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I CAN ONLY IMAGINE JOURNAL FOR STUDENTS.
THIS JOURNAL IS A POWERFUL RESOURCE TO HELP
YOUR STUDENTS GO DEEPER INTO THE THEMES
COVERED IN THE MOVIE *I CAN ONLY IMAGINE*.

The journal features four weeks of interactive daily Bible study.
The themes of each week parallel the themes of the movie.

- Week 1: Imagine A Loving Father
- Week 2: Imagine Forgiveness
- Week 3: Imagine Redemption
- Week 4: Imagine Going Home

***IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT
THIS RESOURCE, DON'T HESITATE TO CALL US.
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I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

A 4-WEEK
DEVOTIONAL
FOR STUDENTS

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: _____

DATE STARTED: _____

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ON A HILL

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I Can Only Imagine: A 4-Week Devotional Journal For Students

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CITY ON A HILL PRESENTS
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Foreword

If you've seen the movie *I Can Only Imagine*, and if you're reading this it's likely that you have, you know that the film is as much about the relationship I had with my dad as it was about me writing a song. My dad had a temper. He was abusive. When he had a bad day, he took it out on me. I went through a growth spurt in 6th grade, and after that, he never laid a finger on me. But the emotional abuse was significant. I've used the word *monster* to describe the way he was back then.

Then, during my freshmen year in high school, my dad was diagnosed with cancer. By the time he died when I was in college, he had become one of the godliest men I knew.

How?

The power of the Gospel.

I watched my dad go from being the guy you'd be afraid to cross when he walked into a room to the man I'd hear weeping while praying for my brother and me. I got to have a front row seat to the transformation God worked in my dad's life. By the time my father ultimately lost his fight with cancer, he had become a man whom I wanted to pattern my life after.

This change was remarkable in my dad. But I had to go through my own change. I remember sitting up nights with my dad while he was in bed getting one of his various medications. My dad would want to talk, but he'd have to pry answers out of me. It was like we were meeting for the first time. I remember not wanting to talk while my dad was hanging onto every word I would say, sincerely trying to make up for lost time. I was the one who was bitter.

The turning point for me was that my dad didn't give up. He kept chiseling away at my defenses. Over time, I opened up. One of the hardest things for me when dad passed away was not having him to talk to anymore.

Do you see how powerful the Gospel is? The love, redemption, forgiveness, and ultimately hope that is made possible in Jesus flies like a banner over my story. What a difference Jesus made in my life in and in the life of my father.

These same themes – love, forgiveness, redemption, and hope – are not only the driving themes of the movie and the story of my dad and me, but they are also the themes unpacked in this book. If you watched the movie, you know that spending time with God and recording those thoughts in my journal was a big part of my spiritual journey. This journal can be a big part of yours too. It's a powerful way of helping you get one-on-one with God and to really dig deep into who God is and how He is working in and through you.

My prayer is that your time spent with God while working through this book is time that God uses to change you. Much like you saw through my story, God is at work in your life. Who knows where He will lead you and what He will equip you to do? Hang in there. Don't give up. And watch to see what God is ready to show you.

Bart Millard
Lead Singer, *Mercy Me*

getting started

If you're holding this book, chances are you've seen the movie *I Can Only Imagine*. If you've seen the movie, you know what a compelling story it is. God's love. Forgiveness. Redemption. Hope. All of these themes and more were woven into the story of Bart Millard and his father.

DID YOU KNOW THAT GOD DESIRES TO WEAVE THESE THEMES THROUGH THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE AS WELL?

Depending on how well you know God, you may have interacted with God in these ways already. Hopefully, you already know God's love, and if you know God's love, then you've felt the forgiveness He offers. But maybe you don't know God yet. Or perhaps you know God, but you just haven't been watching for how He's working in your life. This book is a great way to help you begin to see what God has done, is doing, and will do in your life.

One of the truths communicated in *I Can Only Imagine* is that Jesus changes everything. Jesus can change the life of someone far from Him or change the heart of someone very near to Him. Do you want to see God change you? This book can help. Not because it has any power in itself, but because it is a vehicle to get you face-to-face with God through His Word.

Are you ready to have your eyes open to what God is doing in and through you? There's no time like now to allow God to reveal Himself to you.

SO, LET'S GET STARTED. LOOK AT THE NEXT PAGE TO LEARN HOW THIS BOOK WORKS.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

Here are a few things you need to know to put this book to good use.

START WITH THIS ADVICE

Whether you're super-committed and read your Bible each day or struggle to read a few verses a couple of times a week, the key to sticking with this through four weeks is commitment. Your routine may change, but your commitment to meet God each day has to be there. Tell yourself that whether or not you read this journal at the same time each day, or if you read it whenever you get a few extra minutes, you'll make it a priority in your daily life.

HAVE YOUR BIBLE OPEN

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. The close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible. Have it open as you go through this book.

EACH WEEK IS STRUCTURED THE SAME, BUT IS REALLY DIFFERENT

Each week's content works in similar ways. But, each day is different. And, there are a lot of different kinds of activities. Some will take 3-5 minutes, some 10-15. Some will ask you to look at two or three passages of Scripture; some will just ask you to think about a concept. The variety will make it easier to stick with and help you learn in different ways that are suited to you.

WHAT IF I MISS A DAY OF READING? OR THREE?

Don't give up! Take this at your pace! The goal is for you to grow closer to God. If you miss a day or two . . . or four . . . don't throw in the towel. Pick this book back up and start where you left off. You can do this! And by doing it, you'll show the world that God makes an incredible difference in the lives of His followers. So, hang in there! You've got this!

WELL, THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET STARTED! TURN THE PAGE TO READ THE INTRODUCTION TO WEEK 1.

WEEK ONE

intro

What's your dad like?

Now that's a loaded question, isn't it?

For some of you, reading this question made you light up. Your dad, while not perfect, is awesome. It's easy to think about how funny or goofy or smart he is. For some of you, this was a painful question. Your dad may be someone who is responsible for causing you a lot of pain. For you, thinking about your dad is really, really hard. And for others of you, thinking about your dad doesn't make you feel anything. You don't know your dad. He's not a factor in your life.

Regardless of how you feel about your dad, there is a truth that should make any of us feel all warm and tingly inside. The truth is that if you have come to faith in Jesus, you have been adopted by a Father who loves you so much you can't possibly even fathom it. He is a perfect, loving, gracious dad who knows you and values you immensely. This week you'll be focusing some on God as your Heavenly Father. Hopefully, it will be a time where you see God in a way that maybe you haven't seen Him before.

I Can Only Imagine deals so much with the feelings we have for our dads. In Bart's story, his feelings changed for his dad as God changed the life of Bart's father. In the place of painful feelings toward his dad, Bart felt love. Only God can bring about this type of change. This week as you learn about God as your Heavenly Father, don't miss what He may be trying to show you about how you feel about your earthly father. Let God work in your life. You may be surprised what He's capable of doing in your life.

IF YOU'RE READY TO GET STARTED, TURN TO PAGE 12 FOR WEEK 1, DAY 1.

Read today's devotion and answer the questions to help you think about what it means to love God and love others.

FINDING GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

Imagine this; someone approaches you and tells you they want to give you 10 million dollars, but they tell you the money comes with a catch. If you can give away the 10 million by the end of the day, you'll receive another 10 million to keep. The other catch is that you can only give 1,000 dollars away to each person you encounter.

Are you envisioning the smile on people's faces when you hand them 1,000 dollars for absolutely no reason?

Now, what does this scenario have to do with us in reality? We know from the Bible that we have a gift to give that can bring even more happiness than 1,000 dollars: God's love. In the book of 1 John, the author is trying to affirm Christians in their walk with Christ by having them look back at their own lives. Take a moment and read 1 John 4:15-20. Here it states that we have come to know that God loves us. God loves us! But more than this, because God loves us we must love others. If we have loved anyone, then we have known God's love for us.

What do you think it means to love others? Recall a time when you showed love and kindness to someone else. Write about it below if you want.

When we love others, we are experiencing just a small sample of the love that Christ has shown us. Sometimes though, we best understand love when we see a lack of it. Take a moment to write about a time that you felt unloved by someone.

God's love is the greatest thing that we can ever receive. We know that God will always love us, so when we feel alone in this world, we can never forget that Christ died for us because He loves us. Not only is Christ's love the greatest thing we can receive, but it is also the greatest thing we can give. Remember the joy in the faces of those imaginary people we were giving money to in the beginning? Money will fade, but the love of Christ is eternal! Christ comes to us and tells us that we are to show His love to everyone we encounter, so what are you waiting for?

READ THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND LET THEM GUIDE YOU AS YOU THINK ABOUT APPLYING THE TRUTHS OF TODAY'S DEVOTIONAL TO YOUR LIFE.

1. What are some ways that you can show love to a friend today?
2. Is there someone in your life that does not appear to receive a lot of love or kindness from others? Maybe this person is difficult to love. (Maybe this person even reminds you of Bart's dad in the movie.) What can you do to help that person today?
3. What are some ways that you have seen God love you in your own life recently?
4. What are some ways that you can show God's love today in how you act?

Read the devotion below and answer the questions on page 15.

Do you remember in elementary school when you would bring store-bought Valentine's Day cards to school with you? Whether they were superheroes, princesses, animals, or even Disney they were all filled with puns about the characters and Valentine's Day. The candy attached to the card was great, but the best feeling was knowing this truth for a moment: someone cares about me.

Have you ever asked yourself that question before? "Does anyone care about me?" Take a moment to read 1 John 4:7-10 for the answer to this question.

After reading this, do you think someone cares about you? Yes or Yes (circle the answer.)

You might be asking, why did I have to circle it if the answers are both yes? Sometimes when life gets hard, we forget that someone is always looking out for us. That person is Jesus. We want you to have this reminder circled in front of you to answer that question whenever it arises in your life. Does someone care about you? YES!

What you read today in 1 John is that God loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to be a sacrifice in your place so that, if you come to saving faith in Him, your sin doesn't have to separate you from God eternally. That is love!

Our lives are full of expressions of God's love. When things are going great, it can feel like Valentine's Day every day. But what about the hard times? It is OK to think about those too. There are times in our lives where it doesn't seem that anyone is looking out for us or cares about us. There may even be times when those we are supposed to be able to turn to for love and support aren't there for us. But no matter how bad things get, we know God loves us. He loves us unfailingly. No matter what life throws at us, we can count on God's love to sustain us.

Go back and look at 1 John 4:7-10 one more time. Then, answer the questions below:

1. Look at verse 7. How do we know that God is working in and through our lives?

2. Why is it so hard to love others who don't show us love in return? Why is it particularly hard to love those types of people who are particularly close to us (i.e., family members, etc.)?

3. Are there times in your life where you don't feel valued by people you love? What in these verses should help you feel valued no matter what?

4. Spend some time in prayer today thanking God for the people in your life who love you, and asking Him to show you people who need to feel loved by you.

Read today's devotion and answer the questions on page 17.

Take a moment and imagine that you are making dinner for yourself in your kitchen. Everything is normal until you hear the doorbell ring, and standing at the door is TV chef, Bobby Flay. Bobby says that he heard about your cooking, and he wants to come and eat a meal straight from your incredible kitchen. Do you feel overwhelmed yet? How did Bobby Flay even hear about you? It might feel pretty confusing to have a legend walk into your life to ask you for help. There is a similar scene in the book of Matthew between Jesus and John the Baptist.

Take a moment and read Matthew 3:13-17.

In this passage, John immediately questions Jesus, stating his inadequacies to baptize Jesus. Jesus stops him and says that it is fitting for John to perform this baptism. After Jesus is baptized this incredible moment happens where the skies open up, and the Spirit of God comes down. This had to have been shocking to everyone who witnessed it. We have spent some time this week looking

back in our lives to remember moments of love from the Lord, but today we want to start taking steps toward the future.

John tried to stop the moment that was about to come by saying how inadequate he was compared to Jesus. John's shortcomings were not important; it was his faithfulness to do what Jesus was asking him to do that mattered. So often Jesus has excellent things He wants to do in and through us, but we are stuck looking at ourselves rather than Jesus calling us to move. John's ministry for the rest of his life was confirmed and enhanced because he was the one to baptize Jesus, and this one act of faithfulness opened countless doors for the Kingdom of God in the future.

So how about you? What has Jesus called you to do lately? Perhaps you don't feel called to act because you've forgotten what a Holy God Jesus is. Or maybe you don't think God can use you.

1. Look back at verse 17. Write down what God the Father said about Jesus, the Son.
2. What did it mean that God was saying that about Jesus?
3. If you have come to saving faith in Jesus, did you know that God the Father sees you as a beloved child in whom He is well pleased, not because of anything you've done, but because of what Jesus did for you on the cross? It's true. God is so well pleased with you. What does it mean to you that God the Father looks at you as a precious child in whom He delights?
4. How does this approval change the way you see yourself as someone who can be used by God?
5. What does it make you feel like to know God is in your corner?
6. Wrap up today's time of devotion by praying to God, your Heavenly Father, and thanking Him for His love for you.

Read the devotion below and answer the questions on page 19.

Is it hard for you to think of God as a loving father? Maybe it's because the concept is too abstract. Or maybe it's because we see too many examples all around us of parents who aren't that loving. Regardless of what we think, the truth is that God is, in fact, a loving Father. The Bible helps us see this over and over again.

One of the most powerful ways in which we see this is in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. While this may be a familiar passage to you, take the time to read Luke 15:11-32. Jesus often taught in stories or parables to give the people listening something familiar and easy to digest, but yet still full of truth. Read the story and think about what Jesus is trying to teach us.

Too often we focus on the wrong aspect of this story. The story highlights a man with two sons, and one of the sons decides to leave home and claim his inheritance early. Often readers focus on the despair this son soon finds himself in, and his willingness to return home. The father welcomes him with open arms, and the son's wrong actions are forgotten when the focus then shifts to the other brother. The other brother is jealous of the attention his younger brother gets upon returning home.

Use the space below to write about which brother you relate best to and why? The brother who regrets his mistakes, or the brother who wants all the love for himself rather than others?

We often focus on the brothers while we forget about the real hero of the story: the father. It's easy for us to look past the actions of the father, but the actions of the father are the truth that Jesus was trying to convey! The father welcomed his lost son when he returned. He forgave his other son for his jealous heart, and he loved both regardless of their actions.

It's difficult to sometimes think about God as the father in the story because we don't think about our sinfulness in the way God does. We can't quite wrap our heads around just how bad our sin is. And when we come to faith in Christ, God the Father just wipes the guilt of that sin away. It's easy for us to forget what an unbelievable, life-changing, earth-shaking truth this is.

1. God is your loving father. You are His child. Take some time to think about all the good blessings God has filled your life with. Write them in the space below:

2. How has God been like the father in the parable in your life?

3. What does it mean to you that God is, in fact, your perfect, loving, Heavenly Father?

Thank God today that He seeks you out, just like the father in the parable, surrounding you with His love no matter what you may have done to let Him down.

Read today's devotion and answer the questions on page 21.

How confident are you that you breathe the best way possible? Breathing is a vital function of life, and yet it is something that no one ever "teaches" us how to do. The only time we focus on our breathing is when abnormalities occur. There is no point in which you take a class on how to breathe. It's just assumed that you know how to do it.

Let's ask the question again, how confident are you that you breathe the best way possible? If there was a better way to breathe, would you want to know?

Often in our spiritual lives, we can treat prayer like breathing. People spend time learning how to share their faith or defend their faith, but how many people spend time focusing on prayer?

During one of His most well-known sermons, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a guideline for the proper way to pray. Go ahead and read Matthew 6:6-13. What are

some of the things Jesus talks about as being important before we even think about the words to pray? Jot some of those principles below:

Jesus does something extraordinary when He gives us the opening line of the model prayer; He describes God as our Father in heaven. We don't have to ask special permission to go before the Lord, the creator of the world when we want to pray. We merely have to speak, and the being that holds the very fabric of this world together is waiting and listening to us! How cool is that?

Jesus also discusses items such as asking for our daily bread, forgiveness from our sins, and safety from temptation. These are all critical parts of prayer that we should incorporate daily according to Scripture. Was Jesus saying that our prayers that do not follow this model are bad? No way! He was just giving us a model that teaches us how to approach God with our concerns.

Let's ask the question one more time: how good are you at breathing?

Our breath is given to us praise the Lord, and what better way to praise God than by speaking to Him by following His model prayer?

Think about what you just read and answer the questions below:

1. Have you ever thought that you get to approach God in conversation? This should rock our world a bit, shouldn't it? How does Jesus say that we are to address God?
2. What does this say about the role God wants to play in your life?
3. What does a typical prayer look like between you and God? How is it similar/different than the prayer in Matthew?
4. Think back to times when you have seen God answer a prayer of yours. How did that make you feel knowing God was listening?
5. What changes will you make to your own prayer life to follow the example that Jesus gives us in His model prayer?

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WEEK
ONE

six

Read today's devotion below and write out a prayer to God.

Here we are at the end of our first week of devotions. We've talked about how we know God through love, God's willingness to love and forgive like the father of the prodigal son, and even how we can best communicate with God. More than anything, we've looked at God's role as your Heavenly Father. *I Can Only Imagine* was about the relationship between Bart and his father. As you've thought this week about your relationship with your Heavenly Father, hopefully, you've come to understand God in new and meaningful ways.

Here's a truth that should humble us as believers when we understand how loved we are by God: before the foundations of the world were made God knew He wanted to spend forever with you. If you don't believe that, look at Ephesians 1:4-6. God had a plan for your life before you were even a thought to humanity, and that plan involved being with Him. So, what does that mean for you?

Look again at verse 6. We have one purpose in our lives, and that is to praise the one who adopted us when we didn't deserve it. When we lose sight of this purpose, we fall quickly into the trap of sin and focus on ourselves. We can believe our future is designed to make us great lawyers, politicians, athletes, or business professionals. This was never the purpose of our future; our future was designed to be with the God, the one who chose us over everything else.

As you head into a day of rest and reflection, think about your future. Will your future bring glory to God, or will it feature you as the main star? Take a moment to write out a prayer below asking God to take your future for His glory and to shape it into what best serves His good and perfect will for your life.

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WEEK
ONE

seven

TODAY IS A DAY FOR YOU TO REST FROM READING YOUR DAILY DEVOTIONS, BUT NOT FROM MEETING WITH GOD.

If you want, reflect on some of what you have learned. Look back and identify one day in the week that stood out to you. What was it that was so meaningful?

As you go throughout your day, think about what it means that you have God as a good, perfect, and loving Father. How does that change the way you see God and the world around you? Reflect on this truth today.