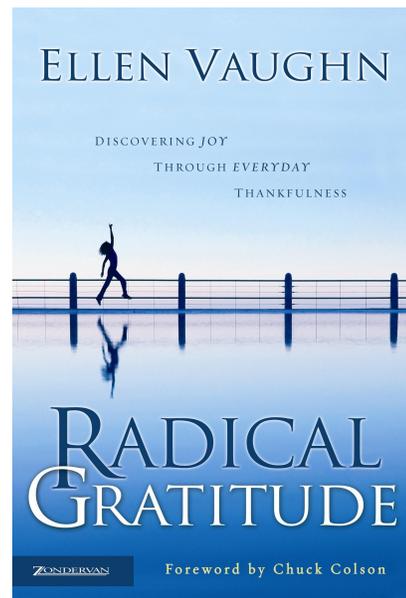


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# **RADICAL GRATITUDE:**

**a casual guide for small-  
group discussion**

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## Chapter One: Death as the Doorway

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*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

*–Hebrews 11:1*

1. What do you remember most about your childhood relationship with your parents?
2. What are your relationships with your parents like today? How have they influenced you?
3. Why was the author's experience in this chapter the doorway for a new understanding of grace and gratitude?
4. Have you lost a parent? Served as a caregiver for someone who was weak and ill? What did you learn from those experiences?
5. The author says that she saw that her mother was dead, but knew that she was alive. What similar experiences have you had in which you had to see with the eyes of faith, believing, in fact, in what you could not see?

## Chapter Two: Fountain of Life

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*They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights.  
For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.*  
{/PO}  
{CRED}--Psalm 36:8–9{/CRED}

*True gratitude or thankfulness to God for His kindness to us, arises from a foundation laid before, of love to God for what He is in Himself, whereas a natural gratitude has no such antecedent foundation. . . . The saint, having seen the glory of God, and his heart being overcome by it, and captivated with love to Him on that account, his heart hereby becomes tender, and easily affected with kindnesses received. . . . Self-love is not excluded from a gracious gratitude; the saints love God for His kindness to them. . . . But something else is included, and another love prepares the way, and lays the foundation for these grateful affections.*

*--Jonathan Edwards, The Religious Affections*

1. What do you think of the notion of gratitude being the secret of staying “plugged in” to Christ? Why do you think the author makes this point?
2. Discuss the Scriptures used in this chapter from Thessalonians, Colossians, and Philippians. Why do you think believers are given these admonitions? What does complying with them look like—specifically—in your life?
3. Is a grateful heart a goal that can be achieved by determined discipline . . . or is it a byproduct of the reality of knowing God? Or is this a “both/and” sort of answer? Why or why not?
4. How do you see Jonathan Edwards’ definition of “natural gratitude” manifested in our culture today?
5. What is “spiritual gratitude,” according to the *Religious Affections*? Why is it the evidence of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life?
6. Describe someone you know who demonstrates “spiritual gratitude.”

## Chapter Three: Whispers in the Night

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*But now, this is what the LORD says--  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.*

*--Isaiah 43:1*

1. Have you had situations in your life in which you have tangibly felt God's presence more so than other times? If so, describe them.
2. Describe the things that occupy your attention the most in your everyday life. If you were told you had a year to live, how would you prioritize these things?
3. This may sound morbid, but for the sake of discussion, as this chapter illuminates the topic, what comes to mind when you think of your own death? Do you fear death? Is your faith solid? Are there any areas or relationships in your life that you need to set right?
4. How does a mindfulness of death helpfully inform everyday life?
5. Read the story in Daniel 3 about wild King Nebuchadnezzar and the three young Hebrew men. Note their assertion that God would rescue them, and their follow-up, "but even if He does not . . ." Was their hope based in a particular outcome, or in God's character? How do we read this story of spectacular rescue and reconcile it with times when God has not intervened, and His people have died rather than been preserved?

## Chapter Four: Be the One!

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*The LORD is my strength and my shield;  
my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.  
My heart leaps for joy  
and I will give thanks to him in song.*

*--Psalm 28:7*

1. Reread the story of the lepers from Luke 17:11-17. Remember the Old Testament's strict laws regarding lepers as unclean individuals who were to be ostracized from the community. Why do you think the nine lepers who were healed didn't thank Jesus? Can you relate more with the one who did—or the nine who didn't?
2. What did you think of the example of the mother whispering thanks to God in the midst of her rocky relationship with her teenaged daughter? Do you have any relationships in which this would be an interesting exercise? Explain.
3. What is the difference between general cultural affirmations that yes, gratitude is a good thing, and a biblical understanding of gratitude?
4. What have you noticed in terms of casual conversations at your office, school, in your neighborhood or church? Is there a negative or positive trend? How can believers be the fragrance of Christ—without being annoying Pollyannas--when others around us are sour or ungrateful?
5. The author says that “gratitude for God’s deliverance reveals itself in action.” Give some examples of actions in your own life or in the lives of others that have stemmed from gratitude to God.
6. Read Romans 1:21-24. How is thankfulness connected with giving glory to God? How is ungratefulness a key element in the slippery slope of sin?
7. Do you think of gratitude as a discipline? Why does the author say it is a gift of God, like grace?

## Chapter Five: Undeniably Delivered

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*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

*--John 15:9-13*

1. Have you been to a concentration camp, or to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., or a similar location tied to human suffering? If so, describe your experience and emotions.
2. Unless you are Polish, Franciszek Gajowniczek is pretty unpronounceable. So let's just call him Frank. Can you imagine how Frank felt when Father Kolbe took his place? What would you have done?
3. Sometimes it's hard to really get hold of the fact that we are all like Frank . . . except it was Christ who actually took our place, and died the death that should have been ours. Sometimes we know that truth so well that it becomes an intellectual verity rather than an overflowing wellspring of stunned thankfulness. Does this story from Auschwitz stir up gratitude for your own deliverance? Why or why not?

## Chapter Six: My Way—or the High Way?

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*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,  
who for the joy set before him endured the cross,  
scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.  
Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men,  
so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

*--Hebrews 12:2-3*

1. Why not “be the one” as the author puts it, who gives thanks to God? Does anything block you from leaping free with the joy of your deliverance from sin, torture, and spiritual death?
2. One obstacle to gratitude is never having been rescued. The Apostle John wrote that all who receive Jesus become children of God. Are you certain that you have received Christ and been delivered from the just penalty for sin? You need not know a particular date and time . . . but if you realize, deep inside, that in fact you’ve never repented of your sin and asked for His forgiveness and presence with you forever, now would be a very good time to do that. See the last page of this booklet for a guide.
3. What are the other obstacles to gratitude that this chapter mentions?
4. How do you see pride manifested in the culture around you?
5. How do you see subtle or overt pride manifested in your own life?
6. The author says that dependence on God is the key to freedom. Why? How?

## Chapter Seven: Getting Naked

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*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

*--Hebrews 12:1*

1. Have you ever driven over a bad piece of art?
2. Look at Deuteronomy 8:10-18. What was Moses warning God's people about in this section of Scripture? Does this caution apply to us today?
3. What is complacency? How and when does it creep into believers' lives? What is its antidote?
4. What convicts you the most from Revelation 3:14-22? What encourages you the most?
5. Are the Christians you know real with one another? Or do we sometimes wear nice facades as if everything is just fine, thank you, even in times of brokenness and pain? How can churches be places where broken people whose lives are a mess feel like they are welcomed . . . rather than intimidating clubs where it appears that everyone has his or her act together?
6. Describe a time in your life when you felt like God was stripping you in order to cleanse and heal you.

## Chapter Eight: Out of Bounds

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*He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom  
and broke away their chains.  
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for men.*

*--Psalm 107:14-15*

1. What impressed you most about Father Jenco's story?
2. Small and benign as it was, Father Jenco's button represented his reliance on Jesus *plus* something else. What's your button? It might be something small and innocuous, or it might be some secret sin. It will likely be the first thing that pops into your mind, the thing you shove away, saying, "oh, no, surely not *that*." You may have several buttons . . . fears, anxiety, anger, bitterness, shame, small areas of pride or self-reliance, big things, little things . . . anything that grossly or subtly keeps you from relying on Christ alone and having real intimacy and freedom in your relationship with Him.
3. As you are comfortable—or perhaps even if you're a little bit uncomfortable—tell one another about these obstacles. You need not describe it explicitly to the group if you would really rather not. After you've shared, have a time of prayer in which you let go of whatever occupies your real loyalty and attention rather than Christ alone.

## Chapter Nine: Letting Go

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*... your faith has healed you. Go in peace!*

*--Luke 8:48b*

1. What is your reaction to Corrie ten Boom's story?
2. What is forgiveness?
3. What is the difference between will and emotion?
5. What indicated the Prodigal's real repentance?
4. The author writes: "Willingness is expressed in obedient action, however small. Lift your arm. Toss the button. Make the call. Admit the truth. When we come to the sticking point, we must do something, even if it feels impossible." Does anything specific, any small step, come to mind that you need to do in order to set something right in your life?
5. What specific elements of the three biblical stories—the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48), the father whose son suffered from convulsions, (Mark 9:17-29), the leper (Matthew 8:1-4)--speak to you in a special way?

## Chapter Ten: No Regrets

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*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,  
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

*--Acts 3:19*

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “repentance”?
2. How, and why, is repentance a gift of God?
3. Have you ever had a botfly stuck in your leg? Anything you need to have cut out of your life in order to heal and be freed?
4. How is real repentance liberating and refreshing?
5. Give an example, from your own life or someone else’s, of the fruits of repentance.
6. How can believers equip children and young people with a real sense of godly sorrow that brings “times of refreshing” rather than regret—instead of Satan’s traps of guilt, shame, and being sorry only for getting caught?

## **Chapter Eleven: Living Gratitude**

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*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*

*--II Corinthians 9:15*

1. Have you had any dental-chair epiphanies recently?
2. What has your experience been in terms of practicing daily disciplines in your life?
3. If gratitude is a gift of God, how is it unleashed in our lives?

## Chapter Twelve: Remember!

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*Remember that you were slaves in Egypt  
and that the LORD your God brought you out of there  
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*

*--Deuteronomy 5:15a*

1. Some people have dramatic salvation stories, with vivid accounts of “before” and “after” their conversions. Some don’t. In three minutes or less, what’s your story?
2. Do you have a sense of having been delivered from slavery in your own “Egypt”—whether from some physical addiction, like drugs or alcohol, or from something more subtle?
3. What are the side effects of ongoing deceit?
4. What are some of the common concepts of freedom in our culture today?
5. What is biblical freedom?
6. How do complacency and self-satisfaction creep into people’s lives? How does the truth set people free?
7. North Americans live in a very self-referential culture, in the sense that spirituality, success, and relationships are often assessed by how they benefit me. “Is it right for me? Is it true for me? It’s all about me! I’ve got to be me!” How is this attitude at odds with the Gospel (which, however, does of course affirm the unique worth of the individual)?
8. What is Oswald Chambers getting at in this quote? “Cut yourself off from prying personal interest in your own spiritual symptoms, and consider bare-spirited the tragedy of God, and instantly the energy of God will be in you.... We lose power if we do not concentrate on the right thing. The effect of the Cross is salvation, sanctification, healing, etc., but we are not to preach any of these, we are to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”<sup>1</sup>
9. What are some practical ways—Ebenezers—that you can remember God’s faithfulness in your own life?

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (November 25 and 26).

## Chapter Thirteen: Out of the Blue

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*For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom,  
and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.  
Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.  
Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential;  
not many were of noble birth.  
But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;  
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.  
He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—  
and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,  
so that no one may boast before him.  
It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus,  
who has become for us wisdom from God—  
that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.  
Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

*--I Corinthians 1:25-31*

1. Do you think that clinical depression carries a stigma among believers?
2. Has anyone close to you struggled with this challenge?
3. Have you ever come to a point where you felt like you hit a wall and were sliding straight down, your fingernails scrabbling in the cement, nothing to grab hold of? What happened after that?
4. What do you like best, and what do you like not at all, about Elisabeth Elliott's quote?

“It is not the level of our spirituality that we can depend on. It is God and nothing less than God, for the work is God's and the call is God's and everything is summoned by Him and to His purposes, the whole scene, the whole mess, the whole package—our bravery and our cowardice, our love and our selfishness, our strengths and our weakness. ... [God uses] as the instruments of His peace a conglomeration of sinners who sometimes look like heroes and sometimes like villains, for “we are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure [the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ], and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us, but is God's alone.” (2 Corinthians 4:7 NEB)<sup>2</sup>”

5. Ecclesiastes 7:13 says, “Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what He has made crooked?” In light of 2 Corinthians 4:7, what might this mean? Or not?

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<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Elliott, *Through Gates of Splendor*, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1996), pages 271–72 (Epilogue 2, January 1996).

6. Some people promulgate a version of Christianity that says if you have enough faith, God will bless you with health and wealth. Even if we don't advocate such a blatant prosperity gospel, it's easy to take on some its assumptions. What does the Bible really reveal about brokenness, pain, suffering, and weakness on the part of God's people?

## Chapter Fourteen: Forget!

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*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect,  
but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.  
Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.  
But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,  
I press on toward the goal to win the prize  
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*--Philippians 3:12-14*

1. Have you forgotten anything lately?
2. The author says that forgetting—of the right things—is a key to gratitude. She advocates forgetting our sins, shame, and successes. What if you can't forget your sins? According to the Scriptures, Who forgets them?
3. How can an omniscient God forget anything?
4. In light of I John 1:9, what does this quote mean to you? “We need to take God at His word. The extent to which we dwell on and obsessively noodle on our own sins from the past—sins for which we have repented—shows the extent to which we really believe God.”
5. The Bible professor Sinclair Ferguson has said, “The determining fact of my existence is no longer my past. It is Christ's past.” What does this have to do with the notion of forgetting our shame?
6. What does Hebrews 12:1 say about shame? How does this really apply in your life?
7. Look at Philippians 3:7-14. How is the Apostle Paul a model of forgetting successes?
8. Think about this quote. Is it the case—or not—in your own life? “But we should forget past successes if they have defined our identity or caused us to be complacent, smug, and self-congratulatory. We're not to fondle the past, dwelling on past glories. (Similarly, we must make sure that our stories of God's work and grace in our lives are not all old. If we can only point to instances of God's faithfulness from five years ago, but have none from this week, then our connection with Christ is not very current.)”

## Chapter Fifteen: Look Up: The Grandeur of God

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*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

*--Proverbs 9:10*

*The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
turning a man from the snares of death.*

*--Proverbs 14:27*

*Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.  
There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.*

*--Proverbs 23:17-18*

*He will be the sure foundation for your times,  
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;  
the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.*

*--Isaiah 33:6*

1. Years ago J. I. Packer wrote a book titled Your God is Too Small. What are some ways that we unconsciously assume, and act like, God is much smaller than He really is?
2. Describe a moment in your life when the veil parted for an instant, and you had just a taste--an intimation, an inkling--of the glory of God.
3. How does focusing on God's enormity and grandeur make us more thankful?
4. The Bible mentions the phrase "the fear of the Lord" rather often. What is it? Why is it the key to wisdom, zeal, life, understanding, and other treasures, as just the short sampling of verses above reveal?
5. How does the fear of the Lord give believers a prudent perspective on all of life? How do we develop this holy fear?

## Chapter Sixteen: “Grieving, But Still Giving Thanks”

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*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;  
may the name of the LORD be praised.*

*--Job 1:21b*

1. Where was God when the Washington, D.C. sniper took aim and shot Dean Meyers while he was pumping gas?
2. What was God thinking when Judy Meyers approached her fatal intersection?
3. What losses have you suffered in your own life?
4. What are God’s intentions in the midst of terrible accidents and evil plots?
5. What do you think of the notion of trying to analyze tragedies from a limited human point of view? Some people think that “figuring it out” makes it into a control issue: if we can just figure out *why* this happened, then we’ll be able to manage it. What does control have to do with suffering?
6. Analyze this quote from Bob Meyers:

“There’s no way I could reconcile Judy or Dean’s death into a human frame of reference. “Trusting God springs from buying into Bible truth, which makes clear that God is God and I am nothing. I have to release my tendency to want to protect myself through controlling everything I can possibly control, in favor of trusting God implicitly in all things.

“Isaiah 55 says ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’<sup>3</sup>

“The comparison between God’s ways and mine, of His thoughts and mine, is the difference between heaven and earth. That’s not a two-inch gap. It’s *huge*. And I have to back off. I either believe that God is good and He is in control, or I don’t. That’s not easy ... but it’s simple.”

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:9.

## Chapter Seventeen: Look Around: Circle of Friends

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*You are my friends if you do what I command.  
I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I  
have called you friends,  
for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.  
You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—  
fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.  
This is my command: Love each other.*

*--John 15:14b-17*

1. Have you ever had experiences like the author's, in which she suddenly felt isolated and depressed for no apparent reason, or is she just really a nutcase?
2. Do you have brothers and/or sisters you can call in time of need? Have you isolated yourself from, or involved yourself in, a community of believers? Are you a member of a local church? Why or why not?
3. What is the biblical norm for believers, barring incarceration in a remote solitary confinement cell?
4. Ephesians 4: 11-16 sketches out the anatomy of a healthy local church. What characteristics do you note?
5. Do you have a circle of friends who know you deeply, who encourage you onward in your relationship with Christ and can remind you of God's faithfulness in the past that gives hope for the present? If not, what blocks you from connecting more intimately with brothers and sisters in the faith?

## **Chapter Eighteen: The Domain of Drudgery**

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*"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!  
You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.  
Come and share your master's happiness!"*

*--Matthew 25:23*

1. Oswald Chambers says that drudgery is the touchstone of character. What does he mean? Do you agree?
2. Are there areas in your life in which it would be wise to change your strategy, rather than just doing the same thing, over and over, like a squirrel on a birdfeeder, so to speak?
3. What are some specific ways you might do so?

## Chapter Nineteen: Memory Rocks

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*As you come to him, the living Stone  
--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—  
you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house  
to be a holy priesthood,  
offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

*For in Scripture it says:  
"See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame."*

*--I Peter 2:4-6*

1. Look at the dramatic story in Joshua 3:1 – 4:18. How did Joshua exhibit faith? How were the Israelites to equip their children to trust in God in the future? How might the principles of this biblical story apply in your everyday life?
2. The author says, “We’re not to worry about the future. The fact is, thus far the Lord has helped us. And tomorrow He will help us thus far again. Like the manna God gave the Jews in the desert, God’s help is daily bread. We can’t store it up for the future. We look for it one day at a time.” Can Ebenezers (reminders that “thus far the Lord has helped us”) really help stave off anxiety? Is a worry-free life really possible?
3. If you are utterly free of worry already, wonderful! But if you’re not, what might your life look like without apprehension and unease?

## Chapter Twenty: “Good Night and God Bless”

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*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.*

*--Psalm 139:9-10*

1. Paul Galanti’s experience in Vietnam was, shall we say, fairly unusual. How can those of us who haven’t been through such dramatic deprivation maintain gratitude for life’s blessings that are so easy to take for granted?
2. How does the culture around us reinforce discontent?
3. What’s more, how can we equip the younger generation—our children, grandchildren, small relatives and friends—to develop habitual appreciation for their material and spiritual blessings?

## Chapter Twenty-one: Ebenezers Everywhere

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*On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.  
Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.*

*--Psalm 63:6-7*

1. The author returns several times to the notion of physical reminders of spiritual truths. Why is this so important?
2. Tell about some Ebenezers of your own, and what they represent.
3. Do you keep a gratitude journal? If so, how has it helped you? If not, start keeping one and see if it increases your perceptions of God's faithfulness in your life.
4. How can friends in Christ prompt one another to remember His faithfulness?
5. How can you become more intentional about noticing and thanking God for His blessings, and for His character?

## Chapter Twenty-two: Pleasures du Jour

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*You have made known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

*--Psalm 16:11*

1. What smells remind you of your childhood?
2. Consider John Piper's quote below about C. S. Lewis. How does the practice of gratitude open our eyes to "daily wonders that waken worship"? What daily wonders waken worship in your life?

"Lewis gave me an intense sense of the "realness" of things. The preciousness of this is hard to communicate. To wake up in the morning and be aware of the firmness of the mattress, the warmth of the sun's rays, the sound of the clock ticking, the sheer being of things ("quiddity" as he calls it). He helped me become alive to life. He helped me see what is there in the world—things that, if we didn't have, we would pay a million dollars to have, but having them, ignore. He made me more alive to beauty. He put my soul on notice that there are daily wonders that will waken worship if I open my eyes."<sup>4</sup>

{/EXT}

3. Carefully noting the semantic differences between the words "sensual" and "sensory," how do we enjoy life's sensory pleasures without becoming ensnared in them?
4. How does Satan twist good pleasures for his own dark purposes? Give some examples.
5. Look at Psalm 115. Though the idea of idols sounds rather primitive, today's slick, modern, "American Idol" culture is full of them. Give some examples.
6. Much of the Christian life seems to be characterized by paradox and tension rather than easy black-and-white formulas. How do we enjoy the good gifts that God gives without getting caught up in them for their own sake? It would be less complicated to go to one extreme or the other, either renouncing all worldly pleasures as did the cloistered monks or earlier centuries, or embracing all worldly pleasures with gusto and becoming a lascivious glutton. Why didn't God make it easier?

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 19–20.

## Chapter Twenty-three: Garden in the Dump

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*Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

*--Psalm 139:7-8*

1. What impressed you most about this story of the Peruvian prison?
2. Like the author, have you been to places where people were full of the joy of the Lord, even though they had no earthly reason to be so? Describe them.
3. When God changes people's lives, does He always make it physically noticeable in their appearance and/or homes? Why or why not?
4. How has God transformed you since you came to know Him? Describe just one tangible way. Use specific descriptions--not "spiritual" language--of changed attitudes, actions, environments, whatever.
5. Are you engaged in helping people who cannot help themselves?

## Chapter Twenty-four: Go!

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*“Then the King will say to those on his right,  
‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you  
since the creation of the world.  
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you  
looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

*“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or  
thirsty and give you something to drink?  
When did we see you a stranger and invite you in,  
or needing clothes and clothe you?  
When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

*“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of  
mine, you did for me.’*

*Matthew 25:34-40*

1. Have you ever seen cows on a beach?
2. What Scriptural admonitions, aside from the Great Commission, tell believers to leave their comforts and go to people in need?
3. What are the obstacles to doing so?
4. Why did Jesus talk so much about helping the poor?
5. What do you think about the information in this chapter citing Americans’ glut of material luxuries but lack of contentment? Have you seen evidence of this tendency among your friends, neighbors, and associates? How can believers live out Kingdom values in a culture so steeped in conspicuous consumption?
6. How can we equip children and teenagers to swim against the tide and do the same?
7. The author writes about jumping on the inner tube and letting the icy river carry her to new destinations. It’s an apt metaphor. What might God be calling you to do that is certifiably uncomfortable, but will take you to new adventures of knowing and serving Him?

## **Chapter Twenty-five: The Rest of the Story: Extravagant Gratitude**

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*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!  
And that is what we are!*

*--I John 3:1*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*--Romans 12:21*

1. What struck you most about the story of Jane Jones? What were the significant milestones in her journey toward forgiveness?
2. In Luke 7:47, the account of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume ends with Christ's words, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Why did Jesus make the connection between the degree of love and the degree of forgiveness?
3. What is the link between our realization of God's forgiveness and our own ability to forgive others?
4. Why, really, is forgiveness so difficult? Be specific.
5. What, if anything, holds you back from knowing the reality of God's absolute forgiveness of your own sins?
6. What, if anything, holds you back from forgiving others in specific situations in your life?
7. What are the fruits of forgiveness?

### **If you would like to believe in Christ . . .**

- God Himself stirs our hearts to seek Him. If you find yourself on this page, wanting to know God, then the Holy Spirit is blowing in your life, like a gentle wind, refreshing you and drawing you to Christ.

*The wind blows wherever it pleases.  
You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is  
with everyone born of the Spirit.*

--John 3:8

- The bad news is that human beings are inherently sinful. Not too many of us would claim to be perfect, but for those who do, the Bible says that the bald truth is that all of us have sinned, violating God's absolute standards of pure perfection. We are spiritually contaminated . . . and stained people can't connect with an utterly clean, holy God. Not only that, sin's just punishment is death. Spiritual death and separation from Him forever.

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

--Romans 3:23.

*For the wages of sin is death,  
but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

--Romans 6:23

- The good news is that, against all human logic, God chose to rescue us from this fate! He chose to love us and make a way for us to connect in a relationship with Him. That way is His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to take the punishment of our wrongdoing—so that we could be freed from the sentence of spiritual death.

*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

--Romans 5:8

*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

--John 3:16

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.*

--John 14:6

- So what do we do? We receive Christ. "Receiving Christ" begins with admitting that we are sinners, and asking Him to forgive us. Whether we have a tiny speck of contamination, or are vile and filthy through and through, it really matters not, in terms of our "worthiness." All of us on the planet are unworthy of God's love and His gift of eternal life.

But He gives that gift freely! All we need do is accept it by agreeing with Him about the state of things, believing that Jesus is perfect, paid the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross, and that He beat death and rose from the dead. Based on everything we know of God, whether it's a lot or a little, and everything we know about ourselves, whether it's a lot or a little, we open our hearts, humbly giving control of our lives over to Him.

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

*--I John 1:8-9*

*As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*

*--John 1:12*

- This is an act of faith. There may well be no drama, bells, whistles, shivers, or signs in the sky. You may or may not feel any differently. But this is about believing in God, trusting in what we cannot see.

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

*--Hebrews 11:1*

*By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*

*--Ephesians 2:8-9*

*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*

*--Romans 3:22.*

*...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

*--Romans 10:9*

- So, if you've prayed and opened your life to Christ, make sure to tell someone! Read the Gospel of Mark, or John, and connect with a local church where the Bible is taught and the people love God. God's great blessings to you!