

A Walk of Dying

Study Guide



Chapter 1

Our Obsession

There's a weed in these parts called a pokeweed. It grows 12 feet tall and produces grape-like berries that will give your digestive tract a nightmare if you try to eat them. When the weed is tiny, it slides right out of the ground with an easy tug, but leave it to grow just 8 inches tall and the plant snaps right off when I pull on it. To get rid of it, I have to get the shovel and dig hard at the roots.

We've all let the flesh grow too tall. If we really want to get unstuck, we're going to need to find those roots and do some digging.

It took writing most of this book before I realized that learning to walk by the Spirit isn't to remake me or realize me—it's about the end of me. But "me" is deeply rooted in the flesh and isn't about to lay down and die without putting up a fight.

This study guide is about asking questions that help you dig deeper. It may be too personal to share in a group. On the other hand, it may be the perfect study for a group if what you are looking for is genuine vulnerability and growth with others.

Use it anyway you like, just know that . . .

. . . every day is a good day to die.

1. Do you need a little "pick-me-up" now and then to feel okay or worthwhile? What would those be?

2. When you feel undervalued, or question your worth, in what ways do you typically try to increase your value or restore your worth?

3. Review the list on pages 14 and 15, and identify the contents of your value closet. Which items do you look to, or try to improve on, in order to gain value?

4. How does your need to boost your worth influence your relationships? Try to think of specific ways.

5. How do you react when your value is threatened? Do you . . .
 - become defensive
 - blame others
 - draw attention to yourself
 - try to convince others you've got it all together
 - get angry
 - lash out
 - mope
 - sink into self-loathing

6. How do you define self-worth and should you have any? Why or why not?

7. Do you ever feel that you aren't good enough? How do you react to that feeling? Do you react with . . .

- anger
- depression
- food
- sex
- sleep
- self-inflicted harm
- distractions
- chemical substances
- self-hate

8. What does it mean to say your identity is in Christ? When are you likely to want to affirm your identity in Christ? When your identity is in Christ, should you expect your value to fluctuate? Explain your answer.

Chapter 2

Deadly Desire

1. What is your flesh capable of doing for you? (Checkmark all that apply.)

- help you find truth
- deceive you

- desire what is good for you
- convict you of sin
- lead you out of an emotional storm
- satisfy your wants

2. In what ways does your flesh offer solutions for what is wrong with you? Have any of these “fixes” been achievable?

3. When we trust the flesh to want what is good for us, we will question God's goodness. In what ways do you doubt the goodness of God in your life right now? In what ways have you trusted your flesh to know what is good for you? Would the Spirit ever cause you to doubt God's goodness?

4. Is feeling good about yourself a flesh goal or a Spirit goal? Explain your answer.

Does the Bible say anything about feeling good about yourself? Give examples if you say yes.

5. Think of some instances in which you have made feeling good about yourself your goal. What has typically been the outcome of those times?

6. Would the flesh ever make bad things look appealing? What might those things be in your life? (ex. sin, drugs, self-harm, sex, self-condemnation, etc.) Be specific.

7. How does the flesh enslave us?

8. Feelings are voices of the flesh that give misleading directions. How have you been, or are being led, by your feelings? What are some examples?

9. When I want to look good is that the Spirit or my flesh talking? When I try to do good is it always the Spirit leading me? What else could it be?

If what I achieve as “good” is really done in the flesh, can that good have any power to overcome the flesh? Why do you think this?

10. What are the four things the flesh does? (Review the chapter subtitles.)

Chapter 3

The Opposition

1. In what spiritual muck do you find yourself continually stuck?
2. Read Galatians 5:13-26, then review the lists on pages 37-39. What characterizes your flesh? (Write your own personal list.)
3. Should you avoid feeling bad about yourself? Why or why not?
4. Satisfying desires can often help us escape that bad feeling. How does doing this make it difficult to live by the Spirit?
5. How do you pamper your flesh?

Too much flesh pampering leads to obvious warning signs. Are any of these signs indicating an overactive flesh in your life?

- defensiveness
- outburst of anger
- self-pity
- only doing what you feel like doing
- bitterness
- discouragement

- resentment
- keeping a list of hurts
- running away/ avoiding reality
- panic
- hopelessness
- indulging in “feel good” behavior

6. Identify the positive side of your flesh. Next, consider your answers to these questions:

When your confidence is shaken, what do you instinctively reach out for to restore your confidence?

What do you believe you have to do in order to be loved?

What are you good at?

Why do people usually compliment you?

7. How can you tell the difference between the flesh and the Spirit?

8. How is the flesh making you look good? How is the Spirit making you look good? (This might be a trick question.)

Chapter 4

Dead Man Walking

1. Read Colossians 3:1-17. What comes “naturally” to you?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-12. In what ways are you investing time and energy in your jar of clay? What have you gained by making yourself a priority?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 4. How does Paul view himself?
4. Read Romans 13:14. What do you think it means to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”? What will putting on the Lord Jesus Christ help you do?
5. What rewards are you expecting to get here on earth in exchange for your “sacrifices”?
6. How familiar are you with the slope of self-pity? How familiar are you with self-hatred? What is the root of these?

7. Do you need to confess the practice of self-pity or self-hatred to the Lord? Take time to do that now. Write your prayer in a journal and date it.

8. Do you have the hope of the living Christ in you? Why do you need it?

Chapter 5

Embracing Weakness

1. Do you ever say to yourself “I should have been able to do that”? Should we expect that to be true? Why or why not?

2. When we think we can be strong, are we looking to strengthen the flesh or strengthen the Spirit? Is “trying harder” the solution to weakness? Why or why not?

3. What is your optimistic delusion regarding the flesh?

4. What makes you feel weak? Do any of these things make you feel weak?

- crying
- losing
- stupid
- fear
- apologizing
- failure
- being vulnerable
- inferiority
- being wrong
- rejection
- loneliness
- neediness
- poverty
- handicaps
- dependence on others
- inadequacy
- not being good enough

5. How does weakness make you feel? Does it make you feel any of these?

- desperate
- a failure
- trapped
- afraid
- hopeless
- angry
- suffocating
- frustrated
- embarrassed
- discouraged

6. Often we feel that if we can't pull ourselves up "by the bootstraps," then our best option is to give up. Why would the flesh prefer defeat over enduring weakness?

7. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. According to Paul, what was the reason for his extreme weakness?

8. Can weakness ever be a good thing? Why or why not? (Explain your answer with God's Word.)

9. Think of a time when God showed His strength in your weakness. Describe how He did that.

10. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. What attitude should you have toward your weaknesses?

11. Where does true strength come from? Which are you most often desiring, true strength or the appearance of strength?

12. Describe the difference between human joy and Crazy Joy? (pages 77-80)

13. Do you have to feel happy in order to be happy, in order to rejoice? Can you have authentic joy while feeling weak? Why or why not?

14. Make a plan for how you can have Crazy Joy this week. Think of at least one specific thing you can do this week to experience Crazy Joy.

15. Read Matthew 26:31-35. Was Peter expecting to be strong? Did Jesus expect him to be strong? Was Peter set up for failure? What was God's purpose for Peter's failure? What was God's purpose in crushing Jesus?

Chapter 6

Enduring Weakness

1. How would you rate your endurance? If offered the choice of enduring weakness or giving up, which one are you likely to choose?

2. What trial are you facing that is testing your endurance?

3. Read Hebrews 10:32–12:3. What motivation can you find from this passage that inspires you to endure? How long should you expect to endure?

4. Read Hebrews 10:19–25. Describe the hope you have in Jesus Christ. How does having Jesus Christ as your Great High Priest make a difference in your life today?

5. Read Hebrews 4:14–16. What promises about Jesus can you claim that will help you endure today?

Which is more likely to be an anchor for you in the midst of trials: truth in doctrine or comfort of feelings? How can the Lord be your anchor?

6. Read Hebrews 12:7–17

Look at the “Runners Manual” on pages 95 and 96. Which items do you need to remind yourself to observe on the race?

Chapter 7

Counterfeit Suffering

1. What are the “numbing agents” your flesh turns to when suffering or in pain? Why should you not give in to the flesh’s ways of avoiding pain?

2. Why does suffering seem wrong?

3. Is it okay to say that God is responsible for suffering? Why or why not?

4. What is the difference between suffering in the flesh and suffering in the Spirit?

5. Use the questions on page 104 to help you make an inventory of your “warehouse.” On a separate piece of paper, try to make as complete a list as possible. Review the list, drawing a circle around those things that you aren’t willing to lose. How will you react if the Lord takes any of those things away?

6. Do you have rights? What do you believe you have a right to? (See pages 106–107.)

7. Are you experiencing empty longings right now? What do you long for?
8. In the darkness of empty longings you should stay put rather than run, listen to God's voice rather than scream, trust God rather than doubt Him. Read Psalm 63:1-8. How can your soul thirst for the Lord in a way that surpasses all other longings?
9. According to God's Word, how should we view suffering?
10. How does suffering challenge your view of God?

Chapter 8

Suffering and Justice

1. With which of these statements do you agree?
- I think God should keep everyone from suffering.
 - I think it is okay for bad people to suffer.
 - I think God should keep innocent people from suffering.
 - I think God should keep good people from suffering.
 - I think it is okay for people to suffer the consequences of their choices.

2. Define fair. Who decides what is fair? What unfair circumstances have occurred in your life?
3. Should reward and suffering be equally distributed? Why or why not?
4. Is the paradigm of fairness a desire of the flesh or a goal of the Spirit? Why do you think this?
5. Read Romans 9:10-23
Do you believe that God is right and just in all that He does? Explain why you believe this.
6. Which do you prefer to live by: grace or karma? Why? Which one does God's Word support?
7. Read Romans 2:1-16. Paul is describing a world where only judgment exists. Now read Romans 3:5-4:8. What does this passage teach you about God's justice?

8. Read Romans 5. What does this passage teach you about God's grace?

9. In what ways, if any, are you despising God's grace? (Review page 126)

10. What do you usually think should be the reward for doing good?

11. Read Galatians 6:7-10. Now read 1 Peter 2:20b-21 and 4:19. What should we be doing in the midst of suffering?

Ask the Lord to show you how you can apply this to your situation today. Write specific ways you should change how you are responding to suffering.

Chapter 9

Perspectives on Suffering

1. Have you ever suffered due to the disobedience of others? Describe the situation.

2. How does your pride keep you from finding joy through suffering?

3. Read Genesis 45:1-15; 50:15-21. Describe the characteristics of Joseph's forgiveness? How does that compare to yours?

4. Is there anyone that you believe does not deserve forgiveness? Is there someone you find impossible to forgive?

5. Read Jeremiah 15:15-18. Are you suffering physical or emotional pain that refuses to heal? Describe your pain.

6. Read Lamentations 3. As Christians we often feel that we must hide our sorrow and pain, that somehow we aren't spiritual if we aren't talking about joy all the time. What do you learn about joy and sorrow from Jeremiah's life and words?

7. Does our joy come from looking back or looking forward? Following Jeremiah's example, write your own honest words of sorrow and joy.

8. Do you wish that you desired more of God's Word? Will your flesh ever desire God's Word? Why or why not?

9. Read Psalm 119. What role does the Word of God play in your suffering? In what practical way can you make use of God's Word? Make a plan.

10. What does following Christ look like?

Are you a philosopher or a follower?

Are you expecting your suffering to end with a trip to the spa or the hammer?

Chapter 10

Humility

1. Review your list of what gives you value in Chapter One. Identify the places where pride has put down roots.

2. In what ways does your pride motivate you personally?

3. Read Luke 14:7-14. Is it possible to be elevated in God's eyes? How do we do that?

4. What do you do when you feel inferior? Do you put others down? Do you mock others? Do you use others' weaknesses to make you feel better about yourself? Do you look for others with whom by comparison, you will feel superior?

5. Read Luke 18:9-14. What is the attitude of the proud man? What is the attitude of the humble man?

6. What elevates you in your own eyes?

7. Pride is the strongest opposition to humility. What hurts your pride? Do any of these?

- unfair treatment
- misjudged
- overlooked
- rejected
- ignored
- unwanted
- excluded

- needy
- public shame
- criticism
- second best
- misbehaving kids
- feeling useless
- being a burden
- expressing gratitude
- asking for help
- appearing stupid

8. What traits elevate people in your eyes? Think about those people you see as better than others. How can the practice of elevating others be a trap for your pride?

9. In what two ways has Christ set your value? (page 157)

10. What should humility look like for you?

Chapter 11

Repentance

1. When you do something wrong or get into trouble, what are you usually sorry for?

Do any of these make you feel sorry?

- getting caught
- disappointing others
- not being perfect
- consequences
- bad opinion of others

2. Define Biblical repentance.

Which of these reflect true repentance?

- feeling bad you messed up
- sorry you got caught
- turning around
- disappointing yourself and others
- failing to be perfect
- regret
- confession
- guilt
- anger at yourself
- complete change of direction
- not forgiving yourself
- disillusionment
- change of heart
- accepting grace and punishment from God

3. Do you need to change your mind about one or more of these?

- the reward for doing good
- you have rights
- weakness is bad
- you deserve to feel good about yourself
- God is not always just in all He does
- the practice of elevating
- your worth in Christ
- God's right to give free grace

Describe what your attitude should be.

4. Is there anything for which you need to repent? Take time to do that now. Write a prayer of repentance here or in your journal.

Chapter 12

Walking in Truth

1. Read John 13:1–16:15. What do you learn about the Spirit from this passage?

2. Have you believed in the Son of God? Do you have life? Do you have the Spirit?

3. How important is the gift of the Spirit to you? What important role does the Spirit play in your life as a child of God?

4. How do you usually go about finding truth?

- asking other people's opinions
- looking on the internet
- relying on your intuition
- taking a poll
- trusting only in yourself
- asking the Spirit to reveal it to you
- reading your Bible
- believing what you have been taught
- doubting the existence of truth
- basing it on how I feel
- researching proof
- going with the most probable or logical option

5. Do your thoughts ever seem to run away with you? Describe how this happens.

Do your thoughts sometimes build walls around your mind that block out reality? In what way?

6. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Do you ever feel that there is a battle going on in your mind? In what ways are you trying to fight this spiritual battle with the flesh? What is the spiritual battle strategy that you should use?

7. The mind is a powerful current of thinking that reflects attitude and dictates actions. Read the verses about the mind on pages 189-197. Pick a verse (or verses) that challenges your thought life in a new way. How will you apply that to your life this week?

8. *Aletheia* is the Greek word for truth. Do you really love *aletheia*? Rate yourself with these statements:

- I get anxious.
- I worry about future events, about things that might happen.
- I am concerned about what other people think of me.
- I have a habit of lying.
- Talking about others is okay as long as what I am saying is true.
- I'll stretch the truth if it makes me look better.
- I like to deceive others.
- I repeat sensational things I read on the internet.
- I repeat rumors that I hear about others.
- I speculate about others' motivations.
- I believe something to be true because I feel like it is.
- I think truth is defined by how I feel today.

How can you be a better lover of truth?

Chapter 13

Walking in Love

1. Do you find it easier to accept love when you feel you have done something to earn it? Do you believe that there are people who don't deserve to be loved? Have you ever felt as if you wasted your love on someone? Do people have limited opportunities to gain your love?

2. Read Luke 6:27-36. Who are we to love?

3. Look at the words on page 206. Which of these corrupting influences of the flesh are apparent in your relationships?

4. Read the questions on page 207 and right down any names of people that come to your mind. Read the guidelines for loving others in the Appendix (pages 239-241). How can you begin to love these people in the Spirit? (Ask the Lord to show you specific ways.)

5. Why is walking by the Spirit a team sport?

Begin learning to love in the Spirit by showing Christ-like love to everyone in your church body, especially toward the unlovable. Jot down one or two specific attitudes you can change your mind about (repent before the Lord).

Chapter 14

Walking with Spiritual Gifts

1. Why would you seek to have spiritual gifts?

- for personal gain
- for your own edification
- for the boosting of your value
- for the common good
- for being seen by others
- for acknowledgement
- for another's honor
- for praise
- for position
- for your own good
- for God to be magnified
- for your own satisfaction
- for your own righteousness
- for the growth and righteousness of others

2. Should you know your spiritual gift(s)? Why or why not?

3. Look at the spiritual gifts survey on pages 241-247, and the definitions on pages 218-222. Do you identify with any of the gifts? How can you improve the practical exercise of your gift? Be specific.

4. Do you ever think that because you don't have the spiritual gift that someone else has, you are less important in the church? Do you ever feel that you are not needed in the body or have nothing to contribute?

Read the four passages on spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11. What should your attitude be regarding your place in the body of Christ?

5. Ask the Spirit to show you how you should be exercising your spiritual gift(s). Jot down specific actions you can begin this week.

Chapter 15

Walking in Prayer

1. Are you ever distracted by the flesh when you pray? In what way?

2. What is the primary focus of your prayer life?

- what you have to say
- what God wants to say to you
- for God to change your plans
- to talk to God
- to listen to God
- to know God's will

3. Whose mind or thoughts are you expressing when you pray?

4. Read Ephesians 6:18. What do you think it means to pray in the Spirit?

5. Read Luke 18:1-8. Praying in the Spirit requires alertness and perseverance. Think of one or two specific ways you can practice praying in the Spirit this week.

6. What do praying and the coming of the Son of Man have in common?

7. According to Scripture, what should characterize your prayer life?

Conclusion

1. Is it God's goal to make your life easier? Why or why not?

2. What is God's purpose for your life? How can you begin to live by that purpose today?

3. Is the Spirit guiding you to do or change anything? Be specific.