Discussion Guide for

*If God Disappears:*

*9 Faith Wreckers and What to Do about Them*

By David Sanford

and Elizabeth Honeycutt

---

**Prayer for Trust in Jesus**

O Christ Jesus,

when all is darkness

and we feel our weakness and helplessness,

give us the sense of Your presence,

Your love, and Your strength.

Help us to have perfect trust

in Your protecting love

and strengthening power,

so that nothing may frighten or worry us,

for, living close to You,

we shall see Your hand,

Your purpose, Your will through all things.

—*St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)*
Is it possible to lose your faith?
Not only is it possible, but millions of Christians have experientially lost their faith in God, the Church, and the Bible.

Losing your faith is not losing your salvation. Salvation is something you have. Faith is the expression of your relationship (of trust and obedience) to God. Think of it in the terms of marriage: You are married (saved), but your love relationship can be weak or strong.

So what “faith wreckers” cause individuals to experientially lose their faith? And what “faith builders” help individuals re-embrace the faith in a new, stronger way?

Based on a decade of research, here’s what author, editor, educator, lay pastor, and public speaker David Sanford found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Faith wreckers” that cause individuals to experientially lose their faith</th>
<th>“Faith builders” that help individuals re-embrace the faith in a new, stronger way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experiencing evil and suffering</td>
<td>1. Telling my story to a friend who knows God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Living recklessly as a rugged individualist</td>
<td>2. Cultivating relationships of humility, trust, and submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making our own rules, whatever the cost</td>
<td>3. Being courageous enough to make choices based on the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Believing that anger is justified when my vision of God is clouded</td>
<td>4. Experiencing the power of love with grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Neglecting my time with God and failing to see him in my life</td>
<td>5. Reclaiming God’s promises even if I have to wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Studying about God without heart devotion</td>
<td>6. Asking tough questions, wrestling with doubt, and embracing hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Experiencing the most crushing circumstances in life</td>
<td>7. Seeing God as he is and believing that he is working behind the scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Giving myself permission to do as I please—especially sexually—pushing reality (and God) out of sight</td>
<td>8. Rediscovering God’s ideal and allowing him to write a vibrant new script for my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Being wounded in or by the church</td>
<td>9. Awakening to our calling as God’s new prophets to the church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This *If God Disappears* discussion guide will take you through each of the faith wreckers and faith builders listed above. You can use this guide by yourself or ideally with a small group of friends. Grab a Bible and a pen, and let’s dive in.

**ONE: Unsolved Mysteries**

The greater is the darkness wherein the soul journeys and the more completely is it voided of its natural operations, the greater is its security. For, as the Prophet says, perdition comes to the soul from itself alone—that is, from its sensual and interior desires and operations; and good, says God, comes from Me alone. Wherefore, when it is thus hindered from following the things that lead it into evil, there will then come to it forthwith the blessings of union with God in its desires and faculties, which in that union He will make Divine and celestial. Hence, at the time of this darkness, if the soul considers the matter, it will see very clearly how little its desire and its faculties are being diverted to things that are useless and harmful; and how secure it is from vainglory and pride and presumption, vain and false rejoicing and many other things. It follows clearly, then, that, by walking in darkness, not only is the soul not lost, but it has even greatly gained, since it is here gaining the virtues.

—St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)

1. Have you ever experienced a “dark night of the soul?” Where was God during that time? What about your family and friends? How did they respond?

2. The author says that everyone experiences spiritual crises at one point or another. Why might this be true?

In her best-selling book, *In the Presence of My Enemies*, Gracia Burnham tells the story of almost losing her faith in God during the middle of a year-long kidnapping ordeal as a missionary in the Philippines. In her depression, she felt such anger and despair that she no longer believed God loved her. In the end, however, she realized she had a choice to make: to completely give in to her anger or trust in God’s love despite her circumstances (*In the Presence of My Enemies* by Gracia Burnham [Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2003], 141-143).
3. In the face of evil and suffering, do you find it difficult to still believe in God? Why or why not?

4. How can sharing your story with a godly friend help to restore your faith?

TWO: Before a Fall

What is the number one biggest temptation you are going to face this year? Next year? And for the rest of your life?

From Genesis to Revelation, the biggest temptation is this: for us to experientially lose our faith. How? When we stop believing and doing what God says.

Think about it. What happened to Mighty Judge Samson? What happened to Tall King Saul? What happened to Wise King Solomon? They all fell away. What about Good King Asa, Good King Jehoshaphat, Good King Joash, Good King Amaziah, Good King Uzziah, Good King Hezekiah, and Good King Josiah? They followed God for a number of years, and then every one turned away. They didn’t lose their final reward in heaven, but they lost God’s “Well done!” for staying true to him until the end (see the next chart).

What is the single greatest warning in the Gospels and Acts? In the New Testament letters from Romans to Jude? Even in the book of Revelation? Keep following the Lord—endure to the end—don’t fall away.

1. How does living in isolation lead to loss of faith?

2. Is submission difficult for you? If so, why? What keeps you from trusting and submitting to God or others in your life?

3. How does the Trinity model perfect submission and trust?
The Good Kings of Judah & Their Responses to Crises

The Old Testament only tells of one good king of Judah with a completely clean record (Jotham). Another good king didn’t follow God’s will, went to war, and died (Josiah). Everyone else rebelled and repented (David, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah) or rebelled but never repented (Solomon, Abijah, Joash, Amaziah, Asa, and Uzziah).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>David</th>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Philistine giant, Goliath, threatened to kill the Israelites. He also defied God, yet no Israelite would confront him.</td>
<td>David stood up for the Lord and for Israel by killing Goliath.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saul tried to kill David even though David had done nothing wrong and was the next anointed king.</td>
<td>David continually refused to take revenge or fight Saul. He even felt conscience-stricken for cutting off a piece of Saul’s robe when he had the chance to kill Saul.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wicked Nabal refused to provide for David and his men, although David had protected Nabal’s servants from harm.</td>
<td>David intended to kill Nabal and all the men in his household. But Nabal’s wife, Abigail, pleaded with David to not dirty his conscience with needless bloodshed. David praised God for sending Abigail to stop him from murdering Nabal. Eleven days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saul tried to kill David again.</td>
<td>David spared Saul’s life again.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Amalekites raided the land belonging to David and his men, burning their homes, and capturing their wives and children. Worse, David’s men blamed him and discussed stoning him.</td>
<td>David asked God if he should pursue the raiding party. When God said yes, David and his men killed the Amalekites and recovered everything and everyone that had been captured. David also shared the plunder, even sending some to the elders of Judah.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saul and his three sons (including David’s best friend, Jonathan) are killed in a battle with the Philistines.</td>
<td>David mourned for his friend and for Saul, “the Lord’s anointed.”</td>
<td>1 Samuel 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When Abner came to make an agreement with David over uniting the kingdom under David’s rule, Abner was murdered.</td>
<td>David cursed the murderers, cared for Abner’s body, and pleased all of the people because his deep mourning for Abner showed that he was innocent.</td>
<td>2 Samuel 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David lusted after Bathsheba and slept with her even though she was married to another man, Uriah. Bathsheba conceived and sent word to David.</td>
<td>David tried to cover his sin by calling Uriah away from war so that he would sleep with his wife.</td>
<td>2 Samuel 11:1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uriah was too honorable to enjoy himself while his</td>
<td>David sent a note with Uriah to the captain of the army, Joab. In the letter, David told</td>
<td>2 Samuel 11:7-27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
comrades were at war, so David’s sin wasn’t covered. Joab to put Uriah in a position that would cause him to die. Uriah did die and David took Bathsheba as his wife once the period of mourning ended.

The prophet Nathan rebuked David with a message from the Lord. David acknowledged his sin and repented, yet there was still a consequence to his sin, which Nathan foretold: his son with Bathsheba will die; his other son will sleep with David’s wives on David’s roof in broad daylight, and “the sword will never depart” from David’s house.

David’s young son grew very sick. David pleaded with God for his son’s life. When the boy died, David worshiped God.

David’s son Abmon raped his half-sister, Tamar. David was furious but apparently didn’t do anything about the rape (which led to the next crisis).

Tamar’s brother Absalom (David’s son), had Amnon murdered because he had disgraced Tamar. David wept and mourned for Amnon’s death and for Absalom, since he had to flee.

Absalom tried to take the kingdom away from his father, King David. David ran away from Absalom, even though God had given him the kingdom. David prayed and asked the priests of the Lord to help him by sending word of what Absalom was doing in Jerusalem. God used David’s servant, Hushai, to frustrate Absalom’s plans and inform David of danger.

David’s men killed Absalom, though David asked them to spare his son’s life. David deeply mourned Absalom’s death.

There was a three-year long famine in the land. “David sought the face of the LORD” (2 Samuel 21:1). He listened to and obeyed God and then God answered the prayer for rain.

David sinned by taking a census of all the fighting men in Israel and Judah. David was conscience-stricken and asked for God’s forgiveness.

God punished David’s census sin with a plague that lasted three days and killed 70,000 people. David grieved that the “sheep” were suffering because of his mistake. He obeyed the prophet of the Lord by building an altar to the Lord at the designated place. David rightfully paid for the selected threshing floor and sacrificial animals before offering sacrifices to the Lord. The plague then stopped.

When David was old and near death, his son Adonijah decided that he should be king after David so he announced himself. David fulfilled his promise by having Solomon crowned king over Israel and Judah that very day. Everyone rejoiced to see Solomon as king. David worshiped.
Solomon

Solomon came to hate life because he felt that everything—good and bad—was meaningless.

Solomon reflected on God, truth, wisdom, and eternity. He realized that no person can comprehend all that God does. Ultimately, he concluded that people should “…fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Solomon sinned by marrying many foreign women.

Solomon kept adding to his harem of foreign wives, in defiance to God’s command to not do so.

Solomon worshiped false gods.

Though God had appeared to Solomon twice, Solomon refused to repent and turn back to God wholeheartedly.

Abijah

Abijah claimed to observe “the requirements of the LORD our God” (2 Chronicles 13:11) and said that God was his leader (13:12). God gave him military victory, yet Abijah “committed all the sins his father had” (1 Kings 15:1-3); his heart was not fully devoted to God—maybe because of his fourteen wives.

Abijah grew in strength, married many women and died in kingly fashion, apparently without turning away from his sin.

Asa

Asa had a military conflict with Baasha king of Israel.

God struck Asa with seriously diseased feet.

Asa relied on Ben-Hadad king of Aram rather than relying on God. He put God’s prophet in prison and brutally oppressed some of the people.

Asa did not seek help from God; he only consulted his physicians. He never repented.

Jehoshaphat

Ahab, king of Israel, asked Jehoshaphat to join him in war, although God’s prophet Micaiah warned him that God did not support Ahab’s plans.

Jehoshaphat did not listen to God’s prophet Micaiah. Instead, he helped the wicked king of Israel, Ahab.

Jehoshaphat made an alliance with Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel.

The Lord wrecked the product of their alliance: a fleet of trading ships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joash</th>
<th>Joash’s advisor, the priest Jehoida, died.</th>
<th>Joash followed the officials of Judah into worshiping false gods. He even killed Jehoida’s son for speaking the truth.</th>
<th>2 Chronicles 24:17-22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The army of Aram attacked Joash.</td>
<td>Jehoida was wounded by the Arameans and then killed by his officials. He was not buried in the tombs of the kings.</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 24:23-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaziah</td>
<td>After defeating the Edomites in war, Amaziah worshiped their false gods.</td>
<td>Amaziah did not listen to God’s prophet’s rebuke.</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He went to battle with Jehoash king of Israel out of pride.</td>
<td>Amaziah was defeated and murdered. He never repented.</td>
<td>2 Kings 14:8-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azariah/Uzziah</td>
<td>Azariah burned incense to the Lord as though he were a priest. “Pride was his downfall” and made him angry at the priests, though he had been the one who was unfaithful to God.</td>
<td>God afflicted Azariah with leprosy and he died alone as a leper, excluded from the temple. There is no record of his repentance and he did not receive a kingly burial.</td>
<td>2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jotham</td>
<td>None recorded.</td>
<td>“Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 27:6).</td>
<td>Read about him in 2 Chronicles 27 &amp; 2 Kings 15:32-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezekiah</td>
<td>Hezekiah purified the temple and told Judah and Israel to return to the Lord. Some people who celebrated the Passover with Hezekiah were not ceremonially clean and became sick.</td>
<td>Hezekiah said “May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of his fathers—even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary” (2 Chronicles 30:18-19), so God healed the people.</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 30:1-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah and intended to make war on Jerusalem.</td>
<td>Hezekiah blocked off the water from the springs outside the city, so that Sennacherib would not be able to find water. He repaired the city wall, built towers, built another wall to protect the city, made weapons, appointed military officers, and encouraged them by saying that God was on their side.</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 32:1-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sennacherib attacked Judah. He sent messengers to threaten Hezekiah and the people in Jerusalem. The messengers blasphemed the Lord.</td>
<td>Hezekiah prayed and trusted God. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah to not fear because Sennacherib would be killed.</td>
<td>2 Kings 18:13-19:8; 2 Chronicles 32:9-16; Isaiah 36:1-37:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah which blasphemed</td>
<td>Hezekiah spread the letter out before the Lord and prayed for deliverance. God sent</td>
<td>2 Kings 19:9-37; 2 Chronicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>the Lord and threatened Jerusalem once again.</strong></td>
<td>word to Hezekiah through Isaiah that his prayers would be answered by Sennacherib’s fall. God rescued Jerusalem by putting to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp, causing them to withdraw from Judah.</td>
<td>32:17-23; Isaiah 37:9-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hezekiah became ill and was close to death. Isaiah gave him a message from God that he would soon die because of the pride in his heart.</strong></td>
<td>He prayed and reminded God of his faithful life. He also wept bitterly. God said that he heard Hezekiah’s prayer and saw his tears. He added fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life and said that he would defend Jerusalem. God confirmed his word with a miraculous sign.</td>
<td>2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24; Isaiah 38:1-22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>God tested Hezekiah when envoys from Babylon came to question him. Hezekiah showed them everything in the kingdom so Isaiah told Hezekiah that Babylon would plunder Jerusalem and take his relatives to be eunuchs in the Babylonian king’s palace.</strong></td>
<td>Hezekiah thought that the message was good since the destruction would not happen during his lifetime.</td>
<td>2 Kings 20:12-19; 2 Chronicles 32:31; Isaiah 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Josiah**

| **When the book of the Law was found, Josiah realized that he and the people had not been obeying the Lord.** | He humbled himself and the Lord heard his prayer. Josiah renewed the covenant with the people and destroyed the high places, Asherah poles, and anything and anyone that was used to worship false gods (according to the prophecy in 1 Kings 13:1-2). For the first time since Samuel was judge, the Passover was properly celebrated. | 2 Kings 22:1-23:27; 2 Chronicles 34:14-35:19 |
| **Though Josiah turned to the LORD completely, it was not enough to excuse Judah’s sins. God still planned to disown Judah (like Israel), but not until Josiah’s death. The king of Egypt, Pharaoh Neco, was sent by God to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates. He warned Josiah to not fight since God was with him and would “destroy” Josiah if he fought.** | Josiah did fight Pharaoh Neco and was killed in battle. | 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:15-25 |
THREE: *Anything Goes*

You may be thinking, “I’ve believed in ‘God’ all of my life. I ‘pray’ all the time. Isn’t that enough?”

According to the Bible, believing in “God” and “praying” isn’t enough.

You may be thinking, “I can’t accept the idea that I have to put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ. What the Bible says sounds too narrow, too restrictive. I can’t accept that. My heart tells me there have to be many ways to get right with God.”

Yet the more we read the words of Jesus, the more we see his message is clearly “the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes.”

Only the good news of Jesus Christ fulfills our greatest desires
to achieve significance,
to love, and
to be loved.

Only his good news meets our greatest relational needs
to more fully know others,
to accept others,
to forgive others,
to love others, and
to enrich our families.

Only his good news takes away our greatest fears
of an uncertain future,
of the call of eternity,
of loneliness,
of failure,
of guilt, and
of shame.

It’s an incredible feeling to know you no longer have any reason to feel ashamed. It’s the Fall reversed.

1. Why is it that we so apt to choose our own will, way, and timing rather than God’s? Why is following our own rules a “faith wrecker”?

2. Is truth the standard against which all things should be measured? If so, are there ever times when rules should be broken? Give an example.

3. Why does it take courage to follow God’s rules? In what ways can we build that courage?
FOUR: Out of Control

“The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Compare the fruit of the Spirit with the results of following “the desires of your sinful nature”: “sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these” (Galatians 5:19-21).

1. Have you ever been so angry that your vision of God became clouded?

2. In what ways do the virtues of faith, hope, and love dispel anger and hatred?

3. Why is it impossible for anger and grace to exist together?

“O gracious and holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you, and a life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

—Benedict of Nursia (480-547)

4. How does grace shine a light on God’s true identity?
FIVE: Slipping Away

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11 for the introduction to Nehemiah’s story. In the opening paragraphs of Nehemiah’s story, we come upon two important discoveries.

The first discovery is this: When Nehemiah heard the heartbreaking news about the Jewish people in Jerusalem, he personalized five ancient practices that were true in Abraham’s day, and that were true in Jesus’ own life and experience, but that seem strange to many of us today.

The five ancient practices that Nehemiah did repeatedly, day and night, over the course of four months were to:

(1) Sit down—which is literal and physical, yes, but something deeper is going on in Nehemiah’s heart.
(2) Weep—which is a physical response to emotional pain.
(3) Mourn—which is an emotional and spiritual response to grief.
(4) Fast—which is a physical act of worship in times of distress, meaning Nehemiah is going without food or water for a specific time period for the purpose of investing more concentrated time in the next ancient practice.
(5) Pray—which is a spiritual conversation with the God of the universe, arising from the soul, sometimes expressed out loud, but often communicated quietly from the heart.

In his prayers, Nehemiah reveals his theology—his core beliefs about God. After all, the only thing Nehemiah had to cling to was the character of God. From his prayers, we discover that Nehemiah believed:

(1) God is the same yesterday, today, and forever—that what the Scriptures tell us about God in the past is just as true now as then.
(2) God is completely holy and just.
(3) God is compassionate, merciful, and forgiving.
(4) God is infinitely powerful and sovereign over all creation.

1. Why is spending time with God so important? In what ways do you connect with him best?

2. Do you have preconceived ideas about how God should show up in your life? Are these based on biblical truths or your own desires?

3. When was the last time you felt God’s presence, his reality? What sparked that experience? Were you surprised?
4. Which of God’s promises are most relevant to your life right now? Which have you seen fulfilled and which ones are you still waiting on?

**SIX: Lost in Thought**

Read what is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus taught his believers to pray “rescue us from the evil one.”

Then read Ephesians 6:10-18. Our faith in God is compared to a soldier’s shield, protecting us from Satan’s “fiery arrows” which are bent on our destruction.

In addition to praying for deliverance from Satan and his conspiracies to hurt us, we can ask God to strengthen our faith in him.

When a father came to Jesus asking for healing for his demon possessed son, he came with doubts about Jesus’ ability to heal. When Jesus questioned him on his lack of faith, the man exclaimed “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!” Jesus cast out the demon and the boy was healed (you can read the whole story in Mark 9:14-29).

In the same way, we can confess our struggles to believe and ask God to help us overcome our unbelief.

1. If you were honest, are there parts of your faith that are more about “head knowledge” than “heart knowledge?”

2. Why does knowledge often fail during a spiritual crisis?

3. The author says that if the study of God’s Word is separated from God himself, it can actually tear our faith down. Why is this?

4. Sometimes the only answer to spiritual questions can only be found by walking back to God again, probably on a different route than you’ve taken before. What might that route be for you?
SEVEN: Why Me?

Only after Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, and long after Joseph’s death, did people come to think of Jesus Christ as “the son of the virgin Mary.” For more than thirty years Jesus was commonly referred to as “Jesus, the son of Joseph.” The assumption was obvious and the social stigma great.

In all probability, for years, only Mary’s elderly relatives Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Mary and Joseph themselves, knew (beyond question) that Joseph wasn’t Jesus’ real father. After all, no one else had received a divine revelation announcing that Mary would give birth while still a virgin. Not surprisingly, many chose to believe the rumors whispered about Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Then again, can you really blame them?

Joseph probably never tried to defend his reputation. Instead, he quietly rested on what he knew deep down inside to be true about the quality of his character as a man. No amount of gossip, insinuation, and accusation could shake his integrity as an upright, righteous, and just man.

To his credit, Joseph believed what the Lord revealed to him in a series of dreams—no matter how incredible those revelations were. Each time, Joseph quickly translated his belief into action—at great personal cost.

Consider what Joseph lost:

First, he lost his public reputation as a godly, upright man.
Second, he lost his security and place in society.
Third, he lost his extended family relationships.
Fourth, he lost his friends and neighbors.
Fifth, he lost his city, province, and nation.
Sixth, he lost his house and home.
Seventh, he lost his business.

Imagine if you lost all that and more. What would you think of God? How would you sleep? Would life even be worth living anymore?

Not once, however, does Scripture record that Joseph hesitated to instantly follow God’s leading. It’s staggering to comprehend what that must have meant to Joseph. How is it even possible?

I think the secret is that Joseph took to heart the reality of Isaiah 55:9, which says that just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so the Lord’s ways and thoughts are higher than our thoughts. In other words, from an earthly, human perspective, we can’t really make sense of this life.

1. If you were to lose everything but God, would he be enough?

2. What preconceived ideas of God might you have to discard in order to see him as he really is?
3. Do you believe that God can truly bring good out of crushing circumstances?

4. How have you seen God work in your past? In what ways does this give you hope for the future and help you to deal with your present realities?

EIGHT: Making Exceptions

Our natural bent against self-control—if it is not mastered—inevitably hurts our community, our family, and our friends. Ultimately, it hurts us. Even purely out of self-interest, you and I would do well to decide in our hearts that we want God’s help to be self-controlled.

If you and I lack self-control, who’s in control of our thoughts, speech, and actions? One option is we’re giving in to the desires of the nature we were born with. That nature’s passions and desires are anything but self-controlled.

Another option is we may be manipulated or controlled by the devil. Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel that the thief (Satan) comes only to steal, to kill, and to destroy. If we let Satan control us, he will rob us of everything that’s good in our lives. He will tempt us to take risky, dangerous, physically destructive, or suicidal actions that could kill us.

1. Have you ever tried to deny reality by sweeping sin under the rug? What was the result?

2. Have you prewritten a script for dealing with sin in your life and the life of your family?

3. Have you experienced the story of the Prodigal Son in your own life? Which role did you play?

4. How is the script you’re writing for your life different from the one that God wants to write?
NINE: Wounded Hope

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus talks about faith. He talked about:

- no faith
- little faith
- small faith
- growing faith
- more faith
- much faith

It quickly becomes apparent, as we read what Jesus says, that the Lord wants us to be proactive in growing in our faith.

First Corinthians 16:13-14 says, “Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.”

The New Testament contains dozens of similar exhortations to keep the faith or strengthen our faith.

As you read the Bible, look for the theme of “keeping the faith.” Consider why the biblical writers thought it was important enough to mention so many times—and what their words mean for your life today.

1. Have you ever had a bad church experience? How did it affect your faith?

2. Why do you think there are so many problems and pain within the church today?

3. Do you know any modern-day “prophets”? What would it take for you to be one of them?

4. What words might God be calling you to share with his church today?

Copyright © 2008 Sanford Communications, Inc. and Tyndale House Publishers.