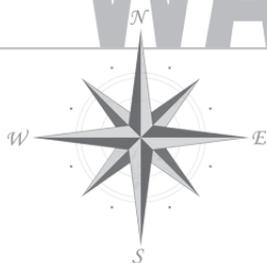


FINDING

5 Awakenings
to Your New Life

YOUR

WAY BACK



TO GOD

DAVE FERGUSON &
JON FERGUSON



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

SESSION 4

NOTE - This Material Is Copyright Protected.

This preview copy of the *Finding Your Way Back to God Participants Guide* has been made available by special permission from Multnomah Publishers to **COMMUNITY Small Group Participants only for the *Finding Your Way Back to God* series occurring in March 2015.**

No portion of this booklet maybe be shared, copied, or transmitted electronically unless it is being used in a **COMMUNITY Small Group discussion during the *Finding Your Way Back to God* series - March 2015.**

FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-673-4

eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-674-1

Copyright © 2015 by Dave Ferguson

Cover design by Mark D. Ford

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

MULTNOMAH and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Printed in the United States of America

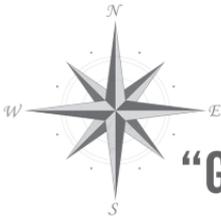
2015—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

Session 4



AWAKENING TO LOVE

“God loves me deeply after all.”

Session 4 Big Idea:

We experience the irresistible love of God in Jesus when we finally return home to our Father. The grace he offers to every one of us is something we can't find anywhere else. It's almost shocking. It's overwhelming. It is continually amazing. And it is what we truly long for and were made to experience. As we awaken to God's love in our lives, some of the choices that seemed impossible before gradually become possible. Trusting God through the ups and downs of life becomes possible. Becoming more like his Son, Jesus Christ, becomes possible—and our deepest desire. And there's more: Believing in his faithful care for us and those we love makes absolute sense, infusing our days with God's peace. Knowing that not only does he love us but he loves everyone in the world just as deeply compels us to share the good news of Jesus with others. That's the wonder of

God's deep love for you and me. It has the power to heal us, change us, energize our hopes and dreams, and motivate us to serve him with our whole lives. So from this day forward, live boldly in his love. Never let doubt and discouragement take away what you know to be true!

If possible, please read chapters 12 and 13 of *Finding Your Way Back to God* before participating in session 4.

OPTIONAL ICEBREAKER

Tell about the first time you had a crush on someone. How did you express your feelings? How did the other person react?

OPENING THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Identify a time when you strongly felt the love of God toward you. What was your reaction?

VIDEO DISCUSSION

Watch video 4 on the *Finding Your Way Back to God* DVD, then discuss the following questions.

2. How did the people interviewed in the video struggle with doubt that God really loved them?

3. What did you learn from Dave and Jon about the new identity that the father in Jesus's parable gave to the son?

BIBLE DISCUSSION

Read Luke 15:20–24, the portion of Jesus's story where we observe the father's over-the-top expression of love for his son.

²⁰While [the son] 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.

²¹The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

²²But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

4. Identify as many different signs of the father's love as you can find in these verses.

5. What does the father's reaction toward his son tell you about God's attitude toward you when you repent and turn to him?

LIFE APPLICATION DISCUSSION

6. Tell about a way in which shame or guilt feelings have lingered in you even after you knew that you were forgiven and accepted by God. How has that leftover feeling of unworthiness affected your life?

7. If we have turned to God in repentance and received his acceptance, how can we help each other learn to accept our new identity as fully loved children of God?

8. Once we have accepted our identity as God's children, what are some ways in which our lives can be different and more fulfilling?

OPTIONAL PERSONAL DECISION TIME

No, you haven't earned God's love because you've performed so well in life or are such a great all-around person. But God offers his love to you anyway. It is a gift, boundless and free. May you

never lose your wonder at God's love. And yet, may you learn to adjust your mind-set so that you can begin to live in the reality of the love that is yours.

Ask yourself these questions:

What are the kinds of situations that trigger your doubts about God's love for you?

When those situations arise, what Bible verse could you use to remind yourself of God's free gift of love to you? Write that verse here and decide that you will recall it whenever you need to hear God's voice of affirmation again.

EXPANDED BIBLE DISCUSSION

Read 1 John 3:1, a verse revealing that people have always needed some convincing that God's love is real—because it is so amazing.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

What do you think it is about becoming a child of God that is evidently so hard for people to accept?

Read Romans 8:31–39 on the invincible love of God toward us in Christ.

³¹If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He 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? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who

then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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.

2. Identify words or phrases from this passage revealing that God’s love is *effective*, eliminating every last bit of condemnation. (See verses 31–34.)

AFTER THE SESSION

Sometime after participating in session 4, find some quiet time to spend alone in a peaceful place with Scripture, your own thoughts, and prayer.

Read the following Scripture passage (Ephesians 3:14–19):

¹⁴I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Underline one or more lines in the above passage that mean the most to you.

Think about these questions: *How can I learn to grasp the vast dimensions of God's love for me in Jesus? How can I learn, not to take it for granted, but to accept it as real and to live in it?*

Pray the following prayer:

**God, if you are real,
make yourself real to me.
Awaken in me the awareness
that I am your unconditionally loved child.**



Thank God for his love, and ask him for the ability over time to gain a better sense of his love and a better sense of your identity in him by grace.

Session 4

Awakening to Love

Objective: To help participants choose to live boldly in God's love, never letting doubt and discouragement take away what they know to be true.

What you need for this session:

- At least one copy of the book *Finding Your Way Back to God* to refer to if needed
- The *Finding Your Way Back to God* DVD
- A DVD player and a screen on which the whole group can watch video 4
- Bibles for yourself and the other participants
- (optional) Index cards or slips of paper
- (optional) Pens or pencils

- (optional) A Bible concordance or similar Bible reference tool

OPTIONAL ICEBREAKER

You may wish to use this icebreaker to warm up the group for the session. Try to keep the discussion from embarrassing anyone. Keep the conversation light.

OPENING THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: Hopefully, in response to this question, you will get some stories in which participants testify to how they felt overwhelmed by God's love. If not, tell a story from your own life in which you could hardly believe it was true that God loved you so much.

VIDEO DISCUSSION

Questions 2 and 3: After playing the video, use these questions to help group members react to what they saw.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

Questions 4 and 5: If you want to expand on the meaning of the robe, the ring, and the sandals, see chapter 13 of *Finding*

Your Way Back to God. The key point is that, just as the father in the story shared his own identity with his son, so God shares his identity with us. In other words, when we return to him, we belong to him and we share in his blessings.

LIFE APPLICATION DISCUSSION

Questions 6 to 8: The message of this session is simple: “You are loved. So live like it!” In this life application discussion, help group members move toward acceptance of their new identity as beloved sons and daughters of the heavenly Father.

OPTIONAL PERSONAL DECISION TIME

Use this as a concluding activity if you have time and want the group members to make a personal response to the discussion you’ve been having.

Hand out index cards or slips of paper, along with pencils or pens, for participants to write the Bible verse each has chosen. Invite the group members to scatter to different spots in your meeting area for personal reflection on the verses they want to use to help them live in—and live out of—God’s love. Meanwhile, you may wish to have a Bible reference tool such as a concordance on hand to help group members identify a verse to memorize. (You could also have a computer logged on to an online Bible search tool.) If nothing else, group members may

want to use 1 John 3:1: “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

Just as Jesus used the Word of God to help him fight back against the devil's temptations (see Matthew 4:1–11), so you and your fellow group members can use Scripture promises to help you avoid the temptation to reject or downplay the love of God toward you.

EXPANDED BIBLE DISCUSSION

If you have time in the session to discuss more of the Bible, use one or both of the passages in this expanded material. (You may wish to insert these questions following the discussion of Luke 15:20–24 in questions four and five above.)

Expanded question 1: Deep down, we all know that we are sinners who have done nothing to earn God's grace. Adoption as his child is a continual wonder!

Expanded questions 2 to 4: Your group members may have been disappointed before by people loving them but eventually taking that love away. Help them to see that God's love is different. It transforms us and, through faith in Christ, is ours forever.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lead in prayer, praising God for his overwhelming love and asking him to help all the group members live in his love, with gratitude and boldness, from this day forward.

PREVIEW OF THE NEXT SESSION

Encourage the group members to be present for the final session, and tell them that it gives them practical ways to live out their new life as children of God.