



AMY SEIFFERT

STARVED

BIBLE STUDY

A
SIX-WEEK
GUIDED
JOURNEY

STARVED BIBLE STUDY



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Starved Bible Study: A Six-Week Guided Journey

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A NOTE TO THE LEADER



LISTEN UP, MY DEAR FRIEND.

You can do this.

You don't have to have a theology degree, or the perfect marriage, or children who behave like cherubs, or any part of your life totally figured out to do this. Trust me when I tell you that I have none of those things.

You don't have to be old and wise.

You don't have to be hip and swag.

You can be you, and you can lead this thing.

Why?

Because the Holy Spirit lives in you.

And because the disciples were uneducated fishermen.

Those two reasons alone should breathe life into any insecurities about leading this Bible study. You've been called by God and equipped with His Spirit. That, my friend, is all you need.

This group of fellow travelers is starved to see other humans trusting God and taking steps of faith. And I promise, you will be nourished by leading. Stay humble, trust Jesus, and watch as He uses your leading to nourish others, just as He will nourish you.

Over the years, I have mentored dozens of women in college (and older) on how to lead a Bible study or a spiritual group discussion. I'd love to share a few of my best tips with you as you begin.

SNACKS

Ask someone each week to bring some kind of snack. Store bought or home-made, sweet or salty, it doesn't matter. Something happens when food is

involved—something good. It becomes a fellowship and a way to break the ice of coming together. Yes, the snacks are essential.

PRAYER

After about fifteen minutes of informal hang-out with your chips and guacamole, gather everyone up and start by praying for your time. Besides being a great cue to let everyone know you're about to begin, it's also a chance to invite the Lord to work in and through your time together.

THE "THREE THEN ME" RULE

Let the group know you are going to follow the "Three Then Me" rule for discussion. This is where group members let three other people share before they share again. It helps us make space for all kinds of people in the group. This way, no one dominates. Feel free to state this each week to remind the talkers in the group of the format you want to follow.

QUESTIONS

This is a six-week study. Each week you meet, you'll cover one topic. You could walk through each day and ask a variety of questions to get the group talking. All you really have to do is ask good questions here. You can pull some from the study or ask the Lord to lead you in coming up with some of your own. As you personally answer, lead with humility and vulnerability. You don't need to fix or solve anyone. Listening and empathy are two of the biggest parts of leadership.

A few questions to get you started:

- What spoke to you or what did you underline on this day?
- What did you discover about God's character on this day?
- What did you discover about yourself on this day?
- Did you do the spiritual practices at the end? How were those for your relationship with God?

DON'T BE AFRAID OF SILENCE

Don't feel the need to fill the space. Silence is often a space to let the internal processors find their words. While you don't want to linger so long that it becomes distracting, don't be afraid to sit in the silence for a while to let those have it who need it.

PRAYER . . . AGAIN

Close your group in prayer. Here are a few prayer tips to consider for this:

- Pray to God. Don't pray with mini-sermons for someone else. (For example, don't pray, "Dear God, please help Amy to see how wrong she is, and that she needs to call her sister right away, and she needs to repent, and she needs to. . . .")
- Pray about real heart change for yourself and your group. Try to stick to praying about the content of the week. That will keep the focus of your prayers on the material you discussed.
- Let people know they don't have to pray at all. This isn't a requirement; it's an invitation. So, if someone doesn't feel comfortable, they can pray quietly or listen as someone else prays.

Underlined heavily in my Bible is this verse from a beloved psalm: "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me; your faithfulness, LORD, is everlasting; do not abandon the works of Your hands" (Psalm 138:8, NASB).

You are the work of His hands, and He will not abandon you. He will accomplish what concerns you! And this is what is in front of you.

I am cheering you on, and I believe that God will equip you to do this good work.

Have fun, and be blessed!

Amy



INTRODUCTION

Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best, fill yourself with only the finest.

ISAIAH 55:2, MSG

DEAR FRIEND,

I'm willing to bet the farm you feel it.

Because if you're anything like me—*human*—then you know what I'm talking about.

The nagging spiritual hunger pangs in your heart.

The exhaustion, anxiety, and dissatisfaction that fill your plate without filling your stomach.

The attempt to nourish yourself with anything that you think will satiate.

The starvation deep in your soul.

The menu we keep choosing from to satisfy our hunger promises substance, but in reality, it eventually falls flat. Much like the way a soufflé behaves—coming out hot, pretty, and puffed up before quickly lying back down in the pan as if it's nap time—what we're consuming appears delightful on the outside but is nothing more than fluff once we get down to it. So, we keep trying new recipes, keep changing ingredients, keep attempting new meals that we think will finally cure our hunger. Podcasts, social media, perfectionism, the opinions of others, cute shoes, overworking—these all hold some morsel of nutrition, sure, but none that will last.

Friend, we may be eating, but still, we are starving.

I know this feeling deep in my bones.

I know it after a few minutes turns into hours on my phone, and I feel worse, not better.

I know it after I work harder than I ever have to achieve, only to be left wondering what's next at the end of the day.



I know it when I believe there is joy to be found in consumerism, but it ultimately consumes me instead.

I know it when anxiety rises as I try to shoulder the weight of the world, only to realize my human shoulders can't take it.

I know what starvation is because I've felt it too.

And I wrote the book *Starved* because I was tired of feeling it. I kept running to the same things for satisfaction, but they only got me halfway there. And some of them? They actually plucked me up and placed me farther away from nourishment than where I began. They sold me the lie that they would bring me to a banquet table, but they left me outside looking for scraps. So, I simply decided: No more!

No more hunger.

No more searching.

No more trying to feed myself with the things that won't satisfy.

No more starvation.

It's time to feast on the things that will nourish. It's time to feast on the things of God.

I wrote this study as a companion to *Starved*. It's designed to help you go deeper in your study of Scripture. It's here to help you sweep out your spiritual pantry and replace those old ingredients with new spiritual practices and principles that will nourish you in real, lasting ways. Because we're only diving in for six weeks together here, this study will cover six of the topics touched on in *Starved*. I wish we had more time to go over each and every single one in detail together, but for now, we'll just agree to start here.

Six topics, six truths, six practices, six principles, six weeks of walking out of starvation and into satisfaction.

I do hope you'll read *Starved* as a companion to this study, either with a small group or on your own. Because in doing so, I believe you will find yourself eating good food and living abundantly. I believe you'll begin to truly live because your food is truly sustaining.

I believe it will help you finally begin to feast.

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This study you're holding was created with you in mind. You want God. You want to feel whole. You want to engage in practices that bring satisfaction, nourishment, and peace. You want to leave behind sluggish spirituality, and you want to "fill yourself with only the finest," according to what is good to God. You want someone to tell you that God is good and can truly, deeply satisfy you.

But fair warning, friend. The thing about enjoying nourishment in Christ is that a few changes have to be made to get there. We need to examine what we believe. We need to exchange the lies for the truth. We need to gently engage in practices that spur our body, soul, and mind to actually change.

This study invites you to join me in practicing, not perfecting. I want to welcome you to the table, invite you to sit down with me and give thanks, and begin the good and holy work of seeking spiritual nourishment from Jesus.

Jesus said that if anyone was thirsty or hungry, they could come to Him. That invitation is for us. We can come together; we don't have to go alone. He loves when we grab one another and run together to His beautiful banquet table. So friend, let's agree to walk forward to take our seat at His table—the one paid for with His love. Let's agree to leave behind what's starving us in order to fill our hearts with what will satisfy: Jesus.

Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.

Buy without money—everything's free!

Why do you spend your money on junk food,
your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?

Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,
fill yourself with only the finest.

Pay attention, come close now,

listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.

I'm making a lasting covenant commitment with you,

the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.

ISAIAH 55:1-4, MSG

Coming, listening, and eating what is good with you, *Amy*



STARVED FOR CONNECTION

Questions for Discussion

THE PROBLEM

What is starving us in our quest for connection?

THE PROMISE

What Scriptures have been feeding your soul lately?

THE PRACTICE

What spiritual practices can satiate you when your soul is feeling starved for connection?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Choose a question and take a moment to journal your response.

- Have you ever paid attention to how much time you spend on your phone? If so, what did you discover?
- What do you believe about your phone? Write as many positive and negative statements as you can.
- What is true about God's character? How does this help you when it comes to true connection?



STARVED FOR CONNECTION

To get the most out of this week's study, read chapter 1 of *Starved*.

CHOCOLATE FOR BROCCOLI

No eggs.

Not again. Why do I always run out of eggs when I need to bake something? And why am I mid-recipe with flour, baking powder, and vanilla all positioned in the bowl, ready to be whipped up into something fabulous when I realize this? Why didn't I look before I started this cooking journey?

Please tell me this happens to you, too.

And then of course, the Internet search begins: "What are egg substitutions?"

Applesauce? I'm out.

Flax? Out.

Chia? Nope.

Arrowroot? No dice.

Banana? YES.

SWEET! Now we're cooking . . . or baking.

The substitution struggle is real. That cookie recipe wasn't going to work if I didn't have some kind of binding and rising agent. It was going to be flat, underwhelming, and weird. I couldn't just leave it out. I needed to replace the missing ingredient with something just as good—brownie points if it was even better.

The same is true when ingredients are missing from our spiritual diets, friend. When what we're using isn't working or we don't have what we need in our pantry, we've got to find a replacement.

Something good. Something better. Something that will satisfy.

In this first week of our study together, we are taking a good look at the small rectangular devices in our pockets. And yes, I will be the first to admit I have a phone addiction. I'd venture to say you might, as well.

The numbers don't lie, friends.

- 71 percent check their phone right after waking up.
- 74 percent feel nervous if they leave their phone at home.
- 35 percent look at (or use) their phone while driving.
- 47 percent are addicted to their phone, by their own admission.
- 53 percent say they have never gone more than a full day without their phone.
- 48 percent feel panicky when their battery is low.
- 62 percent have their phone by their bed at night.
- 45 percent consider their phone their most valuable possession.¹

Now let's be honest. At first glance, this feels like an unfair trade. Trading out our phones for silence feels like trading chocolate for broccoli.

And well, it kind of is, but hear me out. Broccoli, over time, is nourishing for a million reasons. Drizzled with olive oil, sprinkled with kosher salt, and roasted at 425 degrees for 30 minutes? Then, it's not just nourishing, it's good. But chocolate over time? Sadly, it's not so nourishing. Sure, it gives a quick sugar high, a fix of energy, and a delicious taste. But is it chock-full of vitamins? Can it help detoxify your body? Is it an anti-inflammatory? Nope. So even though it's good, over time, it won't satisfy. If we ate chocolate all day every day? Well, we would starve.

The same is true when it comes to our souls. What we consume, we become. If we take in photo after photo of beautiful people in beautiful houses with picture-perfect lives? We may try to become picture perfect, a defeating and unrealistic endeavor we'll never achieve. If we consume copious amounts of articles or podcasts on fashion or scientific developments or the latest celebrity scandals? We'll think about these things in copious amounts. We will be shaped and formed by the information we take in, for better or for worse. If we live

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and die by the text messages, calendars, notifications, and apps on our phones? We'll become enslaved to the devices in our hands.

That's why we've got to make a trade. Chocolate for broccoli, our phones for our sanity.

I know this one is hard. Because phones are tricky. A phone in and of itself is not bad. We can communicate, we can work, we can create, we can encourage, we can laugh, we can play, we can connect, we can share—all with our phones. But at the same time, our phones can steal our agency from us by telling us what to think about, causing anxiety with every news source and notification we get. They can push us to comparison, jealousy, fear, envy, worry, insecurity, and more. If we're not careful, that little device meant for connection can disconnect us from everything and everyone that might actually satisfy us. Yes, we were created for connection, and our phones—the very advertisement of connection—are disconnecting our souls.

They're starving us from it.

So how do we change our steady diet? How do we overcome what might be a downright addiction to our phones? By creating space to acknowledge what's starving us and turning our hearts to the One who can nourish us.

That's what I hope we'll begin to do together over the course of this week's study. As we examine the way our habits with our phones may be impacting our spiritual diets, my prayer is that our hearts will be open to confess what we've been trying to find in that device. That we'll be spurred on to make a trade, giving up what's starving us in favor of what will truly, deeply nourish us.

PUT DOWN THE PHONE, FRIEND

When it comes to your phone (or any screen time), what do you believe it will do for you?

In what ways does your phone fail to deliver what you're looking for?

For me, I believe my phone will help me get work done. I believe my phone will validate me when I see the likes on my social media page. I believe my phone will show me great new recipes and amazing new fashion. I believe it will help me communicate with all my friends.

When I look at that list, I realize I'm asking a lot of my phone.

Does it deliver? In the short run, yes. I do get a lot of work done on my phone. I do find some validation on social media. I am able to connect with my people, both those close by and those across long distances.

But maybe, if I dig just a layer deeper, there's more to it than that. Because if that was all it was, would I really be starving for more each night I plugged that device in to charge?

I wonder if this question rings as true for you as it does for me: *Do I believe my phone will take care of me?*

It's a question worth asking. Why is that little device so often our everything? What do I believe about God or myself when it comes to my phone? What am I

avoiding in myself with each swipe to unlock that precious device? Do I believe my phone will take care of me?

My answer to this question is convicting. I have found it helpful to do two things when it comes to dealing with this in my own life: confess my struggle to believe that God will take care of me, and ask God to help me believe He will take care of me. Along with that simple prayer, I have learned to substitute my phone with true connection—connection to God, to myself, and to those in front of me.

The practice of silence has become one of the ways I continue to recover true connection. It gives me the space to confess my struggles—to lay out on the table what is starving me from the goodness of connection with God. It allows me to sit in the belief that God will take care of me. That He is big enough to take care of me no matter what. That He wants to connect with me.

If I am quiet.

If I am lonely.

If I am afraid.

If I am bitter.

If I am weak.

If I stop checking things off the list.

If I take time off.

If I stop pushing and proving, answering emails, and folding clothes.

If I stop being so manicured.

If I am anxious.

If I am unproductive.

In the silence, I confess that I haven't always believed this is true of God. That's what's at the root of my phone addiction. That's what's causing my starvation.

And maybe, friend, the same is true for you.

So, the question we want to answer this week is this: *Will God take care of me?*

We need to start by simply discovering more about who God is. Who does God say He is? Who does He declare Himself to be?

One of the foundational moments where God tells us who He is comes from the second book of the Bible. Very early on, God wants to set the record straight. So, before God's people received His commands or rules for living well, He told them who He was.

Before they received the Ten Commandments, they received the character of God. And because of who He is, we can trust that God's way—about to be etched in stone—is good for us. Mind you, this was the second time God gave the Ten Commandments—what grace after their sin (see Exodus 32:1-20).

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." EXODUS 34:6, NIV

This beautiful description of God is what the women and men of old come back to over and over throughout the Bible. They call upon God's character and come back to this declaration from God about Himself. Why? Well, because that's where they find real nourishment. It's where they can begin to connect with who God really is.

Read Exodus 34:1-14. Where was Moses at this time?

According to verse 5, what was the Lord about to proclaim?

God is proclaiming His name. Make a list of the five attributes God uses to describe Himself in Exodus 34:6.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Today we will look at the first attribute of God listed in this passage. **Circle that first word.**

Here's a confession for you: I strongly dislike math and equations. I'm more of a word girl. That's why I've found this one equation to be extremely helpful—because it has words, not numbers.

Empathy + Action = Compassion

Empathy is the idea of putting ourselves in another's shoes and feeling what they're feeling. And, as the equation demonstrates, it's when we put that empathy into action that compassion is born. Compassion starts walking in those shoes and does something to address the issue.

I love how *Greater Good* magazine—where they turn scientific research into stories, tips, and tools for a more compassionate society—puts it:

While cynics may dismiss compassion as touchy-feely or irrational, scientists have started to map the biological basis of compassion. . . . This research has shown that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete the “bonding hormone” oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and feelings of pleasure light up, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people.¹

This is the God we serve! A God who has feelings of empathy, caregiving, and pleasure that light up inside of Him for us. A God who longs to bond with us. A God who wants to nurture and care for us as His children. A God who leads with compassion.

If God is compassionate, that means Jesus is too. Let's check the math on this.

Read these verses below. As you do, underline the word compassion. Then circle the way you see Jesus showing compassion in action.

Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

MATTHEW 20:34, NASB

When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her and said to her, “Do not go on weeping.”

LUKE 7:13, NASB

Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.”

MATTHEW 15:32, NASB

When He came ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

MATTHEW 14:14, NASB

When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

MARK 6:34, NASB

The ultimate act of compassion was the Cross. It was the entire purpose of Jesus' coming. *Compassion carried Christ to the Cross.* He saw our sinful and separated situation from our Creator; He saw us starving. So He literally put on human skin (empathy) to live among us and endure the Cross (action). Why? So that God's wrath was justly poured out upon our sin but unjustly and graciously poured out on His innocent Son.

Our God is a compassionate God.

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We can trust Him to care for us. To provide for us. To reassure us that we can stand securely. We can trust that God sees us and is moving toward us. That He will not leave us alone but will be with us in our silence.

We can trust that when we feel rejected, He will not reject us. That when we feel abandoned, He will not abandon us. That when we feel unloved, He will love us. That when we put our phone down, He will pick us up.

We can trust that God sees us and is moving toward us. That He will not leave us alone but will be with us in our silence.

Today, how do you need our compassionate God to take care of you? Is it regarding your identity, your reputation, your finances, your anxiety, or your fears? List the areas you struggle to believe God is compassionately caring for you.

Confess these struggles to the Lord and ask for His compassion to be evident in your life.

THE PRACTICE OF CONNECTION

One of the best things we can do to find nourishment is to connect with the compassionate God we serve. To help us do this, we will end each day this week with a few minutes of silence. We will start with five minutes today, adding one minute each day to end with nine full minutes of silence by the end of the week.

In order to prepare for this time of silence, put your phone away. If it helps to set an alarm for five minutes, go ahead and get that ready. Turn off any music, television, noise, or screens. Maybe go outside if you can. If you have not practiced being quiet very often, the first few minutes may be very difficult as your mind wanders. You may feel anxious. You may think of every kind of

thing you need to be doing. You may be uncomfortable. If that happens to you, don't worry! You are not a failure in this. This is quite normal!

Just breathe. Take in your surroundings. Using your senses, notice nature—the sights of trees or flowers, sounds of birds or animals, feelings of grass or snow. Trust God that your to-do list will still be there. Trust God that He will take care of you if you rest. Trust God to run your world. Trust God to be God. Trust God to care for you. Trust God to connect with you in these moments of silence and beyond.

If it helps, here is a breath prayer you can use during your five minutes. Inhale for four counts (one word for each count). Exhale for five counts (one word for each count).

Inhale: God, you are compassionate.

Exhale: I am in Your care.

BONUS: Record how this first moment of silence was for you. What was your practice of silence like? As Aundi Kolber says, pay “compassionate attention” to yourself.² Your feelings are neither good nor bad; they are messengers telling you something. Be kind to them and to yourself, as God is compassionate to you.

THE THRONE OF WHAT?

Yesterday we looked at God's compassionate heart for us. He is a God who sees us, slips on our shoes, and strides toward us with empathy and action. Who went to the greatest lengths possible to take care of us by repairing our souls with His blood. Who wants to find us in our starvation and nourish us with His presence.

Today, let's look at the second attribute God declares about Himself from His monumental moment with Moses on the mountain. Because the more we understand God's character, the more we'll find ourselves eager to disconnect from what isn't feeding us in order to connect with the One who is. The more we'll be able to put down our phones and trust God to take care of us when we do.

Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?

MATTHEW 6:26, NLT

Look up Exodus 34:6 and write it below.

Underline the word *gracious* in the verse.

In your own words, what does it mean to be gracious?

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

HEBREWS 4:16, NIV

One of my favorite definitions of grace is “getting what you don’t deserve.” That means grace begins with the borrowed breath in my lungs and keeps going with the food in my fridge, the friends in my life, the forgiveness I receive from Christ. God is a generous God, giving us what we don’t deserve all of the time. And when we believe that’s true, we can let our defenses down a bit to connect with

God’s grace in our lives.

So, let’s explore grace a little more.

Read Hebrews 4:16.

What is God’s throne called?

How can we approach God’s throne?

What will we find at God’s throne?

When can we come to God’s throne?

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Gift means grace, and grace means gift. They are synonymous. So when God says we can boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence, we can picture approaching a throne room full of gifts coming from a generous King.

Circle the words *grace* and *gift* in the verses below.

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9, NIV

God loves giving good gifts to His children! And one of the best gifts we can find in Him? Connection to our good, gracious Father.

One year my youngest son became completely obsessed with Halloween (as all good second graders do). Once October hit, he was constantly asking questions about when Halloween festivities would start:

“When can we go pick out our pumpkins?”

“When can we carve them?”

“When will we pick out Halloween candy?”

“What will I be for Halloween?”

“When will the costume be ready?”

As a human, I feel “meh” about this holiday. But as his momma, I started to get excited with him. Because while I don’t love Halloween, I do love *him*. And because of that love, I wanted to connect with my son over something he loved. So, I started to think, “How can I give him something fun this season? How can I join him in his love for Halloween?”

One evening on the drive home from yet another of his older brother’s soccer games, I realized how close we were to the pumpkin farm. I remembered how many times he had asked me in the past three weeks when we could go get our pumpkins and how often I said, “I’m not sure, buddy. We have a lot going on.”

I veered left even though my heart wanted to go right home. Because I love

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my son, and I love to give good gifts to him. As we pulled up to the farm, his face was worth the price of admission. “Are we getting pumpkins now?! Oh thank you, Momma! Thank you! I can’t believe today is the day!” My heart swelled. We both smiled the whole time as he inspected many pumpkins and chose the best one. He thanked me the whole way home.

Gift-giving is great fun. And the biggest gift? The connection because of it.

Recall a recent time when your Heavenly Father gave you a gift you didn’t expect or deserve—a gift of grace. What gift did God give you? A message from a friend? A new job? A surprise coffee from a coworker?

Write out what it felt like to receive that gift.

If you can’t think of a gift you’ve received like this, write a prayer asking for a gift from His throne.

Staying true to God’s declaration of Himself as a gracious God, Jesus Himself embodies grace.

Read John 1:14-17.

What do you find out about grace from this passage regarding Jesus?

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

If we are going to replace our phones with true connection, what we believe about what that phone will do for us has to be addressed first. Can that phone actually take care of me? Can it provide for me? Or is it better to put my trust in a gracious God who promises to give me more than I can ask for or imagine?

Maybe this seems like a sacrilegious question, but I'm going to ask it nonetheless: *How is God better than your phone?*

If He really is better, what is it that keeps us starving for real connection behind that screen? Why do we keep picking it up, over and over? What is it about our phones that keeps us coming back for more?

Take a minute and journal your thoughts below.

Remember, real nourishment flows from the throne of God. It's there in every gracious gift He gives us. It's there in every aspect of His generous character. If we don't make space to connect with God there, we'll miss it.

And friend, I don't want you to miss it!

THE PRACTICE OF CONNECTION

We ended yesterday with five minutes of silence, and today we will set aside six minutes.

Like yesterday, let's clear everything out of sight for six minutes of silence to connect with God. Turn off any music, television, noise, or screens. Maybe go outside if you can. Remember, those first few minutes may seem as if thought monkeys are coming to take over your brain. Just breathe through them. This is normal. Everything else that comes to mind will be waiting for you when you are done.

AMY SEIFFERT

Here is a breath prayer to use during your six minutes today if it helps. Inhale for four counts (one word for each count). Exhale for five counts (one word for each count).

Inhale: God, you are gracious.

Exhale: I am in Your care.

How was your time of silence? Record any reflections you have.

PATIENT AS THE DAY IS LONG

If there's one thing as sure as the sunrise, it's that I was born with a short fuse. Mercy. I have been working on my temper, my anger, the unmet expectations underneath my frustration for years. I am grateful that I have come a long way. I have added many tools to my tool belt to use when anger rises, thanks to all of my counselors. They deserve all the coffees and scones and hugs. Because I'm a mess, and they've helped me out of the pit many times.

As we keep exploring whether we can truly put down our phones and find connection to and trust God, we are looking at the description of His character that He proclaimed to Moses—a description that would be repeated and called upon for hundreds of generations.

Underline the third attribute of God's character in our verse for this week.

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

EXODUS 34:6, NIV

I'm just so incredibly grateful that God made sure we knew that being slow to anger was in His DNA. Because we blow it, over and over. At least I do! Slow to anger isn't a phrase anyone in my family would use to describe me. But it's certainly true of the God we serve. His compassion and grace also lead God to be slow to anger toward us.

I'm grateful we can trust a God who is slow not only in anger, but in timing.

Read the verse below and consider why God is “slow” according to this passage.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2 PETER 3:9

Fill in the blank.

God is patient toward _____.

God is patient toward *you*.

And me. And all of us.

Why? So that more and more will repent, turn their thinking around, and come to know—to connect—with Him. What a good God! I don’t know about you, but I believe I can trust a God who has decided to keep a posture of patience toward me. We can trust a God who is patient with us because He has our best in mind.

Our phones? They don’t care who we are. They give us image after image that can cause us to be anxious, to compare, to fix ourselves, to worry. They’re starving us of the patience and peace that comes from a patient and peaceful God.

Having a Father who is slow to anger may be something very foreign to you. You may have grown up with a father who was quick to anger, impatient, and full of frustration at the world, or his job, or at you. My dad was quick to be angry when house repair was involved. He was hardly ever quick to be angry at humans, but always at leaky toilets.

No matter what our experience with an earthly father has been, the good news for all of us is this: *God is not our earthly father.*

He is patient.

He is kind.

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

He is compassionate.

He is gracious.

He is slow to anger.

What comfort does knowing this truth about God's character give you?

Because God is slow to anger, we can rest assured that when we wander away from connection with Him, He longs to restore us and bring us back into fellowship with Him. He doesn't want to destroy us; He wants to redeem us.

When this lesson is applied to us, we love it! But when it extends to other people? Not always as easy. Maybe like me, you've felt like Jonah. You wish God was quicker to anger with others.

Jonah believed the people of Nineveh deserved to be punished for all of their sins. He did not want to bring good news to this city. He thought they were beyond grace. But God saved the people of Nineveh—all 120,000 of them. Take a look at Jonah's response to God after that:

To Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

JONAH 4:1-3, NIV

What Scripture do you think Jonah was thinking about when he talked about God's character?

I need you to know I have felt like Jonah. Angry that others didn't get the wrath of God. Angry that God wasn't angry enough to punish my enemies. Angry that God didn't do anything to the ones who have betrayed me, hurt me, rejected me, and stolen from me. Angry that God didn't work with a short fuse like me.

If you've been there, congratulations. You are human. Our anger can be an indicator that we are protecting something precious to us. Sometimes what is precious to us needs to be crucified (like our pride), but sometimes it needs to be fiercely honored and guarded (like our dignity). Jesus flipped tables to protect His Father's house as a place of prayer, not commerce. As a place of knowing God, not buying and selling. As a place marked for worship, not for marked-up sacrifices. There, the anger is for the sake of defending what is honorable and good.

But if we can ever so tenderly swivel the camera toward us and our own hearts, I wonder what we will find. If we feel indignant at others for their sins and choices, as Jonah did, are we able to see our own sins and choices in the same light? Are we able to see the anger we may have caused others? All I can hear is Paul in my ears on this one:

Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

ROMANS 3:23, NLT

All have sinned; all fall short. We could stop there. That should be enough, right?

Well, Paul goes on:

Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.

ROMANS 3:24-25, NLT

Praise!

I know I can be afraid to turn off all the noise and distraction because I

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might get a wagging finger from God. Maybe I hide behind my phone in order to avoid connecting with God who I fear will greet me with arms folded in disapproval. Maybe I run from a frustrated God who is sighing with impatience at how long I'm taking to grow.

I may do those things, but they're not doing anything for me. In fact, they're starving me from the connection I need—the connection that will remind me who God really is when I meet with Him.

The God who is slow to anger.

Are you afraid of what kind of God you'll get if you disconnect from distractions? How is being silent connected to your view of God and His potential anger toward you?

To end our time today, read Psalm 103:1-19. Write down what you find out about what God the Father is really like.

What if, for today's practice of silence, you imagined God as patient and slow to anger? What is His face like? What are His arms doing? What is His posture like? What is He saying to you?

Connect with that image of God in your mind today. Find nourishment in the presence of a God who is slow to anger.

THE PRACTICE OF CONNECTION

Today, practice seven minutes of silence. I hope this is a freeing and lifegiving experiment for you this week. Put away all distractions. Try to sit by a window or outside. Breathe slowly. Close your eyes and let your imagination build a picture of your good Father, patient and slow to anger.

If it helps, here is a breath prayer you can use during your seven minutes. Inhale for six counts (one word for each count). Exhale for six counts (one word for each count).

Inhale: God, you are slow to anger.

Exhale: Father, I am in Your care.

THE GREAT MINT TAKEOVER

We bought this lovely little dilapidated house a few years into our marriage. Talk about a fixer-upper. It was 2003, so we were way ahead of Chip and Jo on this one. It would take pages for me to tell you about everything that needed to be repaired, restored, and rebuilt. But we were spry and didn't have any children yet, so we went for it. We redeemed that beauty, stained glass and all.

The first time my husband mowed the two-foot-high lawn in the backyard (around the Chronicles of Narnia lamppost sitting dead center in the yard that we never could get working), I expected to get hit with a whiff of fresh-cut grass. But it was quite a different smell. Not a stench, but not the scent of grass either. My husband stopped the mower and we both said, "What's that smell?" The answer hit us both like a strong mojito on a summer day: mint!

Who knew that mint would conquer entire plots of land if you let it? About one third of our yard wasn't grass after all. It was mint. The Great Mint Takeover was well underway, and every neighbor knew it right then. The smell took over the street as soon as we started mowing the lawn. We had a plentiful quantity, enough for a bazillion soups, salads, drinks, and desserts. You might say we were abounding in mint.

That brings us to the fourth characteristic we want to look at from Exodus 34:6. God is "abounding in love."

What do you think of when you hear the word *abounding*?

AMY SEIFFERT

The dictionary tells us that *abounding* means “existing in or providing a great or plentiful quantity or supply.”¹

And in this case? The supply is LOVE.

Our God is great and plentiful in His love toward you. What a fresh and rich thought, like the smell of mint permeating the air of your neighborhood in place of freshly cut grass. His love is *that* good, that real, that nourishing to our souls.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being God is stingy with His love for you and 10 being God is abounding in His love for you), how do you feel about the way God loves you? Why?

God is stingy with His love					God is abounding in His love				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Let’s take a look at some places we can see God’s love at work, up close and personal.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:8-10, NIV

How did God demonstrate His own love for us?

How does that act show you God’s love is abounding?

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

Read the verse below about the depth of God's love:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

GALATIANS 2:20, NIV

What two verbs are assigned to the Son of God here that directly apply to you?

He _____ me.

He _____ himself for me.

In the smallest way, I can relate. When my oldest son was diagnosed with Crohn's disease in 2018, everything inside of me wished I was the one given the chronic illness. If I could have traded places with him, I would have. I would have taken the disease, the management of food and pain, the overwhelming health and treatment plan to find remission. That's because I love him, and a mother's love for her child is fierce.

But here's the kicker: my son is MINE. He is easy to love, because he's my boy. My precious, amazing, wonderful, brilliant boy. A part of my family. And he's a kid who loves us as much as we love him.

In other words, it's easy to have abounding love for him.

So, let's take in the fact that God loved us when we were not loving to Him. In fact, we are called something else. **Read Romans 5:10 again. What were we according to this verse?**

We were enemies of God. *Enemies*. Let that soak in. An enemy is someone who is against you at every turn, actively opposed or hostile to you. And this is how we were toward God. Going our own way. Living our own life. Going against God's Kingdom way.

No wonder we're starving, friend.

But don't worry, there's still good news here. Though we were born slaves to sin, Jesus set us free from that slavery, and now, we are ruled by the Spirit. Now, we are family to God.

Look how Paul describes this reality:

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

ROMANS 8:14-17, NIV

I love this explanation from *Got Questions*:

Christians are born enslaved, but Jesus buys them out of slavery and they are adopted by the Father and given the Spirit, so now they are heirs.

When we come to faith in Christ, our debts are cancelled, we are given a new name, and we are given all the rights that heirs of God possess. . . . Christians are not adopted because God thinks they will make worthy heirs. God adopts people who are completely unworthy, because He adopts on the basis of His grace.²

All of this theology is quite profound, but unless we address the heart along with the head, we won't get anywhere. So, let's get real about this. *I think the hard part about truly believing God's abounding love for us is in the contrast between our own expectation of what His love should look like in our lives and how our lives actually look.*

We have unmet expectations that may have starved us from believing God loves us. We expected God's love to look a certain way. Maybe we expected to

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

be married by now. Or we expected to have children by now. Or we expected to have our dream job by now. Or we expected to be free of traumatic memories by now. Or any number of expectations that we have held against God as proof of His love.

For years we struggled through infertility. And I had to fight tooth and nail to believe in God's love for me. It took me some time to realize I had thought this thought: *God's love equals a baby in my arms.* With that ringing true in my head, the only logical next thought was this: *If I don't have a baby, God must not really love me.*

Thank goodness for God's abounding love to remind me what is actually true. Because in reality, God doesn't demonstrate His love for us by meeting all our expectations in our own way.

In those days, I had to frequently remember this truth based in Romans 5:8: *Jesus demonstrated His love to me by dying for me—not by giving me a child or healing my infertility or working on my timetable.*

Can we get very personal and very honest?

When you think about the unmet expectations that may prevent you from believing in God's abounding love for you, what would your sentence look like?

Here are a few prompts to use:

God's love equals _____ .
Jesus demonstrated His love to me
by dying for me—not by _____ .

I am going to leave space on the next page for you to process and journal more of what may have come to mind. You may have a lot of pent-up disappointment, anger, or resentment surrounding how you think God ought to demonstrate His love toward you. I've been there, friend! Talk to Him about it.

Write out your honest thoughts and cries. Connect with His abounding love here. *Take your time and reflect here.*

THE PRACTICE OF CONNECTION

Today, we are closing with eight minutes of silence. You can do this! I believe in you, friend. Prepare yourself for this time. Set a timer if you'd like, but then turn your phone over. Find a quiet space. Breathe. If you need a prompt for your silence, consider again the truth about God's love for you. I have emphasized a few truths here:

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us?* He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? . . . *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

ROMANS 8:31-32;35; 38-39, NIV (EMPHASIS ADDED)

If it helps, here is a breath prayer you can use during your eight minutes. Inhale for five counts (one word for each count). Exhale for five counts (one word for each count).

Inhale: God, you abound in love.

Exhale: I am in your care.

FAITHLESS PHONES, FAITHFUL GOD

So far this week, we have explored that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. **Underline the final attribute of God's character we are looking at today.**

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

EXODUS 34:6, NIV

Not only is God overflowing and plentiful in His love for us, but He is abounding in His faithfulness to us too.

In your own words, what does *faithfulness* mean to you?

You may have listed being reliable and steadfast, having integrity, being true to your word, or something to the effect of being unwavering. Good work!

The incredible thing about God's faithfulness is that even when *we* are faithless toward Him, He is faithful to us. We are going to look at Luke 15 to read a story that puts skin on the character of God. Every single one of the attributes we've discovered this week is displayed in this story. Take a deep breath and ask God to show you something about Him you may have never seen before in this parable as you read.

Slowly read Luke 15:11-32.

I have been obsessed with Luke 15:20 for quite some time. I cannot for the life of me get away from it. Write out the five verbs that are true of the father from Luke 15:20 below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

He got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. LUKE 15:20, NIV

If this is not a manifestation of Exodus 34:6, then I don't know what is! Let's compare notes here:

In Exodus 34:6, these are the attributes of God:

- Compassionate
- Gracious
- Slow to anger
- Abounding in love
- Abounding in faithfulness

In Luke 15:20, these are the actions of the father:

- Sees his son
- Is filled with compassion for him
- Runs toward the son
- Embraces his son
- Kisses his son

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

What a gift to see the consistency of the character of God across thousands of years. *From Exodus to Luke, God is the same.* Jesus told this story because the Pharisees were mad that He was associating with notorious sinners—eating with them even! He wanted them to know that God’s love was faithful to *all* of us. He wanted them to be fed by that truth, and I think He wants the same for us as we read it today.

But maybe you are like a young woman I recently talked to at a retreat where I was speaking. She felt much more like the older, faithful son who had done everything right and served his father endlessly. She felt left behind and unwanted. She was frustrated since it seemed the new believers who have shady pasts get to be celebrated and honored while those like her are looked over and forgotten. After we spoke about this late one night, I had to go back to the passage to see how the father in this story responds to his other son.

Look again at Luke 15:31. What does the father say? Write it out here:

I wrote this verse on a piece of paper and passed it to the woman at the retreat before I spoke. I felt like God wanted her to have a personal note to remind her of the truth: God sees her, and everything He has is hers.

God is faithful to us all.

I love that, like the father in the parable, God says, “Everything I have is yours.” It’s as if He says, “I am just as generous, and compassionate, and gracious, and slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness to you as I am to your brother. EVERYTHING I HAVE IS YOURS. I am not sparing one thing. For the faithful and the unfaithful, my compassionate grace will cover every one of you.”

God's faithfulness is abounding. And that's true for us all. No matter what we've done, how we've starved ourselves from connection with God, or how we've attempted to find that connection in our phones or anywhere else, the good news of this week is that we can trust the character of God. We can trust Him to care for us. We can trust Him to love us. We can trust Him to handle us with patience and grace. We can trust Him to be faithful. We can trust Him to feed us.

Well, we have had quite a week exploring the character of God. And we've gone even further, putting down our phones and picking up true connection to God in our silence.

How has putting down your phone, practicing silence, and meditating on God's character helped you find true connection this week? What has been hard? What has been good?

For me, one of the things I've found so interesting is learning what I'm asking my phone to do for me.

My phone is not compassionate. In fact, I find it can be a real source of shame for me in a variety of ways, like comparison, envy, jealousy, and not measuring up.

My phone is not gracious. It cannot give me spiritual gifts or free me from my sin.

My phone is not slow to anger or abounding in love or abounding in faithfulness. In fact, my phone can make me quick to anger when it breeds comparison, frustration, and more.

And though my phone is always there, it cannot provide lasting peace or enduring comfort. It cannot provide for me or give me life.

Not like my faithful God can.

STARVED BIBLE STUDY

I hope this week has given you a taste for building the practice of silence into your lives. We are starving for a soul connection to our Creator. He made us and wants to tell us all about Himself, all about who He made us to be, all about what He has for us to do. He wants to feed our souls through His presence and to teach us how to trust His character in the silence. Part of this practice is to remove all distractions so we can enjoy our connection to Him.

This week we truly practiced a three-part remedy:



Even if this week felt terribly hard, uncomfortable, or unfamiliar to you, what are you taking away with you?

THE PRACTICE OF CONNECTION

We will close our week with nine whole delicious minutes of silence. To prepare for this time, take a moment to do a brain dump! Write as much as you can as quickly as you can, filling the space below with all the thoughts or things you have to do or the worries on your mind. Dump it out. It will be there after your intentional connection with God. Now, find a good spot to breathe and enjoy God's presence.

Here is a breath prayer to use during your nine minutes today if it helps. Inhale for four counts (one word for each count). Exhale for five counts (one word for each count).

Inhale: God, feed my soul.

Exhale: I am in Your care.

DAD'S FAMOUS CHICKEN STRIPS



Something happens around our kitchen bar just about every Monday night. When my kids start to smell frying chicken, all of a sudden everyone gets really close to one another, huddled in the kitchen. All five of us end up standing around snacking on chicken strips, laughing, sharing, and connecting. Because good food does that. It brings us together, lowers our guard, opens our hearts. I've heard that it's hard to eat at a table with a sword in your hand. May these chicken strips bring all the connection and all the satisfied bellies.

Ingredients

2 eggs	½ tsp. onion powder
2½ lbs. chicken strips	1½ tsp. salt
1½ cups almond flour	¼ tsp. pepper
½ cup oat flour	olive oil to cook in
1 tsp. garlic powder	

Instructions

1. Beat eggs in a medium bowl. Combine egg mixture and chicken pieces in the bowl, stirring until all pieces are covered with egg mixture. Drain excess egg off chicken using a strainer.
2. Combine all dry ingredients (almond flour through pepper) in a small bowl, and then sprinkle on top of drained chicken in a medium bowl. Stir gently until all the pieces are covered.
3. Add about ¼ inch of oil to a medium saucepan placed over medium-high heat. Once the oil is hot and begins to shimmer, place coated chicken strips in the oil. Don't overcrowd the pan—there should be space between the pieces.
4. Cook for 5–6 minutes on each side, until crispy golden brown. Repeat until all pieces are cooked through, with no pink inside. We use a kitchen thermometer to make sure each strip is cooked to 165°F.
5. Serve with dipping sauces of your choice, such as ketchup, honey mustard, or our family favorite: Primal Kitchen Buffalo Sauce.

Note that the recipes in this book are compliant for our family's unique dietary needs. We have used the SCD diet (specific carbohydrate diet) and the book *Breaking the Vicious Cycle* by Elaine Gottschall for Crohn's disease.

