THE HEART OF MAN

Participant’s Guide
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Resources and Recommended Reading
The journey of The Heart of Man that you are being invited to is not for the faint of heart. Being honest with yourself takes profound bravery, and sharing your darkness with others can be terrifying. We encourage you to be brave. Be courageous. Healing, hope, and power are waiting for you . . .
INTRODUCTION

Welcome fellow traveler!

Many of you who have seen *The Heart of Man* have been touched to the core. Perhaps it has helped you see yourself accurately for the first time—the way that God sees you. Even more importantly, you have also now discovered a more wonderful and accurate picture of God, the Father. For all of us, that experience and conviction of the depth of the Father’s love may be a key to forever changing our relationship with Him.

This freedom is for us.

All of us.

But even at the beginning of this journey, we have to be intently discerning. For it is possible for truth to move us and still not free us.

Even though we’ve been through a compelling experience, offering us incredible hope, this new insight can get snatched away before we have a chance to internalize it. Each of us has a lens through which we see God and truth. Some lenses are more “sight-giving” than others.

If we see God through a lens of our shame, we will remain unconvinced that He is good, powerful, present, willing and utterly loving. We may hedge our bets and guard our
hearts because it may all feel too good to be true. For we have been let down too many times. Too often we bought into something that promised hope and never delivered.

Seeing God through a moralistic lens could compel you to respond to this film by jumping in with both feet, the way you would a New Year’s exercise resolution.

“I must get to work on my shame.”

“I need to be better at loving God.”

“Now that I see how much God loves me, I need to be better at saying no to temptations.”

It’s a trap. A trap of your own design. And it will work even less well than the last twenty-seven self-improvement projects you put yourself through.

It would be hugely valuable for each of us to stop here and give an unhurried, honest response to these questions: “Do I come away from this film wanting to promise God I will do something more or better? Or, do I think I am buried so deep that I can’t claw my way out of this hole?”

You will certainly not be alone if you answered yes to either question. But a “yes” answer can also sometimes cripple you or leave you pretending you’re okay.

Then striving.

Then despairing.
Then hiding.

Then giving yourself permission to act out again.

There is another way.

This journey starts with community. Only in community can we try out such daring trust. It is time for a clumsily real but increasingly authentic community to set the table in this wild land.
“Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit? 
To be out of your sight? 
If I climb to the sky, you’re there . . .
If I flew on morning’s wings to the far western horizon, 
You’d find me in a minute—
you’re already there waiting.”

— An Ancient Poetic Text of David
This guide is designed for both groups and individuals. If you are going on this journey with a group, we strongly suggest watching *The Heart of Man* together as your first meeting. Even if you have already seen the film separately, this can lay a powerful foundation for the rest of your time together.

This guide will take you through six Scenes, leading you through the film’s story and, if you let it, your own. Each Scene will have five questions for you to consider and wrestle with. We encourage you to spend time answering these questions for yourself throughout the week. Try to be as honest as you can, even if you struggle to be self-disclosing. *Remember that there are many addictions beyond sexual struggles, and some are less obvious than others—this guide is designed to help bring freedom from both internal and external addictions.* When you get together as a group, read through the Scenes out loud and then answer the questions as they come—this will help remind you of the context of each question.

Authentic community is absolutely essential to begin breaking our painful, destructive patterns, so whether you are experiencing this journey individually or with a group, make sure to share with others what you are learning about
yourself. We all have a deep, God-given longing for relationships where we feel safe, known, and loved. If we do not trust anyone enough to let them into our pain, we will continue hiding, alone and afraid to be known. Our temptations and struggles fester and grow in the darkness—it is only by bringing them into the light with others whom we trust that we can begin facing our pain and healing from our wounds.

This kind of community and trust takes great courage. The journey of *The Heart of Man* that you are being invited to is not for the faint of heart. Being honest with yourself takes profound bravery, and sharing your darkness with others can be terrifying. We encourage you to be brave. Be courageous. Healing, hope, and power are waiting for you.
Scene 1

The Table

“There is a longing in the deepest parts of us to belong. The hope that there is a table somewhere, around which we might actually be comfortable in our own skin. We don’t have to hide. We don’t have to keep our secrets. There’s always been a community of relationship. We are designed for that.”
“When I am in the Father’s presence, I feel like I am at a banquet, where the table has been spread for me, and there has been such attention to detail put into every part of the meal. The true power of that meal is there is no fear in His eyes if I decide to get up and leave. Because there is always an open seat for me at His table.”  
—Tony Anderson
**QUESTION:**

*If the deepest part of us longs to belong, why do we struggle to find “a table” in most of our friendships or communities?*

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*The Heart of Man* shows us a good, trustworthy Father who stands at the head of the table, affirming, enjoying, and loving each one of us, no matter what season of life we are in. Family, friends, and newcomers to the community all sit together, some entering with others into hard places, others celebrating each other, and all enjoying a meal made with extravagant love. The depth and goodness of the relationships provide an atmosphere where pain and loss, grief and loneliness, do not carry the same power as they would in isolation. And healing is not just a theory, but an ongoing practice that takes place day in and day out.

The entire picture illustrates the care and creativity of committed friends who know they are loved, needed, and valued. Friends who know they are indispensable to each other. The strength of this community welcomes all members to come as they are, and stay as long as they like.
QUESTIONS:

When you imagine sitting at the Father’s table, how does it make you feel? Why?

What are the reasons we might leave the table?
An innate longing for this table, this sense of community, this place where we can be known and loved, has been woven into our very DNA! Dan Allender describes what this kind of environment, this kind of interaction with God, would be like in a shame-free world.

A SHAME-FREE WORLD

DAN ALLENDER

Try to imagine a shame-free world where there is no looking at oneself with judgment, where there is looking at the other with nothing but joy. Looking at your fellow man, your fellow woman, and your God and the world He created—all these relationships would be playful. Your day would be full—an investigation of stars, of cells, of trees. In the garden, everything would have been new and fresh and alive, and everything would have been connected to something else that one doesn’t know. There would be an accumulation of joy each and every day as you climbed the highest mountains and dived the deepest oceans. At the end of your play—in the cool of the day—God shows up. And he’s going to sit down with you, eager to hear what you’ve investigated, what you found, what kind of joy you discovered. It is sitting down with a really good brew, with a really good meal, having a conversation with a really good friend about the best things in life.
QUESTION:

Have you ever experienced this kind of freedom and acceptance, either in your relationship with God or with others? If so, what was it like?

A community like the one Allender describes allows us to experience a Father who doesn’t need us to fix ourselves up before coming into His presence.

What happened through Christ at the cross opened the door even more widely to freedom, strength, and safety with the Father. When we believe in Christ, we get to risk a life without masks, without hiding. His table is a place where you can be known deeply and don’t have to worry that the Father is ever offended by the real you. In fact, He cannot wait for your next conversation! Shauna Niequist describes what is so powerful about coming to the table.
COME TO THE TABLE

“We don’t come to the table to fight or to defend. We don’t come to prove or to conquer, to draw lines in the sand or to stir up trouble. We come to the table because our hunger brings us there. We come with a need, with fragility, with an admission of our humanity. The table is the great equalizer, the level playing field many of us have been looking everywhere for.

The table is the place where the doing stops, the trying stops, the masks are removed, and we allow ourselves to be nourished, like children. We allow someone else to meet our need. In a world that prides people on not having needs, on going longer and faster, on going without, on powering through, the table is a place of safety and rest and humanity, where we are allowed to be as fragile as we feel.”

— Shauna Niequist, Bread and Wine
The table is a place where there is no hiding, where we can share our brokenness with others. Some of us, tired and weary of isolation, discover we are being called by God to create such a community for ourselves and other like-hearted friends . . . maybe even someone you watched this movie with. Risking such vulnerability is the very best kind of terrifying. The alternative is staying hidden and unknown, perhaps pretending to those around you that you’re doing okay even though you’re in incredible pain. To feel and experience others’ love, we have to trust them enough to let them into our real selves. It takes great courage, but it is worth the risk.

We noticed something else very early on at this table. Not all of us are able to fully enjoy the meal. Sometimes we’re preoccupied and struggle to stay in the moment. Maybe that’s how it is for you, too. Half here and half in your own head . . . islands away.

But never the Father. He is always there, and He sees what no one else can. Even while He is blessing and enjoying everyone at the table, He understands that we are islands away, and He’s already planning how He will bring us back home.

This takes place at every table, in every community. Someone always hides in the midst of community, afraid to be known. The gifts of forgiveness, repentance and unconditional love are all available to everyone, at every meal. Yet our heads are elsewhere . . . lost in fantasy or intentional sin. Not even a great Father or His gracious welcome is enough to woo us away from that which remains hidden.
Have you ever been in a safe, healthy community and felt like you were still hiding or were afraid to be known?
QUESTIONS:

What did that look like for you?

What was keeping you from experiencing the moment?
In the opening scene, we see a character that we quickly understand is the Father in our story. He’s slashing His way through a jungle, trying to get somewhere, or to something. He has a sense of determination and relentlessness. For what? We don’t immediately know. This scene connects to the end of Act 2 as we again see the Father forging His way through the jungle—and it’s here that we realize he is heading towards the cave where His son has been taken captive, facing destruction. This is the same path that the Father started creating at the beginning of the film—before His son had even left. He’s been working on behalf of His son his entire life, to prepare the way back to unity and wholeness.
VIOLIN AS CHOICE

The inscription on the back of the violin is a Hebrew word, timshel, and the interpretation is ‘Thou Mayest’ from Steinbeck’s novel, East of Eden. The violin is this intimate and winsome expression of “choice” and “sonship.” In other words, the son had the choice to receive it from the Father, the choice to play with Him, to be present with Him — to develop melody over a lifetime with Him. The choice is always present, the symbol of our status as sons and daughters is always there.