

I N T R O D U C T I O N

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WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

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Congratulations! You've completed Phase 1 of *The Ultimate Journey*! By now you've had a chance to unpack much of your self-deception and should have a better understanding of how you've reached this point in life.

As a result of your journey thus far, one of two things may have happened: You may either be elated because you've learned the truth about yourself and have received some healing, or you may feel a bit lost now that you see the lies you've been living under and are no longer sure how you should live.

Understand that there is no right or wrong response to your journey experience. Everyone's journey is different. But no matter what your response, the question is the same: Where do I go from here?

As a reminder, *The Ultimate Journey* is modeled after Israel's exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. This is the journey God used to transform a bunch of hurting, wounded slaves into his beloved bride. It is the same journey God is calling you to undertake.

And it is vital that you not only begin the journey, but complete it. After God destroyed Pharaoh's armies, imagine what would have happened if the Israelites had simply camped alongside the Red Sea and said, "OK, we've gone far enough now. We're tired and we don't want to go any farther. After all, we got what we were after—all we ever really wanted was to get out of Egypt."

Think of everything the Israelites would have missed out on if they had halted their journey shortly after God delivered them from slavery. God didn't bring the Israelites out of Egypt just to free them from slavery. Rather he brought them out of Egypt so he could marry them, bond with them, and dwell with them forever in the Promised Land.

Do you recall what God told Moses to say to Pharaoh before the Israelites left Egypt? God sent Moses to tell him, "Let my people go." And each time, God's command was followed by the words, "so that they may worship me."

God has brought us out of bondage so we would be free, but also so we could worship him. This is why it is so important that we complete the journey God calls us to undertake. Because if we do not complete *The Ultimate Journey*, if we do not learn to worship God and become one with him, we will drift back into the bondage of Egypt.

After leading Israel out of Egypt, God fulfilled his promise to make her his bride. But unfortunately, Israel was unfaithful. This is why the prophets referred to Israel as an adulterous bride when the people drifted away and began serving other gods. But all was not lost for Israel, and neither do we need to fear. God is not only a loving God, but also a forgiving God. Read the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant

I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people' ” (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

In this passage of Scripture, the jilted husband, God, uses the same language with his unfaithful wife as he had first used to propose marriage. Israel had broken the wedding covenant, but God is promising to give her a new covenant she will not be able to break. And not only is God going to renew his wedding vows with Israel, but he promises to give his bride a new heart by fusing his heart with hers. He will also write his covenant of love on her heart so she will always know how to be intimate with him.

God has also promised to put his Spirit within his bride, which will move her to follow him: “For I will take you out of the nations: I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness” (Ezekiel 36:24–29).

Notice who is doing all the work. God repeatedly says “I will” because he now plans to fulfill even our part by becoming our covenant representative and fulfilling it through his son, Jesus, who lives in and through us.

As noted previously in Jeremiah 31:31, the New Covenant was promised to Israel. But even though the promise was proclaimed to Israel, God’s plan from the beginning has always been to work within the Israelites to then bring all nations to himself.

Galatians 3:6 says, “Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ ” Then verses 28 and 29 go on to say, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

When we put our faith in Christ, we are adopted as sons of Abraham. And as such, we are grafted into Israel. Therefore the covenants God made with Israel are for all people who put their faith in Christ.

When we choose Christ as our covenant representative, Scripture declares our enemy has been defeated and we are set free. We are no longer slaves to sin and the radical independence that keeps us separated from God. Scripture declares we are his beloved children and are holy, righteous, and just—joint heirs with Jesus Christ. In fact Paul tells us we are the temple of the Holy Spirit who now lives within us.

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So, where do you go from here? The answer is this: It is time to go through the desert and allow God to teach you who he really is and let him show you just how much you really can trust him.

Over the coming weeks, you may indeed feel as though you are in the desert. But don't be discouraged or dismayed by anything you might feel. Such responses are normal. As you persevere, refusing to give up on this journey you've begun, you will make it through to the Promised Land. Because once you truly understand who God is and believe you can trust him beyond question, you will then be ready to possess the Promised Land God has given you.

Remember that this journey you've begun started out with an awareness of your bondage in your own "Egypt." Now you are ready to get a better understanding of who the Living God is and the intimate bonded relationship he wants to have with you. God still hears the cries of his people today. He hears your cries. He knows the longing of your heart and the desire you have for something more satisfying than anything you've known in life. This is why God sent his Son, Jesus, the one like unto Moses, to lead you.

Right now, this very moment, God is wooing and calling you to continue *The Ultimate Journey* with him. Receive the love God longs to pour out to you. Let him take you by the hand and lead you through the desert so you are equipped to enter the Promised Land.

Avoid the trap of trying to change through self-improvement techniques. At best these produce temporary results, and can never satisfy in the long-run. So stay true to the course. *The Ultimate Journey* will change you from the inside out as you become one with The One who loved you first.

So get your compass ready—you are about to receive the bearings you will need to embark on the journey to find True North!

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LESSON

1

PREPARE YOUR HEART FOR A JOURNEY

God created us in his image and likeness, but each of us has forsaken our true identity and conformed to the patterns of this world. Just as with Abraham, God calls each of us to make an exodus journey from the false identity that keeps us in bondage. In exchange we enjoy the freedom that awaits us as we learn to embrace our true identity in Christ.

CHARTING YOUR COURSE

- We can now look to God as source and provider for all our needs rather than living as we had in the past, trusting in ourselves.
- All we must do is acknowledge our need for God—on his terms rather than our own—and stop resisting his love.
- It's not about us and what we think we can do or accomplish. It's about the perfect, complete work God has already done through his beloved Son, Jesus.
- We are created in the image and likeness of God!

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Before he died, the crucified Lamb of God proclaimed to his Heavenly Father in the presence of all creation: “It is finished!” God’s provision for us was completed through Jesus’ death on the cross. Even in his agony, as he drew his last few breaths as a sinless mortal man, Jesus was thinking of you. With the words, “It is finished,” Jesus stated in essence, “It is perfect. It is fulfilled. It is consummated.”

Jesus announced to the world the end of man’s alienation and separation from God. His death marked the beginning of our redemption and reconciliation to God our Father. Our intimate relationship with him was now restored. Through grace, or unmerited favor, we could now be at one with God through the shed blood of his Son, Jesus. His death opened the vaults of heaven to fallen mankind and secured God’s solution to all our needs. Christ revealed the finality and closure of all unfinished business, whether real or perceived, throughout creation.

Some people view Jesus’ death and resurrection as having eliminated the need for free will, thus removing our ability to make life-changing choices. But this isn’t why God sent his Son to die. Jesus’ death on the cross means we can now look to God as source and provider for all our needs rather than living as we had in the past, trusting in ourselves.

Through Jesus’ death, the price was paid for everything we will ever need. As we yield to God and allow him access to our lives, he is faithful to provide what he has already secured for us through his eternal love, wisdom, and mercy. His provision is *infinitely* better than anything we could dream up for ourselves.

Jesus proclaimed an end to anxiety, emptiness, dissatisfaction, and the compulsion to strive, achieve, and arrive. So even though our lives may *seem*

unfinished and insufficient, God has already provided the solution to all our needs. Accordingly, when we allow the Holy Spirit access to our lives, this solution redeems and transforms us by rendering perfect, finished, and complete what Jesus accomplished through his death. There is no need for us to reinvent what God purchased at such a great price. When we turn to God, he is faithful to supply everything we need through his kingdom on earth.

WHAT IS “FINISHED”?

The “It” Jesus proclaimed while dying on the cross is the covenant God made with himself before creation, which was perfectly fulfilled through Jesus’ death. This covenant, or binding agreement, is the heart, soul, and source of God’s good news. The “It” in Christ’s last words, “It is finished,” is so immense that we’ll spend eternity exploring what he accomplished for us. Yet we will never reach the end—there is no end!

God demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die in our place. All we must do is acknowledge our need for God—on his terms rather than our own—and stop resisting his love. He is always open to us. When we respond with the same wholeheartedness with which God reaches out to us, nothing can prevent him from being everything we’ll ever need.

But rather than allowing God to be your provider, you’ve tried to remodel your life by following the ways of this godless, human-centered world. So you’re not accustomed to entrusting anything to God’s love and finished work. To do so would vaporize your false assumptions—that you have an independent life and are actually in control of things. For you to let go, to give up ownership and control, would feel like death rather than the freedom of eternal life and true parenthood God is calling you to live under and enjoy.

By contrast, consider this reflection on what God longs to do for you:

“My beloved, I designed and created you for myself. You were made to be one with me. We’re supposed to abide with each other and do everything together. This is how I created you. What is mine is yours. My love for you and my knowledge and wisdom are your treasure and inheritance. But you’ve lived by your own self-life means and understanding. This separates us and demonstrates your mistrust of me. And because it keeps us apart, self-life is sin. It is the root of all disease, damage, destruction, and death.

“You must repent. You must change your mind about whom you will entrust your life to. Turn yourself over to me, on my terms, according to how I created reality and its laws. Everything is already done and covered. I long for you to know the depth of my love for you. I’ve anticipated and met every need you could ever have. Even if you don’t understand my love and all that I’ve given you, my work on your behalf is nevertheless finished. Learn to trust me and enjoy the fruit of its results. Then you can truly rejoice and live in freedom.

“Acknowledge your spiritual bankruptcy and inability to figure everything out, to control your life, to make the right changes, to deliver yourself from your sinful, self-destructive ways. Come to me. Recognize you are a fallen creature in need of me. Acknowledge me as your Creator and your moment-by-moment source of life. When you do this, I will fill you, heal you, and complete you through what I have already provided.

“Are you not tired of repeated failure to find fulfillment and satisfaction? Are you not weary of juggling more balls than you can possibly keep suspended, scared because you’re already slipping up and dropping some of them? How long can you keep this up? How much longer can your body and soul perform before they give out under the pressure? How long before it all falls apart and comes crashing down around you? *You have no other option.* Trust in me, now. Let go and stop trying to control your life. Respond instead to me, your Creator.”

This is the key: *It’s not about you and what you think you can do or accomplish. It’s about the perfect, complete work God has already done through his beloved Son, Jesus.* We can’t meet God’s standards through our own efforts, and we can’t make ourselves good enough to be acceptable to God. Such a self-centered line of reasoning is desperately wrong. Stop striving for what you can never reach through your own means. Your Heavenly Father is ready and waiting with open arms to receive you. All you must do is turn to him.

Are you ready to relinquish control of your life? If so, read these words aloud as you acknowledge God’s authority and submit to him:

It’s not about you and what you think you can do or accomplish. It’s about the perfect, complete work God has already done through his beloved Son, Jesus.

“I give up, Lord. I can’t run my own life. I can’t do anything without you. You are the vine, Lord Jesus. Let me be one of your living branches. Save and bond me to yourself by your Holy Spirit. Without you I can be nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing. I can do only what you empower me to do. I’m ready to receive whatever you give me, and will do whatever you say. Save me from continuing to live out of self-life. I surrender unconditionally to you—on your terms. Show me what I must do to be made right with you and be fulfilled. And empower me to follow you.”

The transition from self-life to Christ-Life is no small matter. If you’re ready for the exodus, understand that it’s not because of anything you’ve done. God was finally able to get past the hard shell of self-life and begin communicating with you as you acknowledged him. He is calling you out of your self-life cave so he can break the chains that have enslaved you.

All your life you've been in the dark, running in circles, trying to escape your true reality, attempting to "get there," to "be somebody." You've never been able to face reality and admit your limitations—not to yourself, and much less to the

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world around you. All the while, as you've struggled for control, you've been enslaved to the fear that your needs won't be met.

When you finally begin to hear God's voice, you can no longer run, get lost in the crowd, or drown yourself in busyness. You can't get away from yourself as you once thought you could. You can no longer

ignore God, pretending he isn't real and telling yourself you're not really hearing his voice. God is calling and wooing you. And he's not going to stop.

The following allegory will help you understand what happens in the depths of your heart as you begin to hear God's spiritual equivalent to—

THE CALL OF THE WILD — AN ALLEGORY —

Of all the cute, cuddly, cats and dogs in the animal shelter, one puppy seemed to have a spotlight on him. At least that's how it seemed to Bill and Jenny Normal and their kids, Judy and Chris. They had considered pets of all kinds and sizes. But this puppy was stealing the show and capturing the family's heart.

This special puppy and his littermates were now several weeks old. It was amusing to watch as some yapped, wrestled, and tumbled with each other while others climbed all over their stoic, patient mother. The one that seemed as though he had a spotlight on him had the cutest markings—black spots on a white background. And the way he interacted with the other puppies marked him as a first-class character. Whenever another pup rolled on him or got in his way, he would yip, yap, and scold the offender. That's why Judy exclaimed, "Oh, you're such a little grump." And that's how he got his name—Grump.

The Normals must have had a spotlight on them, too, because as soon as Grump noticed the family watching him through the cage, he forgot all about tumbling with the other puppies and focused his attention on the Normals. He began to yelp, and tried to get out of the cage so he could get to them. It was love at first sight for all. The family members soon had Grump in a little box and were taking him out to their car for the trip home. The Normals had a new puppy, and Grump had a new family. Later the Normals would tell people, "It was really weird. We had to take him. It was as if he was saying, 'Won't you please take me?' We were helpless to resist."

Once the housebreaking period was over, Grump was integrated and woven into

the family system. He became the perfect pet. Grump knew that this was where he belonged. After all, he had a nice soft mat to sleep on and a dog bowl with his very own name on it. He was so happy; he even learned tricks, which earned the attention and approval of his new family.

If Grump were ever stolen, he no doubt would have clawed, dug, tunneled, or leapt to freedom to get back home. Moreover, once free, no matter how many miles from home, Grump would have found his way back to his family and the only life he knew.

The Normals lived on an acreage on the outskirts of town. The front of their home faced town while the back looked out across an expanse of rolling foothills. If Grump were able to talk, he would have told you how happy he was. Grump was content to follow the family around the house and yard, ride with them in their car, and eat his dog chow, which was faithfully served in a nice, clean bowl with his very own name on it. Yes, this is where Grump had always wanted to be.

This peaceful relationship lasted six years and ended one night without warning. Grump, as usual, was asleep on his nice, soft mat in the kitchen. From far away in the hills came the piercing wails of a pack of wild dogs. Their eerie, primeval song wafted through the cool, night air and reached Grump as he slept.

Upon hearing the dogs, Grump was awakened. His head snapped to attention as he was drawn toward the sound. Now electrified, he got up and began to pace and circle. He trotted back and forth from the kitchen to the den, to the bathroom, and back again. He went through his hinged “dog door” out into the garage. Grump was now consumed by a burning desire he’d never known. He, too, began to wail and howl, adding his own refrain to the savage song taking possession of him.

Grump jumped up on a box along a wall inside the garage. From there he jumped onto the hood of Jenny’s car, then over to Bill’s workbench that faced a window overlooking the backyard. The dogs were out there, howling, calling to Grump’s very core, summoning, coaxing him to break loose and join them in their primal freedom.

He could stand it no longer. Grump steeled himself for the shock. His muscular body coiled up and with a powerful lunge he exploded through the window. He landed on his feet and leapt over the chain-link fence that separated the Normal’s home from the wilderness beyond. In a flash, Grump left the only home and family he had known. Not once did he look back. He was dead to all that had gone before.

Grump made a beeline for the source of the call stirring in his depths. And just like that—it was over. Grump was gone. He had loved the Normals and the comfortable life they provided for him. Yet he was compelled to leave everything behind. He had no choice. He had to answer “The Call of the Wild.” From then on, Grump followed The Call with everything inside him. Soon he became The Call.

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What was so mysterious and electrifying that Grump was compelled to uproot himself from his comfort zone? It was The Call. He heard it. And once he did, he could never go back.

If you haven't yet felt the same kind of call, you will. God, your Creator, is calling to your heart. Once you hear his voice, something will stir in the core of your heart and force your onboard computer—your thoughts, emotions, and will—to begin reconfiguring for a completely different agenda and direction in life.

LIKE CALLING TO LIKE

Grump's human world had put him through obedience training so he would "unlearn" what he was by nature and become something he really wasn't created to be—an extension of the Normal family. Grump didn't need classes to answer the Call of the Wild. He knew what to do and how to do it. The canine nature had always lurked deep within his genes, like a seed lying dormant in the ground. It was the core of who he really was. But before he could follow that call, Grump had to break free from the life that had restrained him.

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As we saw with Grump, domesticated dogs know only of human families and their ways. They submit to the family system, whether good or bad. They have no choice. As long as they live within such systems, pet dogs know nothing of what

they *really* are and what it means to run free, living in the wild.

Grump wasn't in touch with his true nature. It wasn't until that night when the canine instincts within him, the same nature already wide awake in the howling dogs, called to the part of Grump that had been asleep. Once his instincts were awakened, Grump's true nature took over and he discovered who he really was. Just as Grump was compelled to respond out of the instincts within him, all of creation was designed to do the same.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:24–25)

Does Grump's story upset your sensibilities? Do you feel outraged that a dog would leave his safe, comfortable home, the dear masters he loved and the only life he'd known? What could be so powerful that Grump would feel compelled to leave without so much as a yelp or a tail-wag of farewell? Do you wish he would

have forsaken his own kind and stayed in that fenced-in yard, living out his days wistfully staring at the distant mountains, keeping the howls of his heart to himself? We shouldn't be surprised that Grump could so easily leave his quiet, comfortable life. After all, life as a family pet wasn't his nature.

No doubt you've recognized this reading is about much more than a family pet. The story is about the freedom that awaits you upon leaving Satan's self-life world to join your true kind. What happened to Grump will happen in you as well as God calls you out of your self-life cocoon and you respond to his voice. At last, you become who and what you *really* are—the image and likeness of God!

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Most of us have gone through life seeing ourselves as someone other than who God created us to be. How do you see yourself and your “own kind”? Do you see your own kind as being black or white, or as belonging to a certain race or nationality? Do you draw your sense of identity from a particular organization, gang, or club, or through a particular political party, faith, or denomination? Do you see yourself as being homosexual, or as a drunk, a loser, an addict, or some other identity you took on through life experiences? Do you consider yourself a lone ranger, an independent agent able to run your own life?

Recognize that the identities we cling to are temporal, limited, man-made categories. They come from our own self-life endeavors apart from God. These mistaken identities won't be around a few hundred years from now, much less in eternity.

It doesn't matter how closely aligned you might feel with what you've perceived to be your own kind. Your assumed identity will soon disappear. But what you really are will remain forever. What you really are goes much deeper than a label or a category. What you really are is not a matter of the soul, but of your spirit. Your true identity isn't based upon how you see yourself or how others see you. The real question is: Who are you in your spirit? The God of the Bible says a life built upon temporal, physical concerns is symptomatic of spiritual death.

The real question is: Who are you in your spirit?

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26)

If you're living under a false identity shaped by this world, a lie is running your

life and keeping you stuck. Even though the identities we take on are merely labels we pick up along the way, they nonetheless become rigid lifestyles and traditions. If you draw your identity and sense of belonging from your surroundings, you are tied to your physical, temporal existence rather than to your Creator and your eternal destination. This is a tragic, low-level existence compared to the spiritual realm God created you to live in with him. Your false identify forces you to believe you cannot grow, change, or go beyond the limitations of self-life.

You no doubt grew up believing you would be fulfilled through a certain identity. But any identity apart from your Creator will never fulfill you. You were designed to bond with and belong to the Creator of all things. That's who you really are. God made you for himself. You were created in Almighty God's image and likeness. *That's* your true nature. That is your real "kind," as recorded in Scripture: "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26–27).

Once you're able to accept that God made you for himself, you will begin to get in touch with your true self. You will start to feel homesick and will no longer be able to resist your true nature. The comfort zone you've created will begin losing its hold. It will no longer offer the empty promise of satisfying or fulfilling you—not when the truth takes hold and wells up in your heart. Just as for wild geese that must migrate, truth will become a homing device that draws you into the arms of your eternal Heavenly Father.

Even so you may choose to "stay behind" rather than respond to God's call. You may think you can be content with yourself and other created things, only on occasion feeling the need to "howl" for your distant Creator. You might even be telling yourself you didn't *really* hear from God, that he isn't here right now, this moment, calling you. But that would be a lie. God is in fact involved in every detail of your life, doing what he has planned throughout eternity to carry out on your behalf. He's calling you even though everyone around you may be trying to talk you out of your craziness, telling you to be sensible and realistic.

Living at a distance from God is no longer an option. Your heart can never be at rest now that you know the truth. You'll ache to break free and be one with your Creator. You were created to enjoy a moment-by-moment relationship with God, so you'll crave the freedom that comes from living in his presence. You will be compelled to seek and search until you finally live in his abiding, indwelling love—at one with him at all times in all things.

YOUR TRUE NATURE

You've never known any other way of living, so it's understandable that you've identified with your fallen, humanistic surroundings. You haven't seen any other real choice. But the time will come for you to shed your physical body, including all

that you've come to believe about yourself. Then where will you be? Our temporal life here on earth is mere "frosting." At some point you will see the real you, the "eternal cake," beneath the frosting.

As Grump discovered, he was canine to the core. No one could take that from him. When something called and stirred his true nature, Grump felt the magnetic attraction of like seeking like. As for all creatures, he was compelled to seek and cluster with his own kind. In the same way, you were made to "cluster" with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You were made to be one with God in all things.

Because of your past, you may feel more at home in the familiar surroundings of self-life, living as a slave to created things just as the Children of Israel became accustomed to toiling under slavery in Egypt. You've been there for years, a spiritual orphan, living an independent, anxiety-ridden self-life. You may still feel defined by circumstances such as your family, friends, sexuality, political party, religious belief, and lifestyle. And yet you know when your body dies, all of these temporary distinctions will vanish. And *then* what will satisfy you? God has put eternity in your heart, which is why only something eternal can satisfy the longing of your soul.

You were made to be one with God in all things.

What does the worker gain from his toil?

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:9–11)

Are you satisfied running your own life? Have you settled for less than what God intended you to be? Has your godless self-life become a leash around your neck? Have you been thinking it's all about "my life," "my rights," and "my happiness"? If so, you do not yet have intimacy with the Spirit of God, nor do you understand the reality and mystery of "the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven" mentioned in Matthew 13:11.

Because self-life has been "normal" for so long, you don't yet realize you were made to bond with your Creator. You were designed to function at an elevated level of being, thinking, and acting as one with God in his image and likeness. You were created to be spiritually wealthy and prosperous through his indwelling presence. God's nature and life-giving beauty, power, and goodness were meant to flow throughout your being. So when you hear God calling, something that has lain dormant all your life—eternity—will awaken and stir within you.

God yearns to fill you with himself until you are transformed and overflowing with the power and life that follow his divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing love.

Even now you feel God's love, tugging on your heart and soul. As you respond, everything will change as you are drawn out of darkness. You'll begin to pull away from what held you in place so long and will venture out of the cave into light and freedom.

Are you truly crucified with Christ, dead to everything from your past and living by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit? The Scripture says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Is Christ now your life, your source? Or are you still trying to get somewhere in life apart from God? Is Christ living in you with his freedom, rest, and power? Or are you forgetful and unaware of his abiding presence in you? Understand that you can do nothing to please God and attain a right relationship

with him through self-life efforts.

When you hear and respond to God's voice, the hardness of your fallen flesh will begin to crack, crumble, and break apart. This is necessary for life to truly begin. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it

When you hear and respond to God's voice, the hardness of your fallen flesh will begin to crack, crumble, and break apart. This is necessary for life to truly begin.

produces many seeds" (John 12:24). Jesus made this comparison to illustrate that our lives apart from God are just like the kernel of wheat—the self-life must die before we can truly live and become fruitful. During this time of radical change, you'll feel confused, disoriented, and frustrated. You'll feel as though your world is disintegrating, that you're losing control. You'll ask, "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "What is happening to me?" You'll wonder whether you are going crazy. But you're not going crazy. What you're feeling is the separation from God that you've suffered from all your life; it's finally beginning to melt down.

Don't be alarmed by such changes. You're waking up, as though from a dream. You are being freed at last to enter reality—eternal life. You finally sense the call of God, summoning you home to himself, to his heart, to your eternal birthright. You're discovering you are much more than a fallen, worldly creature, and that you are precious to God. You were made to become God's righteous, holy child. You are the product and recipient of his love, created in his image and likeness.

YOUR TRUE DESTINY

You always thought you emerged in this world by yourself, living as an independent agent trying your best to operate as God. But as you're discovering, you were never really as independent as you thought you were. The more you thought you were doing your own thing, in fact, the more you were being exploited. You searched everywhere, hoping to discover who you are and where you belong. But the happiness, fulfillment, and contentment you've sought have eluded you.

You've learned that the self-centered, materialistic life of this world can never satisfy your soul.

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Living as a spiritual orphan has kept you blind and dormant. Because you were born in spiritual captivity apart from God, truth was hidden from you. Instead of becoming a fully developed, spirit-led oak tree thriving in heavenly soil, you became a hard, frustrated acorn stuck on a ledge in a cave of isolation, alienated from God. Over time you became accustomed to living among godless people in a dangerous world. You identified with false gods and sin. You became cynical, critical, selfish, and heartless.

Sin changed everything. It destroyed the channels through which we could know and bond with God. Adam and Eve started out as two brilliant, pure spiritual beings. But sin turned them into fallen, self-centered shells of what they were created to be. Even so, God's plans and specifications didn't change. God loved us so much that he sent Jesus so we could be changed back through repentance, spiritual regeneration, and the renewing of our minds.

Like Adam and Eve, we also were created in the image and likeness of God—living, spiritual mirrors to reflect his presence and activity on earth. This was humanity's true nature and calling, and this is what we were created to be. Through Jesus' death on the cross, we can regain the intimacy with God that Adam and Eve forfeited in the Garden of Eden.

You were created to be a loving, prosperous gardener of spiritual reality just like your true Father. That's why you have been so frustrated all your life. You haven't gardened yourself, much less others. Once you're able to see and hear through new spiritual eyes and ears, you'll stop thinking of yourself, of God, and of life as you have in the past. You'll stop acting like the spiritual orphan you once were. You'll stop seeing God as cold, distant, and light years removed from your everyday life. God's love and indwelling presence will sustain you through the rapids of massive change.

The starting point for regaining this relationship with God is to obey the law of creation that abides within you. Recognize that you are not in your true home or in the proper growing conditions for living out your true, God-given life. You don't yet know what living in his presence is like because you've never truly ventured beyond self-life to explore the spiritual reality that lies beyond. And because you haven't trusted and followed God with all your heart, you haven't yet experienced the depth

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of his love for you. Spiritual ignorance prevented you from knowing the truth: that you *can* have an airtight, eternal bond with God, and that he cherishes and loves you.

You are God's creation and the object of his love and affection, which is why he wants to rescue you from this "dog's life" captivity you've been living in. Your Heavenly Father wants to give you new spiritual eyes so that even if the rest of the world chooses to remain blind, you can now see things as they really are as you come to him in faith. As the famous hymn says:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Recognize that God the Father is calling you. His nature is seeking your true nature; like calling to like, spirit calling to spirit. You were created to be his regenerated, beautiful child. You are truly his, and nothing could ever change your spiritual core just as nothing about you—not ignorance, worldly entanglements, self-deception, or selfishness—could ever change what you mean to God. You are his.

BEWARE OF "OLD WIRING"

Once you realize that you don't have to depend on yourself for everything, you'll long to know more of God and his all-encompassing provision. You'll start out excited, anticipating great things ahead. But soon the restlessness that compelled you to leave self-life will start up again.

The problem is this: the habits, patterns, and systems you depended on for so many years—your old wiring—is still in place. Only now the old wiring doesn't match your surroundings. This new way of living goes against your mental pattern, the old wiring, and you won't understand what is happening. You'll feel like an alien, marooned on a distant planet. You won't have your old maps, coordinates, and landmarks, so you won't be able to navigate the landscape before you.

God has been a stranger to you, and you have likewise been a stranger to your true spiritual self. How could you be God's true image and likeness if your spirit has been dead, or if you don't yet know the truth about him? How could he truly be your new life as long as you hang on to the counterfeit self-life you created?

Everything about Christ-Life will seem foreign and terrifying at first as you venture beyond your comfort zone. You may feel the insatiability and pull of old addictions. The cravings of self-life will try to break loose and crash through whatever barriers may now be keeping you from going back. You may lose sight of the new spiritual reality that compelled you to change. All this talk of safety, rest, and fulfillment seems strange—even dangerous.

You may become temporarily blinded to how distorted your former life really

was. Homesickness will grip your heart. But this homesickness isn't for your true home. This longing is the pull of your old, familiar self-life. You may feel pain, distress, and dissatisfaction. You may be tempted to forget all this "foolishness," to go back where things are comfortable, familiar, and predictable—where at least you could entertain the illusion of being in control. But amid your discomfort, remember how things used to be. You were even more miserable before you began to hear God's voice.

You may wonder why you left the relative security and comfort of self-life for the desert you now find yourself in. The Children of Israel had barely left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land when they began grumbling to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Exodus 14:11–12)

The pain you feel is the cross of Jesus Christ killing your old life and stripping its toxic residue from your heart and soul. Your old life is dying. Just as Jesus experienced on the cross, you may feel as though God has abandoned you: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer..." (Psalm 22:1–2).

The pain you feel is the cross of Jesus Christ killing your old life and stripping its toxic residue from your heart and soul.

LEARN TO LET GO

As you embark upon your exodus journey and enter the desert, you may grossly overestimate the progress you've made thus far. Many people mistakenly think they've arrived simply because they made the decision to leave self-life. They may begin acting like arrogant toddlers with their hands on little plastic steering wheels attached to "daddy's dashboard." They think they've outgrown God, so they try to take over and drive the car, just as they did before.

That's the old wiring of self-life acting up. Yes, the self-life is still active, still deceiving, still contaminating the inner workings of the soul. It has yet to be disconnected and replaced with brand new wiring. Consider God's warning against trusting in ourselves and mankind:

This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man whose confidence is in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of

drought and never fails to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:5–8)

Just as you may be overestimating your spiritual progress thus far, you may also be grossly *underestimating* the extent of what God must yet do within you—the rigor and extent of the cleansing and retraining you must undergo. You may think you can save yourself and live “the good life” by trusting in your own understanding and your religious, self-glorifying efforts.

Even some Christian leaders and pastors expend considerable time and effort trying to improve the fatally damaged Titanic of self-life. Ponder the Risen Lord’s warning to the New Testament Church of Laodicea:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked! I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (Revelation 3:15–18)

The Church of Laodicea was trying to follow Christ through human effort rather than relying on what God had already purchased at great cost through Jesus’ death on the cross. We tend to live the same way, thinking we must trash our life as we understand it and fashion a substitute that we hope will be good enough to please and satisfy God. But understand this: The holiness and just judgment of God have torpedoed self-life. It has been condemned and rejected, forever. True freedom, teamwork, and love will take some getting used to.

Your spirit has been awakened by the overwhelming love of Christ, and you’ve been crucified to your former life of sin.

As much as you might be tempted to turn back, the nails pounded into your self-life won’t permit it. Your spirit has been awakened by the overwhelming love of Christ, and you’ve been crucified to your former life of sin.

“You do not want to leave me too, do you?” Jesus asked The Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68–69)

Your only real choice—life—is to seek, search, wait, and cry out for God with all your heart, soul, and strength, even if this means writhing in agony during the “detoxification” process. You must follow even though it means death to life as you’ve known it. And it *does* mean death. This must happen before you can drink deeply of

his resurrection. You must go forward, submitting to God on his terms so that you might know him and feel his embrace, as you learn by faith to abide in his presence.

Rather than fighting the changes going on inside you, accept that you are not God. *You are not in control!* Stop overestimating your spirituality. Become teachable and flexible. Learn to live from the power of your Creator, your loving Heavenly Father. Then see what happens. God will rescue you according to his blood covenant oath and will reveal himself and guide you. You will finally see how entangled, corrupt, and needy you've always been. Then you will know instinctively what you need from your Creator—*everything!*

God is here to free you, to establish you as his child and heir. He is calling you from darkness into light, truth, and reality. Once you're purified and freed from the counterfeit self you created, God will continue breathing his Holy Spirit into the true Christ-Life

self he entrusted to your care and management. You will no longer be content with the way things have been. You'll forever be spoiled for living as you did in the past. You will hunger and thirst for real love, for real food and drink, and this longing will consume you. You will discover you must have God, and he must become your Heavenly Father!

Despite the uneasiness and uncertainty you're experiencing, recognize that God isn't going to destroy your true self. What must go is the non-existent, delusional self, the lone ranger identity that he crucifies and buries. When that's done, he can then garden your true self, the one he made for himself. God has taken 100% of the responsibility to set things right and restore you to reality and intimate fellowship with him. He has just one infallible provision—Christ-Life. Bury the false assumptions and expectations that this world caused you to develop.

In time your newfound freedom in Christ will feel as normal as the immaturity, selfishness, and separation from God you had known in the past. The Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

GOD'S BLOOD COVENANT WITH YOU

As you will see in the chapters that follow, you were created to think, live, and breathe in oneness of heart and mind with God and his other blood covenant friends. This is the essence of personal fulfillment and maturity. This is the pattern we see revealed in Scripture.

As you allow God to work in you, something in your true nature, something deeper than sin and your fallen humanity, will awaken, respond, and reach out to

God will rescue you according to his blood covenant oath and will reveal himself and guide you.

the corresponding heart of your Creator. You'll realize that you've always been connected to him through a blood covenant bond you didn't know existed. Once you recognize this connection, you will acknowledge and respond to your Father's call.

This is the beginning of your true crucifixion. As you become one with Christ through his death, your self-life will be crucified, killed, and buried. You'll begin to grasp and enter God's blood-covenant ways as you experience the glory of Christ's resurrection. God himself will now be your eternal, abiding, indwelling life. Death had to precede his glorious, post-resurrection life. And now you're following your Lord and Savior, Jesus, into the same process.

This blood covenant relationship can never be adequately described through words. It is much too deep, vast, and intimate. But once you experience this

relationship, you will know that being apart from God, even for an instant, is unbearable.

God's mature sons and daughters enjoy all the benefits of living in covenant relationship with their Heavenly Father.

God's mature sons and daughters enjoy all the benefits of living in covenant relationship with their Heavenly Father. They live in the perfect love of God as the Holy Spirit lights their way, enabling them to see the terrain of life as it really is. Those

who are truly free can now handle reality because they operate in God's Spirit through wisdom, love, and truth rather than according to man-made formulas. They make wise, productive choices for what they will plant within themselves and in their lives. They now have great cause to rejoice at the harvest season.

This is what is meant by Christ-Life. This is the new life you are exploring. Imagine what your life will be like as you learn to think, respond, and live in response to the Holy Spirit, in the same manner as the disciples who walked and talked with Jesus.

Accept God on his terms and get used to the radical newness of your life, your rebirth in Christ. As you do, the reality of having already been crucified with Christ will begin to make sense deep within your spirit. You'll realize everything that must be done and everything you could ever need has already been accomplished and applied to you personally. All you must do is look to the Holy Spirit and allow him to apply truth to your life.

When you finally see this, you'll stop trying to "get there" through your own efforts. You'll be free, once for all, of chasing carrot-on-a-stick delusions. You'll learn to enter God's rest and loving presence by trusting and drawing upon him for everything you need. As you do, God will transmit to you the fruitfulness, power, and eternal blessings that flow from his finished work.

* * *

During Phase 2 and Phase 3 of *The Ultimate Journey*, we unfold and explore the new covenant pattern of being crucified with Christ. The goal is for you to be better equipped to search the Scriptures and have a deeper understanding of how to apply God’s Word to your life.

As you continue reading the chapters and participating in group discussions, keep in mind there is no quick fix—no finish line you cross in two or three months upon having read and discussed this material. We can never know all there is of the infinite, Living God, so *none* of us can ever say, “I have arrived!” God’s unfathomable nature is part of the mystery surrounding his holiness, power, and majesty.

Although we can never fully know the depths of God, the Bible encourages us in 2 Peter 3:18 to “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We take comfort and stand firm in his Word, knowing that, “He who began a good work in you is able to see it through to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). And as you’ll see throughout Phase 2 and Phase 3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). Our Father God really *does* have everything covered!

Though we were once blind to the truth, God’s Kingdom has always been here. And now his Kingdom is invading your space. He is here to conquer and take over, one heart at a time. And now, you are squarely in God’s sights! So don’t move—give him total access to your life!

* * *

RETURN TO LESSON 1 IN YOUR STUDY GUIDE
AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

PHASE

2

STUDY GUIDE

PHASE 2

INTRODUCTION



PHASE 2 STUDY GUIDE

LESSON THEME

This section captures the theme of the lesson you read in your book to remind you of the overall message.

REVIEW POINTS

This section summarizes the main points of the lesson you read.

CONTENT QUESTIONS

Be sure to answer each of these questions for the lesson. By doing this, you will have a better comprehension of the material. In addition, your group leader will be addressing these questions in your class and you will want to be prepared to discuss with the rest of your group members.

To aid you, each of the questions are worded in such a way that you will find the same or nearly the same wording of the question in a sentence in your book. For example: Question—By his death on the cross, what was it that Jesus “finished”? What the Phase 2 book says: “Before he died, the crucified Lamb of God proclaimed to his Heavenly Father in the presence of all creation: ‘It is finished’! God’s provision for us was completed through Jesus’ death on the cross.”

PERSONAL AFFIRMATIONS

Read the personal affirmations out loud each day of the week for the lesson you are studying. They are found at the end of each lesson. You will be amazed at the power of the words as you speak them out loud.

The more you read the affirmations, the more they are going to sink in to your heart and mind. It may take some time for you to believe them, but they are true so keep affirming!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

You need to go beyond just understanding the material. It needs to make sense in your own life and experience. So, answer each of these questions. There is no right or wrong answer. You will have an opportunity to share these with your group members and hear how they are processing what they are learning as well.

STAYING ON THE PATH

Don't lose ground! During Phase 1 you learned the importance of becoming your Adult Ally. How well you were able to do that is a big part of your healing and growth. Don't stop now! Continue on the path you have begun by gardening your heart on a regular basis. You need to be doing this daily, or at least weekly, to maintain the ground you have gained in Phase 1, and to experience more growth and fruitfulness.

This section will guide and encourage you so you can continue to process what you are experiencing. Just as you shower regularly, you need to keep your soul clean. Practice soul hygiene!

LESSON

1

PREPARE YOUR HEART FOR A JOURNEY

LESSON THEME

God created us in his image and likeness, but each of us has forsaken our true identity and conformed to the patterns of this world. Just as for Abraham, God calls each of us to make an exodus journey from the false identity that keeps us in bondage. In exchange we enjoy the freedom that awaits us, as we learn to embrace our true identity in Christ.

REVIEW POINTS

- You can now look to God as source and provider for all your needs rather than living as you had in the past, trusting in yourself.
- All you must do is acknowledge your need for God—on his terms rather than your own—and stop resisting his love.
- It's not about you and what you think you can do or accomplish. It's about the perfect, complete work God has already done through his beloved Son, Jesus.
- You are created in the image and likeness of God!
- You were designed to live as a blood covenant friend of God.
- You must give up your life in order to find the abundant life God has for you.

CONTENT QUESTIONS

1. By his death on the cross, what was it that Jesus “finished”?
2. All we must do is _____ our need for God—on _____ rather than our own—and _____ his love.
3. What is the key to our relationship with God?
4. When you finally begin to hear God’s voice what can you do?
5. For Grump, what was the difference between living by the Normal’s family system and living in the Wild?
6. What did it take for Grump to discover his true nature?
7. Was it okay for Grump to abandon the Normals? Why or why not?
8. What is humanity’s true nature and calling?
9. Your Heavenly Father wants to give you new _____ so that even if the rest of the world chooses to remain _____, you can now see things as they _____ as you come to him in faith.
10. Why is your “old wiring” a problem?
11. As you embark upon your exodus journey what mistake might be easy for you to make?
12. What part of you is it that God wants to crucify and bury?
13. Who did God design you to be?
14. What results do mature people who are living in covenant with God get to enjoy?
15. How do you enter God’s rest and loving presence?

PERSONAL AFFIRMATIONS

Read the Personal Affirmations for Lesson 1 out loud each day this week.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Where do you see yourself in The Call of the Wild allegory?
2. How do you honestly feel about relinquishing control of your life? And, are you ready to do that?
3. Based on your past experiences, who have you believed you are? (stupid, don’t fit in, not good enough, etc.)
4. In what ways do you see that you’ve settled for less than what God intended you to be?

5. How do you feel your own life is different after experiencing Phase 1 of *The Ultimate Journey*?
6. How are you feeling about embarking on Phase 2 of this journey?
7. Do you honestly believe God has really “finished” everything?

STAYING ON THE PATH

Did anyone hurt your feelings this week? What did you tell yourself when that happened? Write out your feelings and the circumstances surrounding what happened. Then write an Ally Letter to yourself and validate your feelings and bring comfort, love and acceptance where needed. Then write a Response Letter back. Remember: Feelings are for feeling, not for fixing.

Did you find yourself believing lies about yourself this week? Write those lies down and then write a letter to yourself telling yourself the truth. Remember: a lie unchallenged becomes the truth you live by.

LESSON 1 GROUP AFFIRMATIONS

1. You are God's eternal, beloved one. He has known you, chosen you, and done everything to provide for you since before the creation of the world. And he wants you to know that.
2. God loves you with an eternal, changeless, life-giving love. He created and designed you to be his own personal image and likeness. Your dignity, beauty, and eternal destiny are beyond the ability of human thoughts or words to grasp or describe.
3. Your destiny is known only by God. He has to reveal it through you as your life progresses. It is a destiny truly worthy of him, and it will make you overflow with joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and gratitude.
4. Of the trillions of possibilities, God chose you specifically. You are the one he wanted to create, maintain, protect, and provide for. We are in awe of you and filled with deep respect because of the special focus, love, and interest God eternally places upon you.
5. I encourage you to learn and accept your God-given identity and purpose. Develop a deep respect for who you are and why you are on this earth. Garden yourself for the glory of God and for the fulfillment of the purpose he has given you and the dignity he has placed upon you.
6. You are beautiful, special, and precious, not because of anything you've done, but because of what God created you to be in yourself.
7. No matter what you have been through, are now going through, or may go through in the future, the fact is God loves you so much that he has already covered you and every one of your needs in an airtight way.

LESSON 1 PERSONAL AFFIRMATIONS

1. Father God, you rejoice over me. I am your eternal, beloved one. Thank you for knowing me, choosing me, and doing everything to provide for me since before the creation of the world.
2. You love me with an eternal, changeless, life-giving love. You created and designed me to be your own personal image and likeness. Thank you for the dignity, beauty, and eternal destiny you have given me.
3. I look to you, Lord, to reveal the destiny you have for your life in me. I rest knowing that it will be worked out in me through your wisdom and love. My heart overflows with joy and gratitude to you for what you purpose to do in me and through me.
4. I am in awe of you and filled with deep respect because of the special focus, love, and interest you have placed upon me.
5. God, I was created in your image and likeness. Thank you for fashioning me with my unique past, present, and future into the image and likeness of your Son, Jesus. I am privileged to carry his life to everyone I come in contact with.
6. Thank you for my God-given identity and purpose. Because of this, I respect who I am and know there is a reason why I am on this earth. I garden the life you have given me so that you may receive the glory and I may live in the dignity you have placed upon me.
7. I praise you, God, for creating and giving me the awesome purpose and destiny that is mine. Thank you for making me wonderful, special, and precious. Thank you that I don't have to strive to be those things. That is who I am.