

# HE WAKENS ME

*How to Pray When You Don't Know What to Pray*



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*How to Pray When You Don't Know What to Pray*

DR. WESLEY E. JOHNSON



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# DEDICATION

To Terry and Archie: men whose passion for  
God continues to impact lives long after  
their departure to glory.





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# PREFACE

Dear Reader,

Kathryn and I have always sought out companions on our spiritual journey. God has satisfied a great deal of this desire over the years in the many people who have come to hundreds of hours of seminars and retreats. I've included some of their comments here to help give you an understanding of what to expect from this book.

From long-time friend and small group partner, retired police detective Ken Thiessen, an elder at Madison Community Church, Everett:

My first impression while reading the draft manuscript was, ahh . . . this is supposed to be a weekend retreat in a book! I found all the pieces: word of hope, being silent before the Lord, loving God with your heart, listening to and praying Scripture, breath prayer, praying our stories—the high and low points, soul friendship, and more. The *more* is what I found so compelling. Dr. Wes shares so much of himself, his life and experience with God calling, shaping and teaching him. Wes explained how he came to use these very same tools as God walked him through the valleys and mountaintops he experienced. He was describing relationship.

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I have been asked from time to time, “How do I have a personal relationship with God?” This book clearly outlines how that relationship can begin, grow, and deepen. As Dr. Wes was sharing his own experience, I heard him saying, “I want you to have a growing, deepening relationship with your heavenly Father. Come join me.”

Thankfully, through repeated exposure to what Dr. Wes was sharing, my desire for a deepening relationship with my Lord has taken root and grown. Learning to be silent before the Lord and listening for the instruction of the Holy Spirit as I read my Bible has been crucial to growing this relationship. I am cherishing my quiet moments with the Lord.

From the Stanglands, elementary through high school band directors and Awakenings Prayer Institute class members in 2014–2015:

I came to API in the fall tired, weary, empty. I’ve come out of API refreshed, filled with hope, and with a deep level of peace. Thank you both for allowing us to see your deep pain and also the joy that comes through working through it with God. —Robin Stangland

Thank you so much for the wonderful ministry that is API! This experience has really deepened my walk with the Lord and has brought the Word to life for me! I am also enjoying the friendship that is developing with you and the brothers and sisters at Bethel. Robin and I are excited about exploring what God has for us! And Kathryn, thank you so much for your wonderful music, worship, the food, and your friendship.—Dave Stangland

From Rev. Harald Gruber, former Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, Iowa, regarding a customized API class at his church:

Your visit with us. . . was so meaningful and such a privilege. Reading the Word of God and looking at the details of the passages read made it come alive in new ways. Often we do not think about praying the Word of God, and being encouraged to do that makes it become relevant and real for personal intimacy

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with our Father. Taking time to focus on God's word of grace, mercy, and love for us makes it more real for our everyday life.

I have found that so many people are incredibly over busy with many things that are not essential in and for life. That keeps them from taking the time to spend with God and in his Word. Being able to be led away from that for some time and then seeing his reality is beyond anything we can find anywhere else in our busy life.

From Dr. Phil Templeton, director of counseling for the Cedar Park network of churches, Bothell, Washington, API participant and instructor:

On Breath Prayer:

What is a breath prayer?

It is two things joined together: a name for God and a prayer need. Maybe seven syllables, brief enough to be easily remembered and spoken in one breath. Deep enough to express my need and call out the name of the one who meets my need.

Early in my first year in Awakenings, I learned about breath prayer. One day in November, we were asked, "What do you need in your life right now?"

I answered, "Joy in Jesus," because I wanted to experience him in my life.

"Write a name for God that has to do with meeting your need."

I wrote, "Living Water."

Reading in the book of John, chapter 4, I saw Jesus talking with a woman at a well about living water that he alone could give. I thought about his water and what it could do for me. Water washes and cleans. It fills us and quenches our thirst. His water is life-giving and eternal. There is something deeply satisfying about Jesus' living water.

"Write a breath prayer," we were told.

So I wrote: "Living Water, wash me, fill me," because I continually need to be cleansed and filled by the one who loves me always and forever.

When our API session was done that day, I went home, and my wife traveled to Oregon to visit family loved ones there. I

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was quietly alone for the day with our dog and cat. That evening my brother called to tell me Mom had died. It was numbing, unexpected news . . . no one to talk with. . . . But I remembered the breath prayer and experienced the Lord in the dark hours before my family returned: “Living Water, wash me, fill me,” I prayed at that time, asking the lover of my soul to hold me in his love when no one else was with me.

Finally, a few words of thanks.

So many have contributed to the making of this book. First, I want to thank my brilliant and dedicated wife, Kathryn, whose confident faith has fueled this project from beginning to end. Thank you, Sweetheart, for your stalwart support through dozens of retreats and seminars: for listening to seeking hearts, for leading worship, and for walking the pathways of prayer lifting this work to our Sovereign Lord and Abundant Provider. Thank you for those working vacations where you read over each chapter and contributed your thoughtful edits. Thank you for your faith, hope, and most of all, your resilient love.

And thank you to Theresa Schaudies, whose dedication to the institute has led to countless hours of creativity, critique, and constructive contribution. Thank you, Theresa, for reviewing lesson plans, producing top-quality materials, looking after a myriad of administrative details, providing leadership on retreats and seminars, and for gleaning the oh-so-helpful reflections of our participants for this book.

Thank you to the leaders of Bethel Baptist Church for valuing this training and discipleship ministry, and releasing me for untold hours of investment in the prayer life of God’s people. Your passion for God and his people has contributed to the fulfillment of the Lord’s calling in many lives.

Thank you to all of our API participants over the years, from the members of Bethel and other churches, to students at Bakke Graduate University, to counselors, pastors, missionaries, and others seeking to deepen their life of prayer. Your fellowship has enriched our lives as we have imparted to you the treasures of reflective prayer.

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And to our readers: I pray your experience with this book will open unparalleled blessings of intimacy with our victorious warrior God.

In his peace,  
Dr. Wes Johnson





# FOREWORD

My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise  
preserves my life.

—Ps. 119:50

At different points in this book, you will learn about the story of Jeremy Johnson. I am Greg, Jeremy's younger brother. The author of this book is my uncle, and I can personally attest to the value and power of *lectio divina* and breath prayer, to which my uncle introduced me many years ago. I would like to share with you how God answered my prayer to preserve my life and launch me on a glorious course.

For three years (2005–2008), my family journeyed with Jeremy through the valley of the shadow of death as he faced the formidable foe of brain cancer. In September of 2008 at the age of twenty-seven, Jeremy's health took a turn for the worse; the cancer metastasized through his cerebral spinal fluid and into his spine. Three months later, on December 13, the day of the first snowfall, Jeremy breathed his final breath surrounded by family and intimate friends. Jeremy went to be with Jesus.

My brother's death seemed to trigger a series of major losses in my life. Five days after Jeremy died, one of my uncles on my mother's side

died. Not long after that my car broke down, and it was beyond repair. Then my family lost our home—the home Jeremy died in—and we were forced to move out. I hardly had a chance to say goodbye to the place, which had been a fortress of comfort for me, a refuge for my family, and a bastion of care for my brother.

While my brother was dying, I was falling in love with a beautiful young woman I had met at Seattle Pacific University. After Jeremy passed, I asked Rose Langer to be my wife on New Year's Eve. After being engaged for five months, the Lord counseled us to make a hard but good decision, and we ended our engagement. I vividly remember feeling like everything I had and loved was being taken away from me.

In the midst of the whirlwind of losses, I began desperately to cry out to God. I wrote voluminously in my journal every agony, every emotion, and every grief-swelled prayer that thrust me towards the comfort of Christ. But one simple prayer emerged from my grieving heart: *Preserve me!*

There were several Scriptures through which God ministered to me in those days: Psalm 119:50; Proverbs 3 and 4; and Hebrews 12:1–13, just to name a few. But for the sake of testifying to the value and power of lectio divina and breath prayer, let me share with you Psalm 119:50. It reads, “My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life.” So, my prayer became: *Preserve me!* Through this small prayer, I was able to communicate to God my great suffering, my deep need for comfort, and my desperate plea for him to save me.

The name of God I attached to this prayer was Good Shepherd. But I did not need to speak his name every time I prayed; I knew to whom I was crying out. He was the only one I could turn to for hope, for salvation, for preservation. Everything else was falling apart. I needed someone to hold me and to hold me together. I was afraid that I was going to die, that my grief would utterly consume me. And that is the very moment that God drew near to me as a loving Father, called me his beloved son, and said that he delighted in me.

Hearing those words was a soothing balm to my broken, torn-up heart. He knew that I needed the comfort of an intimate friend, of a strong yet gentle and compassionate father figure. So, my prayer shifted to, *Father, preserve my life.* And oh, he did. I discovered that in the



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deepest of pain, in the pitch-black darkness of bereavement, God was there, and he loved me. My Father loved me. Because of his great love, I was not consumed by my grief (Lam. 3:22). His love was a light in the darkness; he gave me hope beyond my despair. He reassured me with precious promises that he was with me, and that he always would be. I was comforted beyond words in the very crucible of affliction.

I was in a very vulnerable state in those desolate days, and my loving Father had compassion on me. As he continued to whisper his love and pleasure over me, he also provided much-needed financial aid through a generous brother at church. I was also greatly in need of a job, and in March 2009, he led me to work at Jamba Juice, which was a perfect fit at that time in my life. The money I earned there helped me to faithfully pay off student loans. What is more, another generous gift from a friend allowed me to take a basic chaplaincy training course at my church. During that course, a light shone in the darkness: the Holy Spirit filled me with the fresh and exciting vision of becoming a healthcare chaplain. God was intimately concerned with my life, and his answers to my prayer were flowing like a steady stream.

There is so much more I could say about those days, so many more testimonies of God's faithful, steady, comforting presence abiding so closely with me in my great grief. But what I want you to take away is to be real with God. Don't hold anything back. Open up your heart to him, and let him love you. It could be that you are experiencing immense suffering right now. Don't shut God out. I promise you, God hears your desperate cry, and he will come to your rescue. He will supply your deepest need. And then you will know, then it will be revealed to you, deep in your heart, right down to the depths of your soul, how much God loves you. Plant yourself firmly in the Word of God and in prayer, and you will witness him do marvelous things.

By the way, fourteen months after Rose and I took off the engagement ring, I proposed to her a second time, and she said yes. After a short engagement, we were happily married in Edmonds, Washington on October 10, 2010 (and we still are!). Then we packed up, moved to Colorado, and I pursued God's calling to become a healthcare chaplain by earning an MDiv chaplaincy

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degree from Denver Seminary after more than three years of study. Today I am serving as a chaplain in a hospital in Denver. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise him whose love is unfailing! Praise God who preserves us in the midst of our pain and causes all things to work together for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28–29).

—Greg Johnson, MDiv



# INTRODUCTION

“**W**hat do you need most from God at this season of your life?” That question penetrated my soul as it fell from the lips of a wise spiritual mentor. I had been speaking of the grief in my heart due to the loss of two of my closest friends. Each had contracted aggressive, untreatable cancers and died within eight months of one another. I had a sense in my soul of lonely isolation. I felt as though I were in exile from God, unable to sense his sustaining presence. That place where intimacy with God had once flourished had become a parched, spiritual desert. As I pondered the question, the answer rose from that isolated place deep inside. “I just want God to notice me!”

Of course I was aware that the omniscient God of our salvation knew exactly where I was, and his eye was upon me day and night. Yet my soul felt as if I had been cast out of the camp of the Lord. I needed the assurance that God had a plan to restore me from this place of grief.

Then my mentor asked another penetrating question: “What name of God tells you that he excels at meeting that kind of need?” The name leapt to my mind—Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who sees and therefore supplies. My director then said, “Now put God’s name together with your need. What then would be the prayer of your heart?”

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A simple, direct prayer formed within my soul, “Jehovah Jireh, look upon me—God who sees and supplies, just notice where I am. Lead me from this place of desolation into the place of your provision.”

My director suggested I shorten the prayer to the most essential words and carry it with me throughout the day. That way I could pray it when I woke up, pray it on the commute, and pray it as I went about my daily chores. My prayer became, “Jehovah Jireh, look upon me.”

The theme of exile in my short prayer led me to the biblical story of Hagar and her son Ishmael. In Genesis 21, this mother and son had been cast out of the camp of Abraham. They wandered in a desert, grieving and despairing of life. But then the Lord met them; he showed Hagar a well of water. He spoke promises of provision and of a future and a hope.

As I prayed my simple Jehovah Jireh prayer over the next several weeks and meditated on the Hagar story, a sweet healing began taking place. Then on retreat, the well of God’s presence flowed fresh into the desert of my soul. At last I was able to tell God I was sorry for being angry with him at taking my dear friends home to be with him.

In short, I woke up to God’s healing presence. My grief gave way to worship. My confusion gave way to the awareness of God’s greater purpose—and best of all, I gained a refreshing sense of his presence healing and directing my life. Over the coming weeks and months, I began to form new breath prayers based upon the compelling needs I was facing in life and matching them to passages of Scripture.

Using this simple prayer pattern, I began to look back over the story of my life. As I pondered and prayed, I could see God’s presence and purpose even in those moments when I had wondered if he was still at work. As I shared what I was learning with an experienced spiritual mentor, the awakening deepened.

Thus began a journey of restoration that has spread to many people. I began to teach this simple way of prayer to others. At retreats and seminars, in sermons, small groups and one-on-one, I

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began to share what I was experiencing. From pastors, counselors, and missionaries, to recovering addicts and the clinically depressed, this simple prayer pattern has assisted many to awaken to the presence and purpose of God in their lives and to pass the treasure on to others.

Here is what some of them are saying about Awakenings Prayer:

“It takes you deep into what God is doing through his word in your life. I found as I repeated the readings the text would come alive to my heart. It truly demonstrated it as a living Word active to my heart and deep needs.”—a pastor

“I could finally hear the voice of my Lord. Wonderful!”—a lay leader who had taught Sunday school for over thirty years.

“At first I didn’t think delving into the past and identifying past needs would have any value. As I did it, I found God’s work in my life to overwhelm me again and again. . . . It was so rich and nurturing, even though it touched on some painful memories.”—a pastor

“Breath prayer became the power of God breathing his character into the area of deepest need—this is powerful and transforming on the spot, in the moment. Breath prayer gives God the glory and the responsibility to make it so.”—inner city Los Angeles youth worker and intercessory prayer leader

Now I want to open the way for you to discover your own deeper awakening to the presence and purpose of God in your life. What is Awakenings Prayer? Awakenings Prayer is a devotional journey into the heart of Jesus. It is listening, and it is obeying. It is enjoying, and it is sorrowing. It is climbing with God into the heights, and it is descending with Him into the depths. All along the way, it is companionship with our Sovereign Lord through the journey of life. Isaiah described in prophetic detail the life-giving connection Jesus had with his Father that led him on the journey of ultimate devotion:

The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.  
He wakens me morning by morning,  
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

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The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;  
I have not been rebellious,  
I have not turned away.

—Isa. 50:4-5

The prophet portrays the Lord Jesus waking each morning to the voice of the Father. Because the Son is listening and the Father is speaking, Jesus has an unbroken awareness of the Father's presence and purpose. Because he hears the Father's voice through the triumphs and challenges of his earthly ministry, he has courage to endure even the suffering of the cross. He descends to the depths and rises to new heights through the power of the Father. Thus Jesus becomes the pioneer of a new way, the pacesetter for all who follow in the way of Christ:

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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he 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 sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

—Heb. 12:1-3

The apostle Paul speaks powerfully about the connection between the low points and high points of his life journey and the sufferings and exaltation of Jesus:

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

—Phil. 3:10-11

It is Paul's passion to be so identified with the risen Christ that even the lowest moments of his life may be experienced in partnership with Jesus. Paul is showing us that in all of life's sufferings

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and exaltations, we may experience the profound presence and guidance of the living God. Like Paul, we who seek to follow Jesus through the highs and lows of this life must gain the sense that we are somehow joined with Jesus, participating in the life of God. As Peter put it:

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

—2 Peter 1:4

But how may we do so?

We need to hear what the Lord is saying to us in our triumphs, in our conscience, and in our tragedies. We need to cultivate a listening heart. As C. S. Lewis has said: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his Megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>1</sup>

Did you notice how Lewis describes the ways God speaks? He whispers in pleasure, he shouts in pain, and he speaks through conscience—that inner voice of the soul that is intended to align us with the moral character of God. Paul wrote of how a good conscience is an essential part of Christian obedience: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). But our consciences can be horribly twisted. Our pleasures can become vices that destroy. Our pains can bury us in depression. All of these need to be transformed. For this we need the abiding grace of God’s manifest presence.

Before he met Christ on the Damascus road, Paul believed that he was doing God a favor by imprisoning and putting to death the followers of Jesus. But God radically redirected Paul’s mistaken conviction when the risen Christ revealed himself in a blinding light. In the most overpowering moment of Paul’s life, he gained a radical new source of pleasure. He was given a new moral center—the person of Jesus himself—and he gained the overcoming power of God for his pain. Now everything was centered on Jesus.

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And Paul's life journey became a participation in the divine nature, a partnership with God in Christ.

Through immersing ourselves in the gracious revelation of God in Scripture, we too may experience a moral reformation. God himself becomes our chief pleasure. He equips our conscience to perceive what for us is the surprising goodness of his will and to gain holy pleasures beyond what we had ever dreamed possible. He comforts and instructs us in our pain. Paul wrote of this moral transformation:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.  
—Rom. 12:2

As we encounter the Lord through the Awakenings devotional pattern, the Holy Spirit amplifies the whisper of God in the pleasurable events of life; he re-forms our conscience to reflect the morality of Jesus; and he clarifies what the Father is so powerfully speaking to us in our pain.

In the Awakenings experience you will:

Awaken to your soul's deep need to connect with the Lord:

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Awaken to moral transformation through meditation on God's inspired Word: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Awaken to the character of God revealed in his divine names: “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Prov. 18:10).

Awaken to the place of yielding and rest: “I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Ps. 131:2 NKJV).

Awaken to the presence and purpose of God in the story of your life: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to



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completion” (Phil. 1:6). “He reached down from on high; he drew me out of deep waters” (Ps. 18:16). “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

It’s time to wake up. Let’s begin.



### Meet Your Fellow Awakenings Participants

Throughout this book, we will be tracking with twelve individuals who have engaged in the API experience. It is our hope that their reflections will provide you with a sense of camaraderie as you make your own journey with the Lord.

Ken is a retired police detective and an elder at Madison Community Church in Everett, Washington. He has been a small-group partner with Wes for many years and has come on retreat several times. A quiet man, Ken is not comfortable with what he imagines will be forced intimacy with perfect strangers. He is a participant in API with his wife, Karen.

Karen is a soft-spoken nurturer who has struggled to consider her own needs. Her life took a turn when she was diagnosed with stage three melanoma. After a protracted battle, she is inexplicably cancer-free today. She looks with gratitude upon the goodness of God in her life and in the lives of her family and friends. She has been enriched by the API seminars and is eager to share this spiritual journey with her husband.

Rick is a classic extrovert—he loves people and being in a room full of them. He and his wife, Carol, are applying what they learned in a dozen years of church-planting among the urban poor in Brazil to the inner city poverty of Portland, Oregon. Immersing themselves in reflective prayer has helped Rick and Carol navigate the uncertain waters of career transition.

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Dave is a gifted musician and educator. He is also owner and director of the North End Jazz Camp in Snohomish County. He is articulate and outgoing. At the October seminar he wrote: "I'm excited about this! Looking forward to growing and for deeper meaning in my prayer life." He is attending API with his wife, Robin.

Robin is a musician, teacher, worship leader, and owns her own business teaching homeschool band as well as private music lessons. She has been involved in Bible study and memorization for years, but in API Robin has been learning how to interact with God's Word in a new way. She loves meeting and getting to know a diverse set of people and loves getting together with other believers and hearing what God is teaching them through his Word. After the October seminar she wrote, "I am right where God wants me to be. . . . I'm jumping into the process and excited to see what God is going to do."

Stan is a former homeschooler who takes his role as a father very seriously. He and his wife Cathi have two boys. Stan describes himself as a person who sometimes dreads the group experience yet finds it fruitful. Stan is deeply interested in the Jewish roots of Christianity. He is studying Hebrew and is anticipating a work/study trip to Israel where he will volunteer with the Israeli government.

Marlee has a heart for women and welcomes opportunities to coach those who have been broken by life to experience who they are in Christ. God has given her an eye for beauty and a way with words, which she expresses through photography and Spirit-led blogging.

Judith is a scientist by education with the soul of an artist and a poet. She came to Christ in the Jesus movement of the sixties and seventies. Disappointed with church, she is looking for what she describes as an authentic relationship with God in communion with others. She discovered API by searching the Internet for a prayer retreat.

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Charles is frequently surprised by (and extremely grateful for) God's continued presence in his life. Sidelined by disability, his quick wit and quiet friendliness has served him well on the several retreats he has attended. He always comes away refreshed by new insights and the unexpected pleasure of relaxed fellowship with others.

Gretchen is a retired elementary school counselor with a keen sense of humanity's woundedness and subsequent need for Christ's healing love. She has nurtured close relationships and cares deeply for a circle of friends she met through a divorce care group many years ago. She volunteers for the National Association for the Mentally Ill as a workshop instructor.

Phil is a licensed counselor and the director of counseling services at a large church in the Seattle area. A teachable teacher, he became intrigued by the possibilities for contemplative prayer as a resource for both himself and for his ministry.

Linda is a servant leader who volunteers at a pregnancy resource center where she is able to combine her gifts of compassion and organization. She has at times struggled against expectations that others have of her public role as "Phil's wife," particularly at church.





## CHAPTER 1

# HOPE THAT GIVES LIFE

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

—Rom. 5:5

As you have picked up this book, what hopes do you have for your connection with God? At each Awakenings retreat and seminar, we begin with that question. What do you hope for? What moved you to come on this event?

Imagine that we have just driven a couple of hours to a secluded retreat center. We've left the busy chores of home far behind. It's been just over an hour now since we sped away from the four lanes of the crowded interstate, and you feel the tension of the last several days dropping away. We've traveled over country roads through verdant farmland and have arrived at our retreat center nestled at the base of a small mountain covered with cedar trees. Springs flow from beneath the mountain, feeding a series of large pools surrounded by well-kept gardens. We've unpacked the car and found our rooms. Now we sit together with a dozen other people on comfortable chairs around a conference table in a spacious meeting room where large picture windows invite our gaze out to the greenery of the cedar trees. As you look around the room, you

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know several of the people, but there are some that you have not met. You wonder how the weekend is going to go.

A leader comes around with a choice of colorful felt pens and asks you to write your name on a tent card that will mark your place for the duration of the retreat. And you are asked to write one word or phrase that expresses your hope for this retreat.

Why did you come?

What are you hoping for?

What do you need from God at this point in your life?

You ponder this in silence for several minutes. You notice that the whole group is silent. Some people are looking out the windows. Others are sitting with eyes closed. Others are writing on their tent cards. You notice that the leaders are also writing their names and words of hope.

You settle into the silence and think, "What am I hoping for?"

You write your word: *peace*. You think, "I could sure use some peace. It's been so chaotic lately." You think back to the family issues you've been facing lately, the tensions of your work place, and your sense of missing God in recent weeks.

"Yes, Lord, peace. I could use some peace."

And since you have an artistic bent, you draw an azure sky above a green mountain with a blue stream flowing down. "That looks like peace," you think. And then you let your vision drift out the picture windows, and you wonder what is up on that little mountain.

The leader draws your attention back into the room as he asks each person to simply share their name, their word of hope, and if they feel comfortable, a bit about why they chose it. As you listen, you hear people describe their hopes.

One person's one word of hope is *rest*. She talks about the busy pace of her life.

"Sounds like what I need," you think.

Another writes *inspiration* in large blue letters. He describes how he has been keeping pace with the demands of life, but his soul could use some fresh energy.

And you think, "Yes, me too!" As you listen, you find yourself empathizing with the others at the table.

## Hope That Gives Life

“*Present*: I hope to be fully present here on the retreat and not distracted by problems at work, or what’s going on at home. I want to be attentive to what is being said, to stay in the here and now.”

“Right on,” you think. You breathe out a prayer, “Lord, help me pay attention to you while I am here.”

“*Learn*—my word of hope is *learn*. I want to learn how to do contemplative prayer better, for the healing it can bring. I guess *healing* is a better word of hope for me.”

“What I am hoping for is *community support*. I want to be heard and understood and to not be derailed by negative human emotions.”

“*Wisdom*,” another shares. “I want to go beyond learning and experiencing—as good as those might be—and move toward wisdom. I hope to gain something that lasts.”

“What I am hoping for is *clarity*. I have some decisions to make, and I am unclear about where God wants me.”

“*Breaking bonds*. I want freedom from things in the past that are still hurting me—things that happened a long time ago but they have affected my circumstances all these years.”

“*Resurrection*. I’ve been focusing on the crucifixion, the dying to self. Now I want to see the promise of new life fulfilled.”<sup>2</sup>

And then it’s your turn. What do you say? How do you describe what you are hoping for? A few more speak after you, and then you hear the leader describe his hopes for the retreat. He says that he hopes for companionship—he wants brothers and sisters who will be companions with him on the journey of listening to God.

Then the session moves into a season of prayer. Several name their words of hope and lift them up to the Lord.

You think, “This is going to be an interesting weekend. I wonder how God will meet us in this place.”

But meanwhile, I’m aware that most of you who picked up this book are not away on retreat. You are in your home, or on a break at work, or perhaps in a coffee shop. Maybe you are fortunate enough to be overlooking a beautiful beach, a flowing river, or a quiet field as you read.

But I am hoping that you will take a moment to pause and consider the question we started with at the beginning of this

chapter: What do you hope for as you read this book? Take a few minutes to reflect. Write your word of hope and a short explanation. Then lift that word of hope up to the Lord.

Let me say at this point that one of my hopes for you as you read this book is that you will take your time and interact with it at the level of the heart. Yes, this is a book for the mind. Jesus wants us to love God with our minds. But it is also a book for the heart. Jesus calls us to love God with our heart: all of it! But we twenty-first century, Internet-driven, tech-savvy, media-saturated North Americans are distracted. Our attention span is diminishing, and we are drawn in many different directions. With constant opportunity to connect with virtually anyone across the world through our electronic devices, it's hard to know where our heart is these days. And to be able to direct all the affections of our heart toward God is, well, daunting! Think about the challenges we face: How do we capture our stray thoughts? How do we direct those thoughts toward God? How do we become aware of what we are feeling? How do we direct our feelings into a single stream of love for the Father?

This is the quest of the heart that longs for God. It's what we need the most: the awareness of his presence. But here's the good news: Scripture is full of stories of God reaching to us, showing us himself. God wants us to know that he is on a quest to capture our hearts. Moses was minding his own business when that bush caught fire. From that day on, this living God, this self-existent one, the great I AM, became central to everything Moses said and did. He talked with God as a man speaks with his friend, earning him the title, "friend of God!"

God finds us.

Saul of Tarsus was moving quickly toward Damascus to arrest, torture, and imprison the followers of this new Way of Jesus. But God stopped him in his tracks. He heard the voice of Jesus. He saw the light of God. And he saw nothing more until Ananias, that faithful disciple, came to restore his sight and speak to him of the purposes of Jesus.

God finds us.



## Hope That Gives Life

With the author of Hebrews, we could say the same about “Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies” (Heb. 11:32–34).

It all begins when God finds us.

Our part is to let God captivate us.

My prayer is that God will use this book to deepen your awareness of his presence and purpose and stimulate a greater love for him at the core of your soul. And I pray that such love will compel you outward to engage God’s radical purpose with those around you. The good news assures us that God will meet us in this quest.

Consider your time with this book as time on retreat. Make it a journey of your heart as well as of your mind. Set your pace more like a quiet walk on mountain trails than a hurried run down a city sidewalk. Take your time. Savor each step. Pause and watch the streams flow down. Ponder the waterfalls, rest by the quiet pools, and listen.

Now, about your quest: what is your hope for your time in this book? Take a moment to write it here:

Now lift up that hope to the Lord. Tell God about what you hope for, and put your positive expectation in his hands.

Scripture for meditation:

*Of David.*

In you, LORD my God,  
I put my trust.  
I trust in you;  
do not let me be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.  
No one who hopes in you  
will ever be put to shame,

## He Wakens Me

but shame will come on those  
who are treacherous without cause.  
Show me your ways, LORD,  
teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long.

—Ps. 25:1–5

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”.

—Ex 3:1–5



### API Participants Respond with a Word of Hope

Judith’s words of hope were *activate* and *abiding*, which she reports were totally fulfilled. “Steady on. Feeling very good about friendships.” Conversely, the words of fear were *deactivate* and *perseverating*. She said God addressed this fear very well. Having slept well, her focus was consistent right up until the very end.

At the first seminar of the year in October, Gretchen wrote on her nametag two words of hope for the year: *honest* and *light*. “The fact that Pastor Wes and Theresa are genuinely engaged and walking along side us is key. The room is filled with a relaxed, caring feeling.”

## Hope That Gives Life

Rick's word of hope was *connection*. "The audio and visual of the rushing waters that cleanses me with his blood will always give hope and encouragement." His fear was that he would be unable to stay connected. "I will always live with this fear. My prayer is to turn this fear into the fear of the Lord.

Ken's word of hope at the first retreat was *direction*. He wrote in the retreat evaluation, "God re-directed me—God and I needed to settle an issue regarding his love for me."

Karen's word of hope was *stillness*. Her hope was fulfilled. "[It was good] being away from the busyness of everything around me and being still. I had nothing else to do but be still."

Dave's word of hope at the first retreat was *healing*. "God gave me some wonderful examples of healing and restoration. I'm taking away meaningful verses and breath prayers."

At the October seminar, Marlee said of her word of hope: "I had no idea how this exercise would set up the day. Holy Spirit inspired word is taking me where I need to go." Her word of hope at the final retreat was *hammock time*. Her prayer request was, "That I practice hammock time faithfully in this season. I went into it a couple of times and slept deeply at night."

Charles' word of hope was *learn*. He said afterwards, "I was taught by the Lord." His words of fear were *rebellion/pride*. Of this he said, God granted him "a keystone long missing in my identity."

Robin had two words of hope on the retreat: *hope* and *healing*. "He has led me to at least be bold enough to pray and ask for healing. He showed me that children with healthy fathers run to ask and good fathers delight in giving."

Stan's word of hope at the first retreat was *clarity*, which he says was significantly fulfilled. "Even if, via advisors, all my plans should ultimately seem unwise and need to be replaced, I have gained some skills to put into practice."

## He Wakens Me

Phil's word of hope was adventure. "I was encouraged that next steps in my life will be well lit (Ps. 119:105). His words of fear were *harm to my loved ones*. "Psalm 91 covered it wonderfully."

Linda's word of hope was *advance*. She wrote that God fulfilled this hope "One hundred percent. He is so good to keep growing me as I make myself available." Her words of fear were *revelation, opening up to God*. "He let me stay in a safe place; nothing scary happened. Joy!"