness exposes us to our hunger for relationships. If we will respond to loneliness in a healthy way, it will require us to take the initiative to be authentic with people. We will have to embrace the idea of being known and earnestly seek out relationships. God gave us this natural feeling so that we may use it to draw closer to Him, others, and ourselves.

Sadness expresses value and honor.

Sadness reveals how much we value something that we have lost. When my dog died, my world was turned upside down. I missed his unconditional love and the way that he was always there. I was profoundly sad at his passing because he meant so much to me. Sadness, if we will embrace it, reveals just how much we cared about something or

someone. Sadness can show us just how valuable something was in our lives so that we might give it the honor that it deserves.

Anger hungers for life.

Anger lets my heart know that which really, truly matters to me. Anger can reveal how much my heart is affected by something that failed to happen. It can move us to go out and make a difference in our life and the lives of others. One of the best examples that I can think of is the first time that Jesus got really angry in the Bible. He came upon money changers making a mockery of God's holy place. Jesus expressed His great displeasure and cleared out those who were insulting all that He stood for. He saw what they were doing to such a precious and sacred place and He acted out of passion for His Father.³ Anger shows how passionately something matters to us. It is the energy that can propel us to go out and do something that matters and truly make a difference.

Fear awakens us to danger and begins wisdom.

Fear is a healthy emotion in recovery. Let's take alcohol use for example. If I know that another drink can cause someone to be killed, that fear will awaken me to the many consequences that can happen from one simple act. Fear makes me see the dangerous possibilities of my actions and will guide me to wisdom in making future decisions. Fear can provide a sense of accountability and can motivate me to move in a direction toward recovery and healing. Healthy fear always leads to the beginning of wisdom.

Shame maintains humility and mercy.

Shame shows us that we cannot do everything, that we have limitations. It shows us that we are not God. Shame does not humiliate; it

helps create humility within us. It should be a relief to know that we cannot and are not expected to do everything. Healthy shame leads me to identify that I am human, make mistakes, and need help.

Guilt brings forgiveness.

Guilt is what we feel when we do something wrong. It is all about behavior and actions. Guilt comes from actions that I did when I harmed someone or actions that I should have taken when I did not. If we listen to the guilt, we become aware of how we acted and know that we must make the situation or relationship right. Guilt leads me to seek forgiveness so relationships can be restored.

Gladness proves the hope of the heart to be true.

Gladness is the result of allowing ourselves to feel the other seven feelings. It is great to feel these feelings because it means that you and your heart are alive. If I will feel my feelings and live from my heart, then I will know true gladness.

If I am not living from my heart, then I am living from my addiction and I am not free to feel. Gladness comes from being free. Dr. Gerald May says that only a free heart is really alive.⁴ That is what God wants. He does not want you bound, but free. All addictions that we have are about control. Hearts that are in bondage to the control of their feelings are not free. Where there is no freedom, there is no gladness.

BODY

If we wish to live the happy life, we have no choice but to exercise and become fit.

—DR. GEORGE SHEEHAN, *PERSONAL BEST*

The journey to freedom will require that we begin to live authentically from our hearts, where we embrace our feelings. Avoiding our feelings has become a way of life for many. It leads us to isolation and ultimately to different forms of medicating those feelings. These deeply ingrained patterns of avoiding our feelings begin to rule our lives by becoming life-controlling issues. To become free from these life-controlling issues, we must learn a new response to these feelings. That begins by understanding the tremendous value that God gave us through feelings. And as we learn to live from our hearts, feeling these feelings, we can begin the path to freedom.

IMPAIRMENT

When we think of feelings as negative, it is often because we have experienced what Dr. Dodd calls the “impaired” version of the feeling. This is what we experience when we don’t allow ourselves to feel the true feeling. Just as each feeling has a “gift,” each feeling has an impairment that comes when we do not allow ourselves to feel it.

Impaired Hurt: Resentment

Resentment is what happens when we try to avoid feeling hurt. Resentment deflects our focus away from our internal pain and on to someone or something else. Hurt most often comes in relationships, and God brings healing to where there has been hurt through relationships. He wants us to be vulnerable with Him about the relationship that is causing us pain. Only then can He heal our heart and move us forward.

Impaired Loneliness: Apathy

Apathy is the opposite of love. It says, “I just don’t care anymore.” If I refuse to feel loneliness, it will drive me inward even further into isola-

tion and depression and possibly to other forms of self-medication. I can let my loneliness keep me from ever seeking out relationships and let it control my everyday activities for fear of letting people know me.

Impaired Sadness: Self-Pity

We often fear expressing sadness because we don't want to be seen as having self-pity. But in actuality true sadness and self-pity are very different. Dr. Dodd defines *self-pity* as "a way to escape the pain of sadness by trying to make others feel sadness for us."⁵ If I am unwilling to feel sadness myself, I may try to get someone else to feel what I refuse to feel. This will not cleanse my heart and bring healing. I must allow myself to feel the depth of the loss and the sadness that comes from losing someone or something that I value.

Impaired Anger: Depression

Depression has often been defined as anger turned inward. It also occurs when I close off my desires and passions. The energy of anger is turned against myself, and I become worn out. I have no motivation, no energy, no passion—and no vision for my life. True anger is a good thing—it expresses our desire for life. This is different from how we may have thought about anger before, as uncontrollable rage. Rage is not an impairment of anger, but an impairment of fear.

Impaired Fear: Anxiety/Control/Rage:

Fear will drive us in one of two directions: it can drive us to faith and surrendering our lives to God's care, or it will drive us to try to control our circumstances in an attempt to avoid the negative event that we fear. Anxiety and worry are the result of not trusting God with our lives. When we are anxious, we will try to control the people and circumstances of our

lives to conform to our expectations and needs. When they do not conform and we are unable to control them, we can react in rage. Rage destroys the benefit of fear because it is a refusal to face our fear of vulnerability to the point that it denies the fact that fear exists. Most people confuse rage and anger—we think that they are the same thing, when they really could not be further apart. Dr. Dodd puts it this way: “Rage rejects the fear of having desire. Anger is an acknowledgment of the depth of our desire.”⁶ This distinction can be crucial to our recovery. If you struggle with rage, the question that you need to ask yourself is not “what am I angry about?” but rather “what am I so afraid of?”

Impaired Shame: Toxic Shame

When I believe that I am flawed and defective as a human being, then I have moved away from a state of healthy shame and I constantly condemn and criticize myself. We call this toxic shame. It is where I have taken shame on as an identity—I am ashamed of who I am. It drives me to humiliation, which says “You are so bad,” and away from my need for God and others.

Impaired Guilt: Pride/Toxic Shame

It is very dangerous when I do not feel guilt. If I do not feel remorse in my heart when I have done something wrong, then I will not seek forgiveness and relationships will remain fractured. Pride keeps us from asking for forgiveness because it rejects our true condition and refuses to be vulnerable to another person. In order not to feel guilt, we may blame others and justify our own actions so that we don’t have to feel our own hurt. We can also go the other direction with guilt, and feel that we are not just guilty of a bad action—we are *all* bad. Toxic shame rejects the forgiveness of others and continues to feel bad even after we have sought forgiveness.

Impaired Gladness: Happiness/Entertainment

Happiness has its root in the word *happenstance*, which means that circumstances are what dictate our happiness. In an attempt to manufacture joy, we look to external events to bring us the happiness that we all desire. Yet haven't you found that those events never seem to quite fulfill our expectations? And we are left with a sense of wanting more. We may also try to find gladness through sensuous pleasure, such as sex, eating, sports, music, etc. While these can all be good things, they are temporary pleasures, which will not bring true, lasting fulfillment. If we are not finding fulfillment in feeling and owning all of our feelings in relationships, then these things end up being distractions that take us away from our heart rather than into our heart.

The Journey to Freedom will require that we begin to live authentically from our hearts where we embrace our feelings. Avoiding our feelings for many of us has become a way of life. It leads us to isolation and ultimately to different forms of medicating those feelings. These deeply ingrained patterns of avoiding our feelings begin to rule our lives by becoming life-controlling issues. To become free from these life-controlling issues, we must learn a new response to these feelings. That begins by understanding the tremendous value that God gave us through these feelings. And as we learn to live from our hearts, feeling these feelings, we can begin the path to freedom.

REFLECTIONS

LIFE IS NOT A CONSTANT EMERGENCY, BUT WHEN WE LIVE BY OUR EMOTIONS, EVERYTHING SEEMS LIKE AN EMOTIONAL EMERGENCY.

1. What feelings have you been avoiding or suppressing because you are afraid of the pain that comes with them?

DAY 6

FACING THE NEED FOR CHANGE

After surviving a pulmonary embolism, Kristy decided on a lifestyle change. She joined a YMCA in Florida in April 2002 to improve her health, to lose weight, and to keep it off. She weighed over four hundred pounds, but Kristy was determined—and scared. She knew her behavior and lifestyle patterns had to change, so she began by doing low-impact aerobics twice a week and weight training three times a week. As she started to lose the weight, she added more cardiac exercises (such as biking and using the treadmill and elliptical machines). By November 2003, Kristy had lost 205 pounds! Now she visits the YMCA four times a week to maintain her desired weight and to stay healthy.

Change usually takes place out of developmental or environmental forces that urge us to rethink our condition.¹ All of us reach age milestones or face health conditions that cause us to reevaluate our lives. We ask: Are we healthy? Have we reached our spiritual goals? Do we have a sense of well-being? Usually health threats or age milestones usher us to the point of needing to change.

Here's a list of possible developmental and environmental pressures that frequently bring people to the threshold of change:

- Moving from one stage of life to another (i.e., adolescence to adulthood, for example)
- Aging
- Illness
- Life-debilitating addiction
- Retirement
- Inner emotional turmoil

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Marriage | • Death of a loved one |
| • Childbirth | • Divorce |
| • Job dissatisfaction | • Health problems |
| • A promotion or termination | • Societal pressure ² |

SPIRIT

Keep your life so constantly in touch with God that His surprising power can break through at any point. Live in a constant state of expectancy and leave room for God to come as He decides.

—OSWALD CHAMBERS, *MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST*

Some items on this list are the natural result of life, while others are thrust upon us by our own choices. All of them usher in the possibility for change in some capacity. Those who fail to respond properly to environmental and developmental pressures usually repress the need for change. Some alcoholics continue to drink even after a dismal health report. Some smokers are known to smoke even with a tracheotomy. Phil—mentioned in Day 4—knew that his drinking had become more than just social, even though he checked the box marked “social drinker” on the health club application.

What holds most of us back from experiencing change is fear. We fear what others will think if, like Kristy, we walk into the Y weighing over four hundred pounds. Can you imagine the courage that it must have taken for her to face this fear? We’ve all had the false belief that YMCAs are for healthy people who are there to simply maintain their great health. But this belief holds us back from change. I wish I could convince people to get involved in change before they are faced with a health scare or environmental pressure. But I believe the avoidance of change stems from low self-esteem.

BODY

Every time I walk into the YMCA, I am motivated because people are swimming, shooting basketball, dancing, lifting weights, and walking. There are people of all ages, races, and walks of life.

Low self-esteem is the silent locust moth that eats away our courage to change. I see this as a certain kind of pessimism. Over all the years that we have worked with people at the YMCA and Restore Ministries, we find that the majority of them struggle, at some level, with low self-esteem. True, they may have life-controlling issues such as addictions, obesity, risky behavior, or even pornography. But the reality is that underneath there's a deep struggle with low self-esteem.

When low self-esteem sets in, we begin to question our worth when we should be questioning our circumstances. Something is fueling our low self-worth. Sometimes we hate our job, but we're too scared to apply for the one that we desire, and then we berate ourselves for playing it safe. We could be in an abusive relationship or have too many failures to list in one lifetime. But we have to work at finding our true self, and this may mean that a change has to occur.

Most people who face change of any kind have to overcome self-resistance. They feel safe, yet dissatisfied. It's an interesting dichotomy. They feel safe in their addictions or other problems because they know what to expect. And the number-one drawback from change is getting people to take the risk of change.

If we can raise the awareness about low self-esteem and concentrate on ways to overcome our self-loathing, then we will have a chance at changing. But many of us put on our happy faces and head off to work, knowing that we are slowly killing the true self that we long to become. The paradox of low self-esteem is that we project a false self to protect our true desires that we feel will be rejected if discovered. In essence, we say, "If

you really discover who I am at my core and what I long to be, then you'd reject me." This is why we hide this inner longing until it comes out in unhealthy ways. We use drugs to alter our moods. We try to live vicariously through the lives of our children. We perform through a false self to gain approval. We have to work at shedding our false self and allow God to change us into the person that He created us to be.

Richard Leider writes, "With major change, we often confront, as seldom before, our own insecurities and self-doubts as we let go of the identity of the past and risk shaping our future. . . . Through purpose, we grow by becoming more honest with ourselves and more aware of our gifts that naturally give us joy."³

THE PAIN OF CHANGE

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C. S. Lewis introduces a character named Eustace—a disagreeable boy who seems to delight in being a nuisance. He travels to Narnia, a fantasy world, and finds himself in a dragon's cave filled with treasure. Eustace falls asleep on the dragon's hoard "with greedy, dragonist thoughts in his ear" and wakes up to find that he has turned into a dragon.

After spending time as a dragon, Eustace wants to be himself again and no longer desires to be in the dragon skin. However, he is at a loss as to how he can get rid of the dragon shell. Fortunately, Aslan the lion comes to his rescue and leads the scaly Eustace to a large well of clear, bubbling water. Aslan instructs Eustace to bathe in the water. Eustace attempts three times to peel off his scaly skin, but each time he is just as rough and wrinkled as before. He realizes that he must let Aslan take the skin off, but he is afraid that the lion's claws will hurt. However, Eustace's desire to change outweighs the fear of the pain.

Eustace describes the way that Aslan tore off the dragon skin to his cousin Edmund. "The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it

hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off . . . he peeled the beastly stuff right off—just as I thought I had done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt—and it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly-looking than the others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me—I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on—and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone.”⁴

In our attempts to change, pain will occur and it will seem, at times, unbearable. But we have to let God do His work to shed the unwanted layers that we have accumulated by trying to fix and heal ourselves alone. The first tear might be so deep that it goes straight to our heart, as Eustace experienced, but after the pain is gone you will start to see a new person underneath—one who is ready to begin a new journey and leave the old skin behind.

REFLECTIONS

CHANGE USUALLY TAKES PLACE OUT OF DEVELOPMENTAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES THAT URGE US TO RETHINK OUR CONDITION.

1. How has low self-esteem affected your life?

Day 6

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2. If God were to peel off the “dragon skin” of your false self, what would you want to find?

3. What do you really think about yourself? Name one strength and one weakness.

GOING DEEPER . . .

Read Psalm 139 and reflect on the involvement of God in creating you, and the love He has for your life.