

## From Consumerism to Intimacy

On the table in front of you is a large sheet of paper with 16 post-it notes on it. → Along the **left** hand column, I'd like you to write the **names** of your favorite **things**—write one thing on each of the four post-it notes that comprise the column.

God answers prayer! I've experienced **God meeting my needs** when I called upon him. Have you? In the opening pages of chapter 2, I share the stories of **God providing food, money and health** to people in need. We know that our God is a miracle working God and that he supplies all of our needs according to his riches in glory.

**Our God is able!** He is able to meet our needs when we call upon him. **Take a minute and tell the person setting next to you about a time** that you prayed for help and God provided you with the help you asked for.

→ Now on the second column, write down the **four greatest accomplishments** God helped you achieve.

I'd like to spend some time meditating on Psalm 24 before we fill in the third column

Psalm 24:1-10 (HCSB) The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord; 2 for He laid its foundation on the seas and established it on the rivers. 3 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? 4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully. 5 He will receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah 7 Lift up your heads, you gates! Rise up, ancient doors! Then the King of glory will come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, you gates! Rise up, ancient doors! Then the King of glory will come in. 10 Who is He, this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah

Step one: Focus as you read, can you **hear God's still small voice**? What truths about God jump off the page as you read? → Write at least **four of them in the third column**, one per post-it note.

Step two: Now **experience** those words. What pictures, smells, memories or phrases can you use to experience these words?

Step three: Have an honest, **free-flowing conversation with God** prompted by the scripture. Thank Him for being who he is.

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Step four: Now **sit quietly** and listen to **God's encouraging voice** as he whispers back to you as you continue to reflect on the words you've highlighted.

Step five: Now, this evening before you go to sleep, take time to revisit these moments and reflect upon who God is.

Last week we talked about **defining moments** and how practicing **spiritual disciplines** helps us prepare for life's challenges. **Little did I know that soon after the publisher accepted my final manuscript for this book that I would be faced with a significant trial of my own.**

We were looking forward to celebrating God's grace with our church last **Thanksgiving Eve**. Susan went with me to a **routine follow-up appointment** to have the nurse examine my **incision** from removing a **benign lump** in my left breast and then we planned to **run an errand** or two and be back in plenty of time to **preach** and **give thanks** with God's people.

The **surgical nurse** examined **the incision**, **told us that everything looked OK**, but asked us if **we didn't mind waiting** for a minute because the **surgeon** wanted to see us. A few minutes later a surgeon came in, **looked** at the wound and then **sat down for a minute to talk**. He broke the news to us that **the tumor wasn't benign as the biopsy indicated, but that I had breast cancer** and he recommended a **simple mastectomy**—there was no urgency, he said, but the sooner the better.

This was already a **difficult season in my life**. Both of my **grown children were having one kind of struggle** or another and **I was hard pressed at work**. Our Doctor of Ministry **director** had **resigned**, leaving our department **short-handed**. The dean had asked me serve **as interim director, which I was doing from a distance**. Living 300 miles from the home office has its advantages most of the time, but I found it a challenge difficult to run an office **remotely**. During the typical month, I spent more **nights at the Hampton Inn** than I did in my own home and I knew I would be gone most of the month of **January**. On top of all of this, **I was serving as an Interim pastor and had weekend responsibilities on top of my "day job."**

**"How soon can you perform the surgery?"** I asked. After some **negotiation**, we scheduled it for the next **Monday** to give me the **maximum time to heal before tackling the busy travel days** ahead.

When the doctor left the room I made **three phone calls**. One was to my **parents**, another to the **Academic Dean** at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and the third was to one of **our deacons** to let him know I wouldn't be at Church that night and to ask for his prayer support. Between those **three calls and my wife** sitting in the room, within a matter of minutes **four people knew about my need and were praying for me**.

If it was you getting the **bad news**, who are the four people you want to know? → Write their names on the **far right hand column**, one name per post-it note.

Now look down at your **16 things**. → **Tear 2** of them off and discard them in the **middle** of the table. Keep the **fourteen things** that are the most valuable to you and **discard the other two**.

→ Now, turn to the person on your **right** and tear two of their notes off and put them in the middle of the table. → Now turn to the person to your **left** and do the same thing.

Everyone should have **10 things** left on their sheet.

For the **second time** in my life, I'd listen to a doctor give me a **cancer diagnosis**, and for the second time, I was **fortunate enough to have a cancer that was treatable**. The **Sunday** after my surgery, by the grace of God, I **stood in the pulpit** and preached my sermon. The **next week**, Susan assisted me so I could travel to a **faculty meeting** where I would present an important **motion** to our faculty. I had some time of **recuperation** over the **Christmas holidays** and then began **three straight weeks** of teaching including a **ten-day** stint in Colorado where I stayed near **Colorado Springs** and contracted **altitude sickness**, which led to a **blood disorder**. To treat my problem, the doctor had to do a **phlebotomy** to reduce my volume of blood, it took an **hour** for them to drain one pint because my blood was so **thick**.

**I hit my lowest point about a month later.**

The **night** of my surgery, I'd **fallen** on the way into my house and **hurt** my back. Since I wasn't **exerting** myself much physically, it slowly healed and was more of a **bother** instead of a real **problem**. After the doctor treated me for the blood disorder, I started to feel quite a bit **better**. I wasn't having much **pain** from the surgery anymore and the **back** was improving, so I decided to **catch up** on some things around the **house**. I missed a **step** on the **ladder** and landed on the **same hip** I'd fallen on **three** months before. I could tell I was in trouble. For the next week, my back got **progressively** worse until the **back spasms were** so bad that it was **excruciating** to get in or out of bed.

On the way into the **chiropractor's** office, Susan walked in front of me and I put **both hands** on her shoulders to transfer my **weight** to her. I was in **agony**. However, I finally was hurting enough that I turned to **someone** for help and I got it.

As she always is, Susan was so **helpful**. But **she couldn't always be there**. One afternoon Susan was at work, I was in the house by myself and felt so **helpless** doing the simplest things. I had pushed until I couldn't push anymore, I had nothing left. **That was when I had a spiritual breakthrough. I looked toward heaven and cried out, "I'm not superman. I can't do this on my own."**

→ Tear off **one** of your sheet and discard it into the middle of the table. → Now, turn to the person on your **right** and tear off one of their notes off and put them in the middle of the table.

→ Now turn to the person to your **left** and do the same thing.

Everyone should have **7 post-it notes** left.

Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego's King decided he was **worthy of worship** and made a proclamation to the people. They were to pay **homage** to his **golden image** whenever he wanted them to. The King seems a bit fanatical doesn't he? I suppose all leaders have their **egos**, but this guy seems to have a **real ego problem**. His request seems totally **unreasonable** to me, but his subjects didn't seem to **mind**, they all complied. Well, almost all, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-neg **didn't bow down**. The Chaldeans reported their **noncompliance** to the King and interpreted it as **defiance** against the King's authority.

So here we are. We've got **an out-of-control King** with an **ego that would flood** the Grand Canyon. We've got a group of **goody-two-shoes King's pets tattling** on three "dangerous renegades." And we've got **three Hebrews standing firm**.

Think for a moment, what do you think the **King** is going to do? Will he respond to the **offense** with a punishment that **matches the crime**, something like **send them to bed without their supper? Or will he blow a fuse?**

You're absolute right. **The King totally blew a fuse**. He questioned the Hebrew children, then made a **big mistake** when he expanded the battle between he and them to he and their God by saying "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

That's a line that **Nebuchadnezzar was a fool to cross**. He began to believe his own propaganda, and was ready to take on God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego didn't respond in kind; they didn't get angry, nor did they level threats against the King. With level heads, they said, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (3:17-18 )

We serve a **big God!** Amen? There are no **obstacles** too big for Him, He can handle our diseases, He can handle our finances, and He can handle our biggest problems. Am I right? That's not up for debate. **But there is an element of the unknown for most of us. Will we remain faithful to Him even if he doesn't intervene?** Or do we feel entitled? Can we say with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

They faced the **worst** kind of death--**death by fire** Satan doesn't like it when believers are faithful, and he will always turn up the heat! Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to make the fire **seven**-times hotter and has his most valiant men throw them in the fire (20-22).

The furnace was so hot, **his men perished**, but not the victims of his wrath, they were doing just fine.

In verse 25 the King learns of the men's fate from his high official, "He answered and said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!"

Nebuchadnezzar threw in **three men** who wouldn't compromise their faith, and **a fourth one joined them**. I believe it was Christ Himself. He made a pre Calvary appearance to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" with three **courageous** men!

Sometimes God **saves us from the fire**, and we are rescued from peril. Sometimes **He saves us through the fire**, and walks with us in the midst of our troubles, and sometimes **He saves us in spite of the fire** and greets us on the other side.

Back to your post-it notes. → Turn to the person on your **right** and tear off two of their notes and put them in the middle of the table. Now turn to the person to your **left** and do the same thing.

**Everyone should have 3 post-it notes left. These 3 notes represent what really matters.**

I'm grateful for a **second chance at cancer**. I didn't handle it well the first time. I spent more time **feeling sorry** for myself than just about anything else. This time was different. **I entered this trial with a stronger faith. The first time around, my faith flickered, but it didn't fail—this time, it burned strong.** What I'm most grateful for was **God's presence. Instead of blaming God, like I did the first time, I pressed into Him and celebrated his presence. I found Him in the midst of the fire.**

→ Tear off two of the three remaining squares and discard it in the middle of the table.

→ What remains is what is important.

Play the song: King of Glory by Third Day and read Psalm 24:1-10 (KJV)  
1 The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.

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Selah. 7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

→ “Prayer is more than looking for guidance, blessings, or things from God; it is entering into His presence and enjoying an intimate relationship with Him.”

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→ Will you begin practicing the spiritual disciplines that will help move you from consumerism to Intimacy with God? Things like heartfelt prayer, meditation, and practicing the presence of God?

→ **Then you can really know him!** Philippians 3:10 (KJV) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;