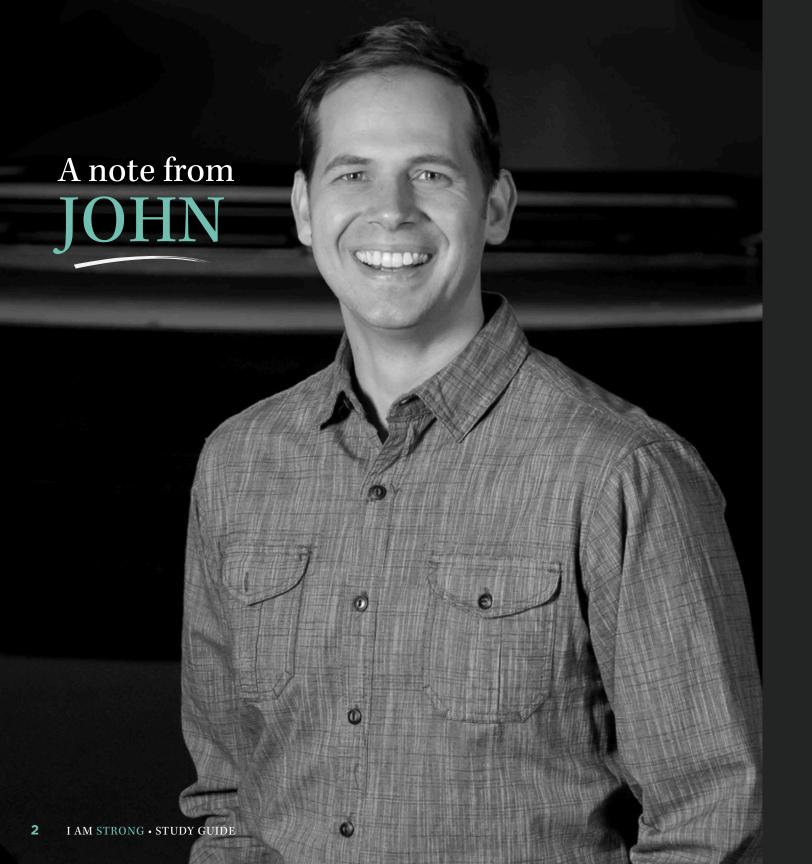
STUDY GUIDE

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE BOOK

I Am STRONG

FINDING GOD'S PEACE AND STRENGTH
IN LIFE'S DARKEST MOMENTS

JOHN S. DICKERSON



I'm so happy you are seeking God's strength and answers for the hurt and pain in your life. This guide is a companion to the book, I Am Strong: Finding God's Peace and Strength in Life's Darkest Moments. It will reference chapters and page numbers from the book.

We've set up this Study Guide so you can use it on your own, or you can use the Study Guide as a small group, discussing answers to the questions aloud. The next pages offer tips for either use.

Whether alone with God or gathered in a group, this Study Guide asks questions that will help you internalize and process the deep spiritual truths of *I Am Strong*. My prayer for you is that this guide helps you experience the fullest and longest lasting life change possible.

Together with you,

John S. Dickerson

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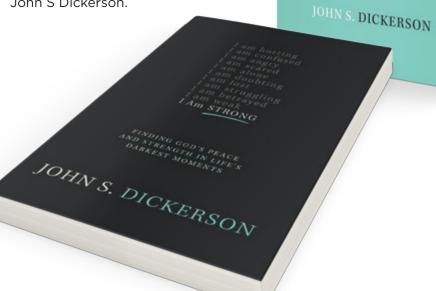
I Am Strong study guide by John S Dickerson

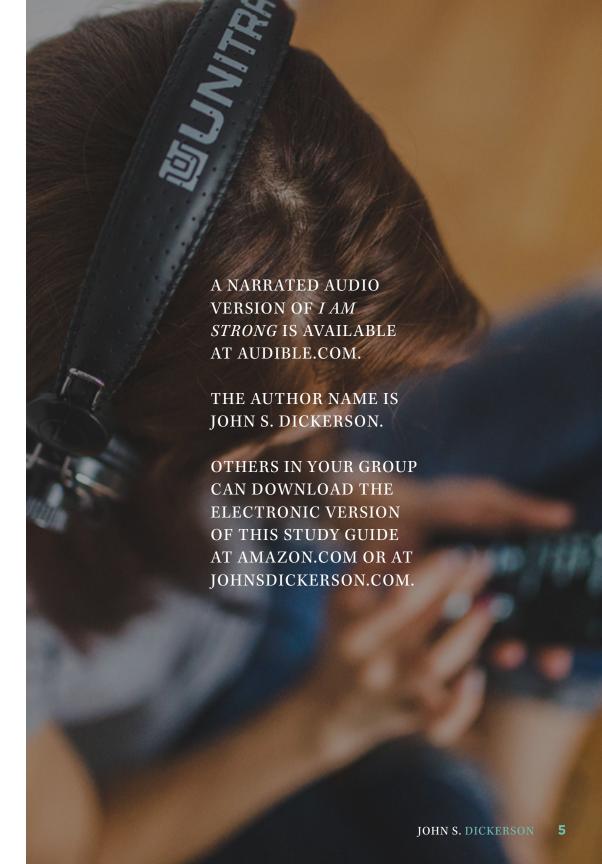
If you don't have a copy of the book, *I Am Strong: Finding God's Peace and Strength in Life's Darkest Moments,* by John S. Dickerson, you can get it anywhere books are sold. The publisher is Zondervan.

hardcopy ISBN 978-0-310-34191-8.

e-reader ISBN 978-0-310-34192-5.

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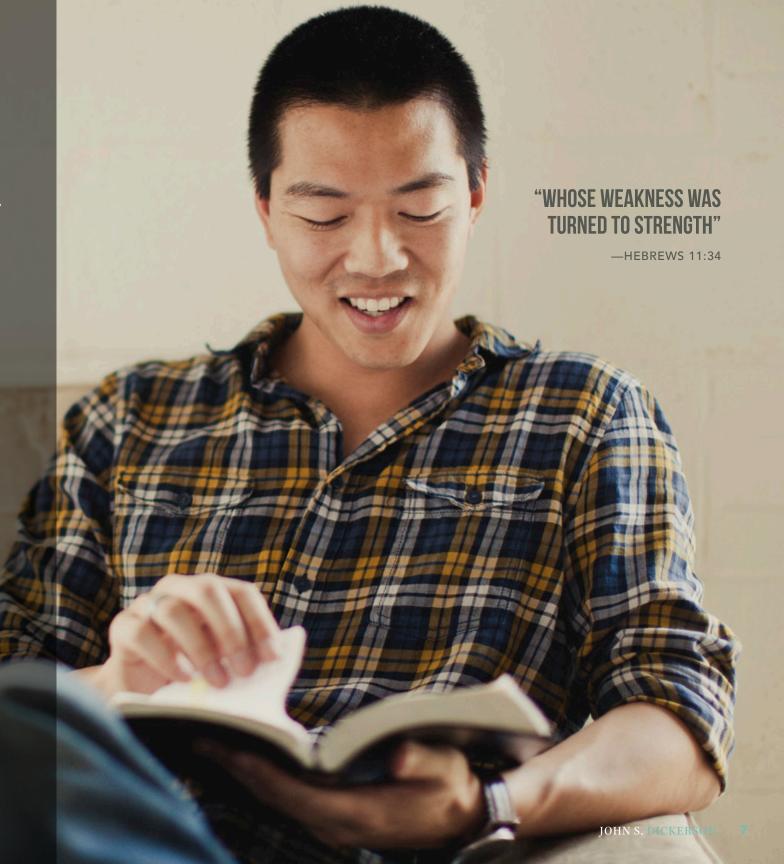
HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE AS AN INDIVIDUAL, FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION.

I have benefited greatly from using study guides like this for personal study. I've found that I get the maximum growth out of a study like this when I write out my answers to the questions. If you have a PDF or electronic version, you might consider printing the pages or creating a note on your phone or computer, so you can write and revisit your answers. Or, you can order a professionally printed copy of this book at Amazon.com (Search for:

I Am Strong study guide by John S Dickerson).

My prayer for you is that you meet Christ in new and life-changing ways in this study. In Appendix 3 of the *I Am Strong* book you will find ways to contact and keep in touch with me. Please let me know how this study helps you grow. I am praying for you and cheering you along.





HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE FOR A SMALL GROUP STUDY.



small group could be you and a friend (two people total), or it can be as many as a dozen or more. Most small groups find it helpful to meet on a weekly basis, at the same time, every week. You could have a Small Group at your workplace, a coffee shop, a living room, just about anywhere.

Small groups often choose to read the Introduction and Chapter 1 before the first meeting.

Then, during the first meeting, they simply read the Discussion Questions aloud, and folks can answer as they feel comfortable (after you've gotten to know each other a bit).

Allow the discussion to grow naturally. It helps to decide as a group if things shared in the group should be confidential. Also, establish a ground rule to keep comments about others encouraging and uplifting.

Once you've answered most or all of the questions, it can be beneficial to pray aloud for each other—again, as you are comfortable. As you depart from Week 1, agree to read the next two chapters (2 & 3) of the *I Am Strong* book. Then, meet the next week to discuss Chapters 2 & 3. Depart that week's discussion time to go read Chapters 4 & 5. And so forth.

Some groups meet at intervals other than weekly—for example, every-other-week. We encourage you to meet wherever and whenever works best for you

all as a group! If you have more than a few people in your group, it may help to choose one of the Schedules below, and write down the actual dates you will meet for each week (considering holidays, travel, etc.)

Here are some Schedules to help you pace which chapters to read each week, depending on how many weeks you want your group to meet. This is not a race, so take your time and adjust your rhythm so that the material is sinking in and absorbing. That pace differs for different groups and different seasons of healing.

FOR A 6-WEEK STUDY

Week 1: read & discuss Introduction & Chapters 1, 2 & 3

Week 2: read & discuss Chapters 4, 5 & 6

Week 3: read & discuss Chapters 7, 8 & 9

Week 4: read & discuss Chapters 10, 11, 12 & 13

Week 5: read & discuss Chapters 14 & 15

Week 6: read & discuss Chapters 16, 17, Afterword & Appendix 3: "Tools for the Road" GOD DESIGNED
YOU FOR MORE
THAN AN ENDLESS,
FRUSTRATING
SEARCH. HE
DESIGNED YOU TO
FIND HOPE.



FOR AN 8-WEEK STUDY (RECOMMENDED)

Week 1: read & discuss Introduction & Chapter 1

Week 2: read & discuss Chapters 2 & 3

Week 3: read & discuss Chapters 4, 5 & 6

Week 4: read & discuss Chapters 7 & 8

Week 5: read & discuss Chapters 9, 10 & 11

Week 6: read & discuss Chapters 12 & 13

Week 7: read & discuss Chapters 14 & 15

Week 8: read & discuss Chapters 16, 17, Afterword & Appendix 3:

"Tools for the Road"

FOR A 10-WEEK STUDY

Week 1: read & discuss Introduction & Chapter 1

Week 2: read & discuss Chapters 2 & 3

Week 3: read & discuss Chapters 4 & 5

Week 4: read & discuss Chapter 6

Week 5: read & discuss Chapters 7 & 8

Week 6: read & discuss Chapter 9

Week 7: read & discuss Chapters 10 & 11

Week 8: read & discuss Chapters 12 & 13

Week 9: read & discuss Chapters 14 & 15

Week 10: read & discuss Chapters 16, 17, Afterword & Appendix 3:

"Tools for the Road"

FOR A 12-WEEK STUDY

Week 1: read & discuss Introduction & Chapter 1

Week 2: read & discuss Chapters 2 & 3

Week 3: read & discuss Chapters 4 & 5

Week 4: read & discuss Chapter 6

Week 5: read & discuss Chapters 7 & 8

Week 6: read & discuss Chapter 9

Week 7: read & discuss Chapters 10 & 11

Week 8: read & discuss Chapters 12 & 13

Week 9: read & discuss Chapter 14

Week 10: read & discuss Chapter 15

Week 11: read & discuss Chapters 16 &17

Week 12: read & discuss Afterword & Appendix 3:

"Tools for the Road"

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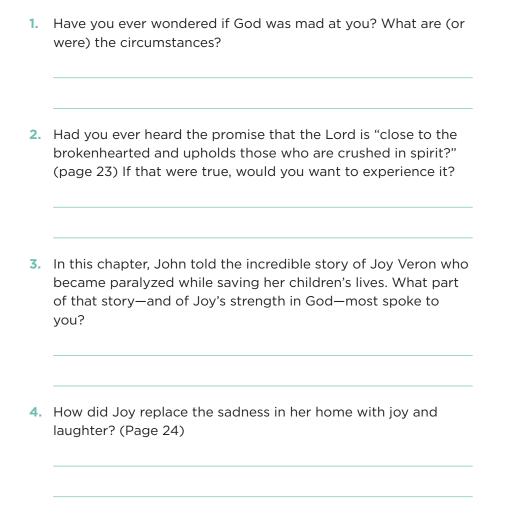


1.	John shares some things that people do to find hope (pages 16-17). Can you relate to any of these? Have they helped in your search for hope?
2.	We make great sacrifices and travel great distances to find hope. Can you share how far you went to find hope to ease your suffering? How long has your journey been? What was the outcome?
3.	If you're comfortable, share an area of your life where you could use hope, strength or healing.
4.	Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." What do you think of that?
5.	What is the "Abundant Life" that Jesus gives?
6.	Are you skeptical that God can give you hope through your current struggles or pain? If so, that's okay. If you're comfortable, write down or share how you feel about the idea of God's strength and power blossoming through the broken parts of your life.

CHAPTER 1

LIVING PROOF OF HEAVEN'S STRENGTH

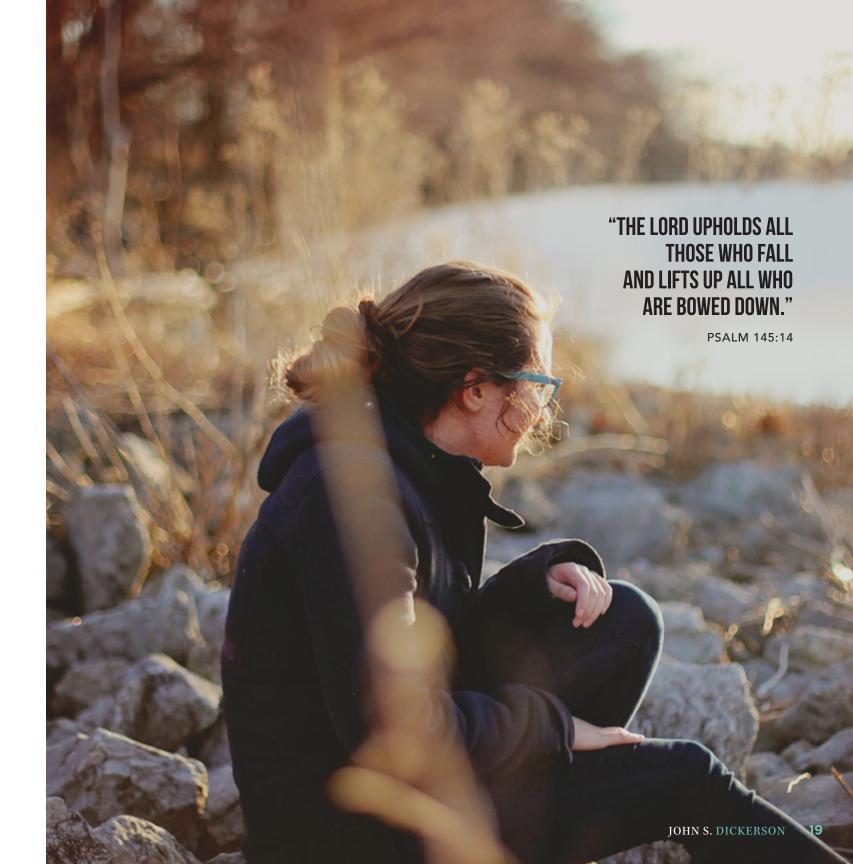
No matter if your struggles are past, present or building on the horizon—your Heavenly Father wants to give you a front row seat as He works good in the midst of your difficulty. He is a God who "gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. (Isiah 40:29)"





	Strength +	Weakness.
	Strength +	Weakness >
8.	What is the best combination of strength a between God and man? (Page 26)	and weakness
	hospital beds, do you think you could atter	npt it?
7.	If Joy Veron could invite God like this, from	
6.	Joy Veron said, "It wasn't until I welcomed us through something that our family that we began to ? from Page 29). Do you think that was easy ever thought about "welcoming God to ble your difficulty?	was so difficult for " (Fill in the blanks for her? Have you
.	God in their lives? (Pages 27-28)	armedsh the power of
Э.	How did Joy and other "Strong Sufferers" (unieash the power c

9.	If this claim is true, what weakness or hurt in your life could be combined with God's strength to be greater than a pain-free life?
10.	Can you think of a way to express that equation in your own life and words?

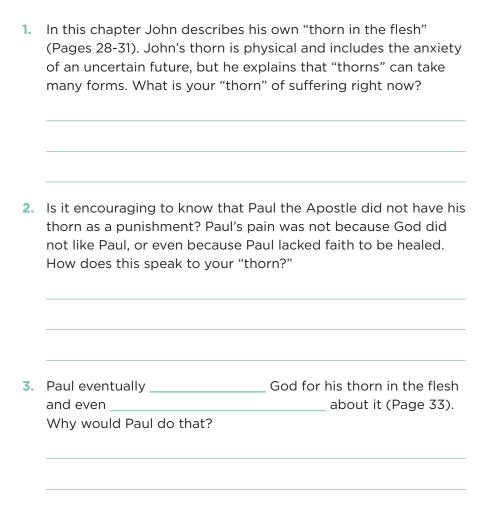


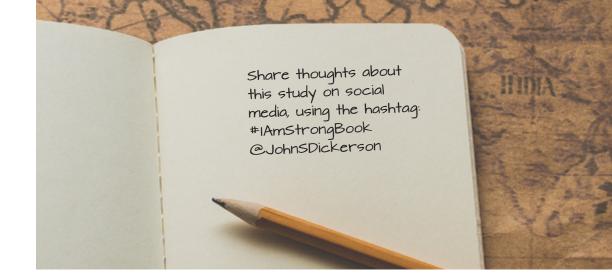
CHAPTER 2

THORNS IN OUR FLESH

It is normal to wonder in "thorn in the flesh" moments of agony, if God is good and has good plans, then why do I have to endure this?







4. How do you feel when you read, "It is normal to wonder in

	n in the flesh' moments of agony. If God is good and has I plans, then why do I have to endure this?" (Page 34)
suffe	ages 35 and 36, we read questions asked by those ring? Which questions are you asking right now? What tions would you add to this list?
hell." tailor	describes the anxiety of his thorn as a "custom tailored In what ways does your suffering feel like a "custom red hell?" Will you take a moment to review the short on that begins at the bottom of page 37?

7. Do you agree that "problem free Christianity" is a myth? If "problem free Christianity" were true, then our problems would mean that God is not truly good. Have you ever felt that way? To further resolve the "myth of problem free Christianity," read the bonus section titled "Favored Sufferers" on page 205.

8. What does God want to give you through your thorn? (pages 37 and 39)



CHAPTER 3

PRISONS OF PAIN, CHAMBERS OF STRENGTH

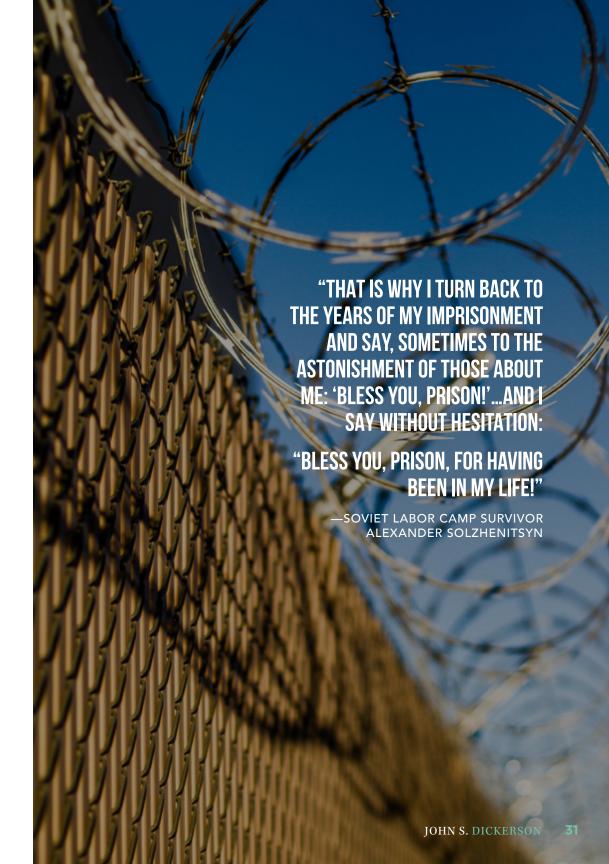


1. John started this chapter by visualizing our thorns as prisons (page 40). Take a moment to draw your prison in the space below. Feel free to use words, pictures or anything else.

- 2. Take a moment to invite God into your prison of pain. Visualize God entering in with you.
- **3.** If you're comfortable, share some of the characteristics of your prison.
- 4. In what ways does your prison confine or limit your life?
- 5. On page 41, John describes five gifts God offers in our prisons of pain. Re-read these gifts and visualize them in your prison. (You can add these gifts to your drawing.)
- 6. Which one of these gifts—if you could have one immediately—would you pick first?
- 7. Did you know that God wants to visit you in your prison to sustain you, and ultimately to break you out?

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@JohnSDickerson

8.	Paul said he was overwhelmed with joy despite all his troubles. Fill in the blanks and find out why (bottom of page 42). "Paul experienced a joy not or by his surroundings or circumstances."
9.	What did Paul's thorn in the flesh accomplish for millions of people? (page 43)
10.	In his prison, Paul could not see how dramatically God would use his "thorn," but he chose to believe. Take a moment to dream out loud about how God might desire to use your "thorn" to help others.
11.	On page 43 we read, "If your prison causes you to doubt that God loves you or delights in you, remind yourself that God's often end up in
	prison in this life." Have you ever thought about this? Do you find this encouraging? Why or why not?
12.	Chapter 3 ends with some good news. "A single one of these gifts can bring new joy into your suffering and struggle. Together, they transform your prison into a private chamber of
	,, and
13.	Will you continue on the journey to learn how your prison can be transformed into a private chamber of answers, hope, strength and purpose?



CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN IN THE UNIVERSE

There's a strength, unlike any other strength, in the boldfaced, carefree confidence of an innocent child thriving under the safety of caring parents.

1.	In this chapter John tells the story of taking his young son to the Emergency Room and having to hold him down against his will, for his own good. Can you relate to the experience of Jack in the emergency room? (Pages 40-52) In what ways has life pinned you down, poked and prodded you?
2.	Re-read pages 51 and 52. John (the author) loves his son, but he had to act in a way that his son could not understand. Does this true story offer some insights into how God can be good, can be "with you," and can be "for you," even in the midst of your suffering?
3.	Have you ever felt punished, betrayed, or abandoned by God? Do you think your Heavenly Father cares about you and is on your side? Why or why not?
4.	Do you believe God can be trusted with your life, your loved ones, your future? Please share honestly. It's okay if you have feelings of doubt or unanswered questions.



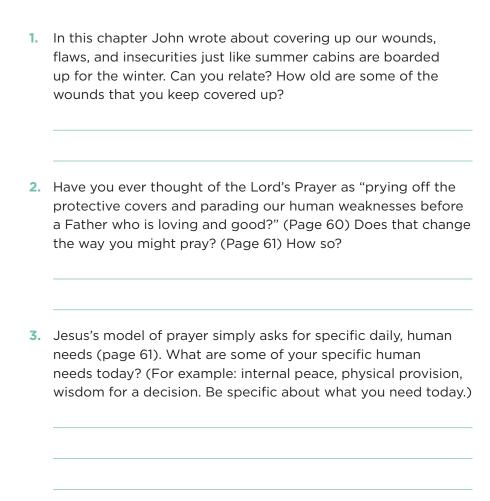
5.	Fill in these blanks from page 52:
	"God wants you to know this in your pain: First, you by your heavenly Father, despite
	what you may feel. And also, even when it feels as though God has abandoned you or is torturing you, He is actually still you, you, and feeling for you—more
	than you could ever understand."
6.	What does John mean when he writes that, "God is repurposing these temporary pains for our eternal good"? (Page 52)
7.	How will we become "mighty oaks" that stand sturdy through the storms of life? (Page 53)
8.	Page 55 includes a prayer you can pray. Take a moment to pray it aloud now.
9.	Which lines in that prayer most affect your emotions, and why?

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10.	Jesus's self-identify was his "son" relationship to God the Father. He defined Himself by this more than by the people around Him or His circumstances. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of your self-identity is presently defined by your Heavenly Father?
11.	Re-read the final paragraphs on page 57. Will you continue on the journey of discovering God as this good and trustworthy Father?









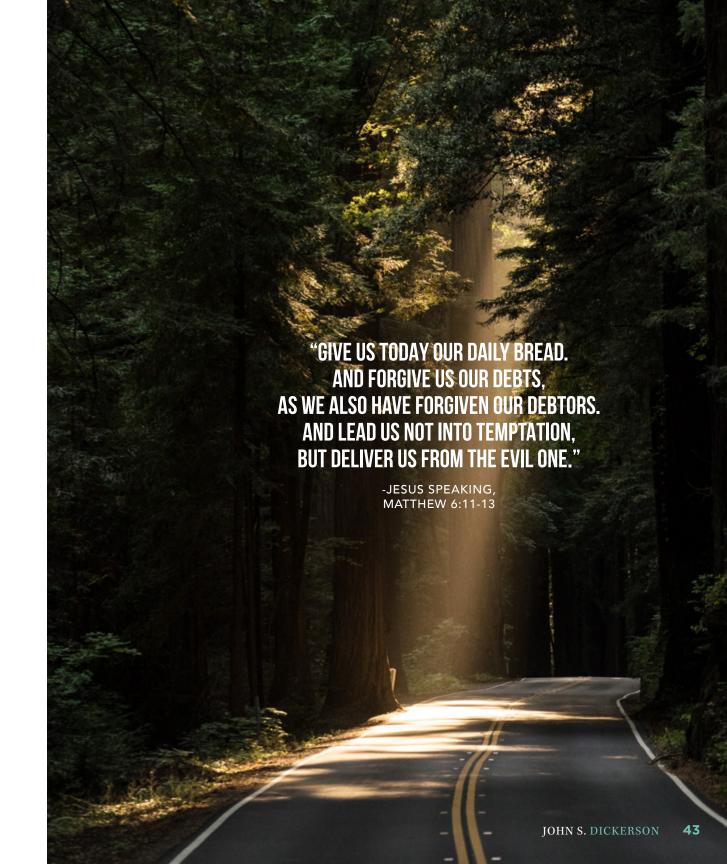
4. On page 64, John writes "When you feel pinned down by God, you can know that He actually wants to help you." Just as John had to hold down his injured dog, Casey, to help her with her paw, sometimes God pins us down to help us. Can you share a time in your life when you felt pinned down by God?

5. Sometimes we can look back and see how God was helping us. Other times we are still pinned in pain, and we have to trust that God has our best in mind. Which applies to you today?

6. When was the last time you asked for healing or relief from grief?

7. When was the last time you asked for strength to follow God and remain faithful to Him in the midst of your suffering?

8.	Have you asked Him to be your comforter, friend, strength and companion in your grief? (Page 65)
9.	John told a story of closing car doors and then expressing his hidden inner feelings to his wife, in private. Share a story or time when you similarly shared a deeper part of you with a trusted friend. Have you ever thought of inviting God into your inner circle?
10.	Make a list of the greatest needs in your life now.
11.	Bring those to the Lord now specifically with boldness and confidence. "He is eager to hear your needs and supply His strength in the grit and groans of your weakness."

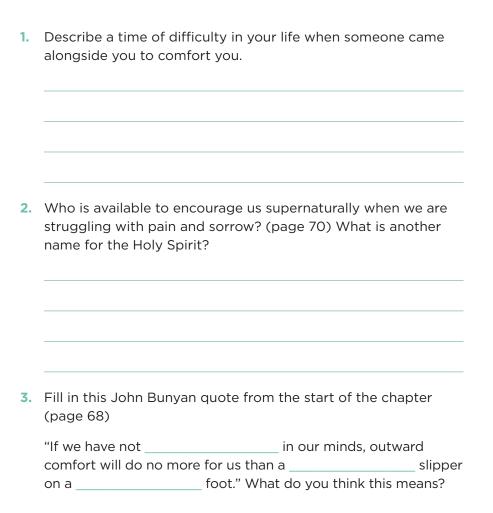




WHEN YOU HURT

God's Spirit is with the Christian believer in every prison, elevator, airplane, bedroom, waiting room, in every moment of difficulty.



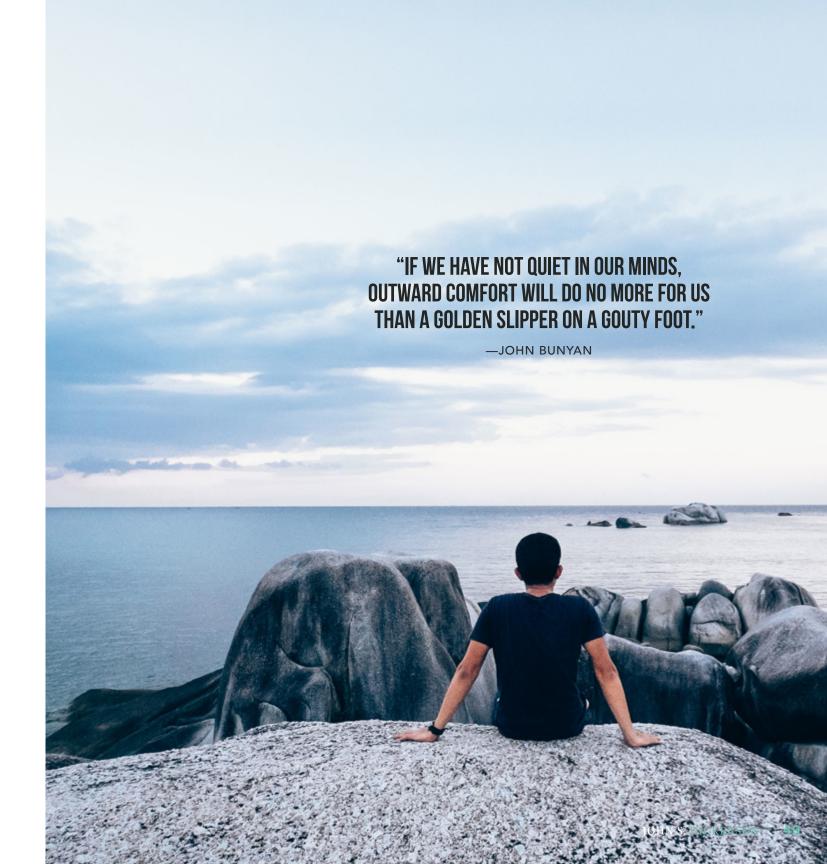




How would you describe your inner peace versus your outer peace? (page 71-74)
If you could only have one (peaceful circumstance without
inner peace—or—internal peace even when circumstances are not peaceful), which one would you choose and why?

6.	In the past, have you most sought your peace to come from the outside-in, or from the inside-out?
7.	John writes about the presence of the living God with him as he wept over the loss of his unborn child (page 74-76). Can you recall a place or a time when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit? Is His presence something you are longing for right now?

8. This chapter begins with a description of the Holy Spirit. Do you believe the Holy Spirit is in your life? You can invite the Spirit of God to draw near to you. If you seek this, pray in Jesus's name, asking for the Spirit of God to be your Counselor, Comforter and Guide.





1.	John begins Chapter 7 with two questions (page 79).
	"If God is a good Creator, then why do I have suffering in my life?
	"If God really loves me, then why do I have weakness and pain at all?"
2.	Have you ever wondered anything along these lines? If so, when and why?
3.	God's word to us, the Bible, begins with a story explaining that our world is contaminated, broken and imperfect. Our bodies, relationships and natures are infected. While creation still contains much beauty and warmth, the entire system has been contaminated by evil. In what ways has this contamination touched you?
4.	Had you ever thought of the world we live in as good but also contaminated? Out of 1,189 chapters in the whole Bible, God explains this contamination at the outset, in the third chapter (Genesis 3). Had you ever thought of the world this way, as it relates to our sickness? How about as it relates to death, loss and broken relationships?

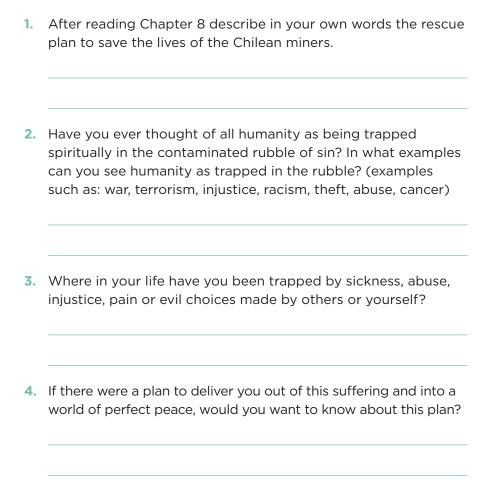
5.	John used a true story from Rocky Flats in Colorado to visualize contamination that is pervasive and deadly, yet goes unnoticed by most people. What about this illustration (Rocky Flats) most helps you understand the pervasive, deadly, contamination of spiritual evil on planet earth?
5.	One writer described the present state of humanity as "a glorious ruin." "Glorious" because the echoes of God are still seen and felt, but "ruin" because of the infection of evil at every level. What are the implications in your life, of living in a "glorious ruin" as it relates to your health, your emotions, your relationships?
7.	Why is there so much sickness, starvation, and suffering in our world? When did it all start? Do you think God desires or wants the world to be broken like this?
3.	Do you think there is a connection between evil and suffering?
9.	Fill in these blanks (page 84): "God did not build a world. He built a world—which evil infected when humans invited evil in."
О.	"Trace them back far enough, and the thorns in each of our lives find their roots in this original infection of sin brought into God's creation by Satan and by our human ancestors." How does that truth affect your view of God in your suffering?

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11. If you labored to create a perfect masterpiece, how would you feel if it became broken and polluted? How do you suspect God feels about His creation? 12. This chapter ends with the idea that God has not abandoned us in this broken state of disrepair. Will you explore what God is doing to repair the brokenness by reading the next chapter?









5.	Fill in these blanks (page 90):	"For God so loved the world that
	he gave his one and only	that whoever believes in him
	shall not perish but have	

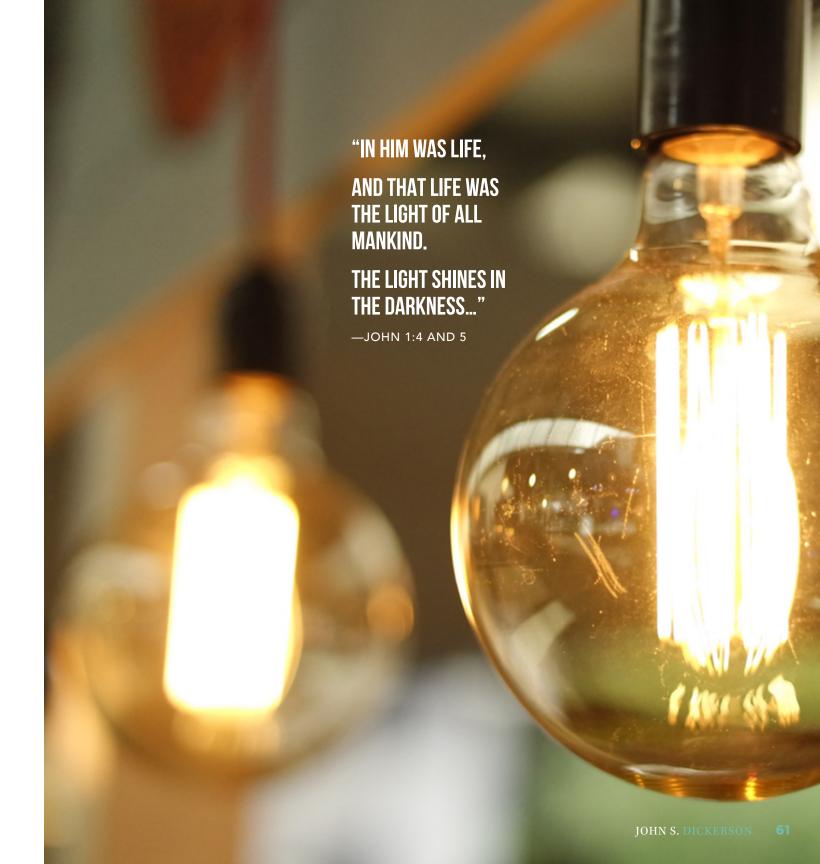
- 6. Imagine yourself as one of those 33 trapped miners, trapped underground in the rubble. Would you prefer that rescuers drop down supplies to help sustain you, or provide a way of escape entirely out of the rubble?
- 7. Had you ever thought of Jesus as God, inserting Himself into humanity to bring both of those: supplies to sustain us and a way of escape in heaven?
- 8. Most rescue tunnels are narrow. Jesus describes belief in Him as the only way out of this contaminated world and into eternal life. Have you ever considered that being rescued requires us to commit and trust the instructions of the rescuer? Have you ever committed to trust Jesus' instructions about your rescue?

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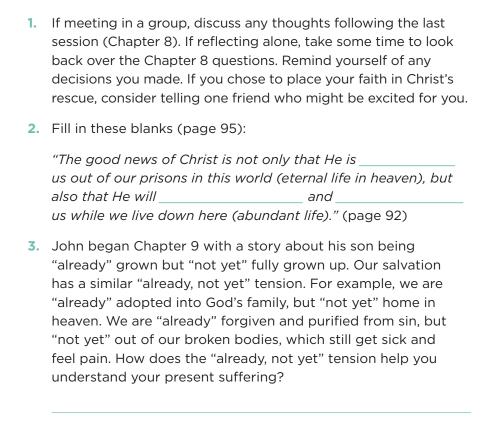
- **9.** Take a moment to re-read God's rescue plan on pages 87-90.
- 10. Just as the Chilean miners needed to decide whether or not they would step into the rescue capsule, we each have a choice before us? Which of the two options on page 89 do you choose?

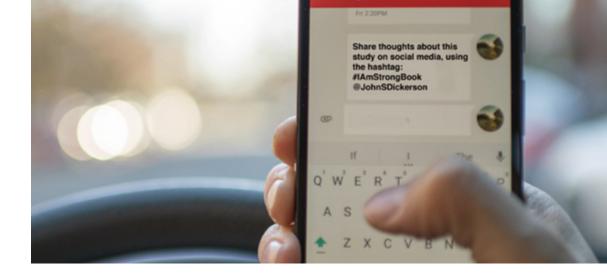
11. If you seek God's rescue, consider speaking these words from your heart to Jesus:

"Jesus, I believe you died on the cross and rose from the grave. I believe you came on a rescue mission, to save me from the brokenness of this world. I invite you to repair what is broken in me. Please forgive my sins and harmful choices. I turn from them to follow you as my One True God. I want to receive your free gift of rescue. Please come into my life now, to lead me, as my Lord and Savior."









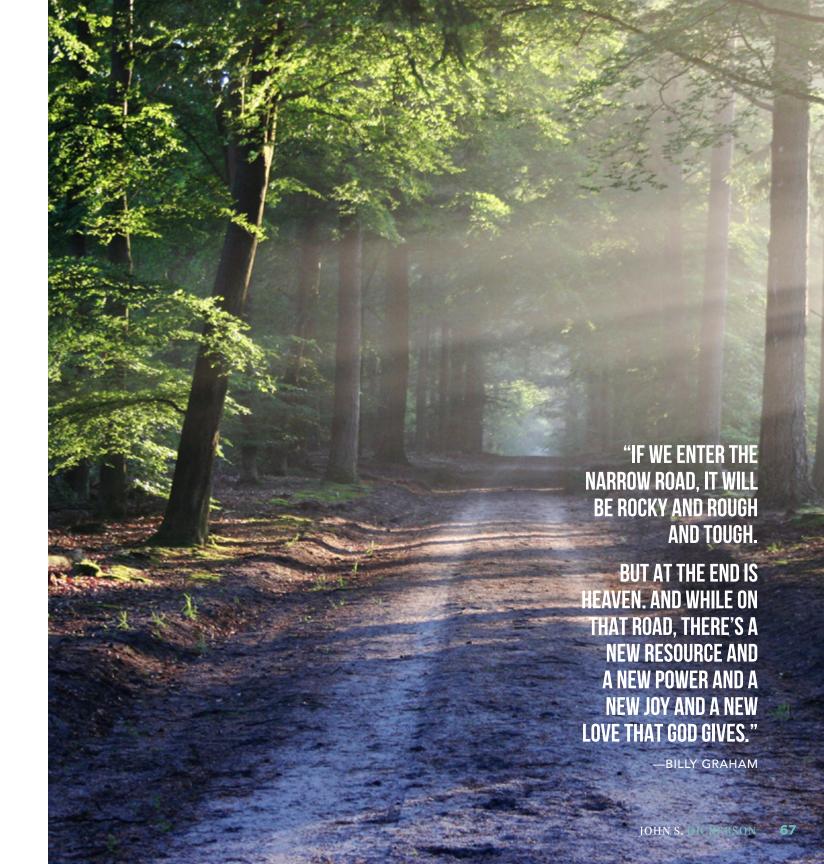
4. List some "not yet" deliverances that you look forward to. (Examples: a body that is healed, a body doesn't feel pain; or a society in which nobody can act with evil toward others)
5. List any "already" evidences of God's salvation which you may be able to see in your life now. (Example: internal peace, this book as a guide, a loving friend)

6. On pages 96 and 97 you will see some examples of life's storms. Which ones have you experienced recently? Are you in one of these storms now?

7. Have you ever considered asking God to help you rise above your storms, until the day He calms them?

8.	Before reading page 99 what was your definition of "trust" and "wait?" What do you think of the definition on page 99?
9.	Take a moment to read the final
3.	5 paragraphs on page 10. What do you think of these ideas?

10. In the next chapters, we will explore some of the deepest insights that have anchored believers for hundreds of years as they endured plagues, droughts, slavery and sickness. Will you commit to continue the journey together?



CHAPTER 10

TRADING LIMITS FOR LIMITLESS



God is teaching us that our thorns, our pains and our disappointments, can prod us past the edge of our own capability.

- 1. John opened Chapter 10 with a story of him and his friends trudging through a desert sand dune that seemed endless. They could not see water with their eyes, but faith drove them to continue moving west. They continued acting on their belief that water was ahead—even though they could not see it. That faith led to the largest supply of life-giving water in the world, the Great Lakes. In what ways does that story relate to your life right now? What is the sand? What is the fresh water you are moving toward by faith, even though you cannot see it today?
- 2. Peter wrote to suffering Christians, encouraging them to "Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation (appearing) of Jesus Christ." Have you ever considered that you get to choose what you will set your hope on? What are some things you have set your hope on recently or at earlier times in your life? (Example: a better diagnosis, a healed relationship, etc.)
- 3. Peter says we can set our hope "fully" as opposed to partially. What do you think about fully setting your hope on Christ's future return, even as you trudge through the desert of your difficulty?

4. Fill in these blanks and then discuss (final paragraph of 105):	
	"We can find in the midst of our
	by fixing our on the
	future deliverance we have in Christ."
5.	Fill in these blanks and discuss (page 106, third paragraph):
	"But God encourages us to live like we're headed to a better place. This,
	our, or our We are making
	our way through the dunes of earth toward a better land with God."
6.	As Paul trusted God, he eventually thought of his "thorn" as a gift? Can you understand his thinking? Do you think of any of your "thorns" could become gifts? (pages 106-109)
7.	Have you ever thought of your "thorn in the flesh" as a conduit for more of Christ's power? How can that be?



8.	Fill in these blanks (page 108, third paragraph):
	Where your dead-end, God's begins.
9.	In our pain, we tend to focus on the end of our limits. How might the realization that God's limitless begins just past your limits encourage you?
10.	"With each step forward, we trade our limits for His
	we trade our inability for His
	we exchange our pain for His,
	our weakness for
	."
	(page 109)



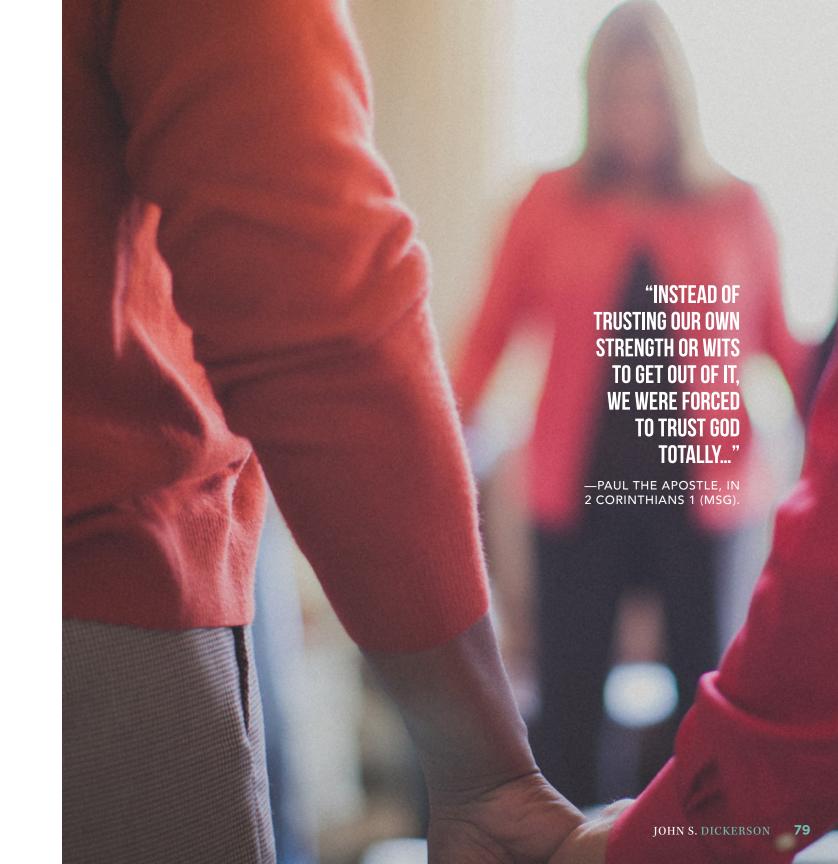


League Basek	hapter 11 with a little known fact about Major all. The multibillion dollar sport all depends on o he bat, called the "sweet-spot" (page 110).
The intersection connect with most unthink	nat "The trials of your life create a sweet spot, too ons of the difficulties thrown at you and how you them (page 111). Had you ever considered that the able pain in your life might be repurposed to creat good, if handled properly?
Fill in these b	anks and discuss (final paragraph of page 111):
	throws us a devastating fastball of we can only hit the sweet spot by
"When One of God's	throws us a devastating fastball of
"When One of God's	throws us a devastating fastball of we can only hit the sweet spot by our lives into God's more capable hands important messages in the Bible is that when lif

5.	When we feel like nothing good could possibly result from our difficulty, it's helpful to remember the true story of Joseph as told in the Bible. Page 113 lists some of Joseph's difficulties. Read them and share the ways you relate to Joseph.
6.	Like Joseph, have you ever found yourself in the midst of one or more of these things, only to then experience even more suffering piled on top?
7.	Look on page 11. What is given as the definition of surrender? (fifth paragraph)
8.	John writes about handing God "the bat" in our lives, so that He can hit a homerun. What might this look like for you?
9.	Fill in these blanks (page 116, top):
	When we turn God with our pain, He has the to turn that evil, hurt, or harm into

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10. What do you think John means when he writes, "Whether your pain drives you toward God or away from God does not depend on your pain; it depends on you?" (page 116) 11. How does it make you feel to consider that God can redeem, recycle, or repurpose your present pain for eternal good?



CHAPTER 12 RESCUE FROM ABOVE

If we don't claim our freedom, the enemy is happy to have us living like he is still in charge—even though he isn't.

1.	What are some curveballs or fastballs life has thrown at you in the last week?
2.	In Chapter 11, we learned the Hope of Redemptionthat God can recycle and repurpose our unthinkable pain for unimaginable good. Since the last discussion time, have you had any opportunities to set your suffering into God's hands? If so, describe when and how. (If you missed some opportunities to hand your suffering to God, don't shame yourself. You can hand those situations over to him now in prayer.)
3.	John opened Chapter 12 with a true story about the horrific pain of childbirth. Mothers who have endured the pain of childbirth willingly invite that pain again because the lifelong joy of a child eclipses the temporary pain of childbirth. Read Romans 8:19-23 and John 16:20-22. Jesus says our present sufferings in this life are like those temporary birth pains. Our suffering is real and severe, but it will be eclipsed by the glory that awaits us in Christ. Discuss or reflect on this word picture. What does this mean for your suffering? Where are you enduring birth pains? If the future glory will eclipse even your present suffering, how glorious must it be?

4.	Do any other ideas or phrases from Romans 8:19-23 or John 16:20-22 encourage you?
5.	Does the idea that you will be completely rescued out of your suffering encourage you?
6.	On page 22 John describes an unbelievable true story. American Prisoners of War found themselves—for a few days—as victors but still living as prisoners in sick, emaciated bodies. Discuss life in the Japanese prison camp for those days after Japan's defeat, but before the prison camps were liberated.
7.	John writes that we are "conquerors" and "victors." The enemy is defeated and we wait for God's final liberation, but we do not feel victorious in our present suffering. Why is that?
8.	In Chapter 9 we learned about the "already, not yet" tension of following Christ in this life (Page 123). How does the "already, not yet" tension of being "victors in enemy territory" encourage you in your suffering?

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9.	Paul's hope was fixed on a rescue that was past, present, and future (Page 126). Take a moment to discuss or reflect on how God's rescue for you is: Past, Present, Future.		
10.	We read about the hope described by G.K. Chesterton, Paul the Apostle, and Abraham (Page 125). Have you ever thought about hope in this way before? Have you made a decision to choose this hope? Can you make that decision now? What would keep you from choosing hope?		
11.	"When the birth pains of this world are forever over and we are forever delivered. Forever rescued. Forever in a place of no pain, no suffering—and not only empty of those, but entirely filled with the good of God, with oceans of pleasure, joy, and goodness that we only ever felt droplets of on fallen earth" (Page 135). What kind of emotions surface as you read those words? What things (absent or present) do you most look forward to when Christ returns? (examples: being reunited with loved ones, being freed from pain, being healed, etc.)		



CHAPTER 13

TRAVELING SONGS

God's travelers sing, shout, whisper and believe these themes as we journey through a jagged world.



1.	On page 137 John lists "four handles of hope you can grab on to by faith when things feel hopeless." What are the four handles? Have you wrapped your hands around any of these in the past? Which one(s) do you need to reach for today?
2.	Re-read the themes of the "Traveling Songs" on page 139. Are any of those new to you? Which one(s) stand out for you today? Would you add any to that list?

3.	your life, past or present? If so, write out or share the lyrics.
4.	John writes that we can take Jesus-centered Traveling Songs everywhere with us—even into surgery prep, chemo treatment, prisons, or funeral homes. In what areas of life could you use a Traveling Song today?



5. On page 141, John writes:
"The hope of refuge is the
hope that when God does not
immediately still the storm, end
the battle, or heal the sickness,
He will sustain and strengthen
you until the very-soon time
when He does still the storm, end
the battle, or heal the sickness."

What does this mean in the difficulties of your life today?

6. Please read Psalm 46. Can you see the truth of God as refuge? King David was very bold and honest in his prayers to God. Have you prayed to God recently? What words would you use to describe your prayer(s)?

7. Pray the words of Psalm 123 as you finish this part of the study.



CHAPTER 14

IN YOUR GETHSEMANE



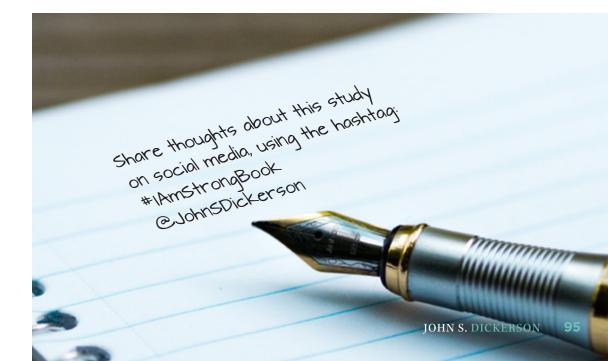
"I get no further than Gethsemane: and am daily thankful that that scene, of all others in Our Lord's life, did not go unrecorded."

-C.S. Lewis

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1.	On pages 155 and 156, John writes about God having a "thorn in the flesh" voluntarily, when Jesus chose the suffering of the cross. Had you every thought about God suffering as much pain as you have?
2.	God has experienced the physical, emotional, spiritual and social pain of having a thorn in his flesh. What does that mean to you in your suffering?
3.	Take a few minutes to discuss this question: "Why did God allow His own thorn in the flesh?" (Page 156, final paragraphs)
4.	What thoughts come to mind when you read about the torture, suffering, and brutality of the crucifixion of Jesus? (Page 157) Does it help you to know that Jesus can relate to your pain? Why or why not?

J.	when He was abandoned by His friends? (Page 160) Which feelings do you most relate to?
6.	Fill in these blanks from page 163, paragraphs 3, 4 and 5.
	"Jesus and Paul both trusted God the Father—more than they trusted
	Jesus and Paul trusted God the Father—more than they trusted their
	Jesus and Paul trusted God the Father—more than they trusted their
7.	Which of these seems the hardest for you today?



8.	When God said the cross could
	be repurposed for good, Jesus
	believed it. Even if it meant
	unimaginable suffering in the
	moment. Today, in your hurts, God
	tells you He can repurpose your
	pain for good. Will you believe
	Him—even if you cannot see it?

- 9. Read page 168 aloud.
- 10. Our Gethsemane's are our lowest sufferings—in which we can turn toward God or away from God. What is your Gethsemane? Can you describe what "Gethsemane surrender" involves? (pages 167-169)

11. God tells us that He knows and understands our weakness. He does not expect perfect or flawless surrender. Will you make a first step—by faith—toward Gethsemane surrender?





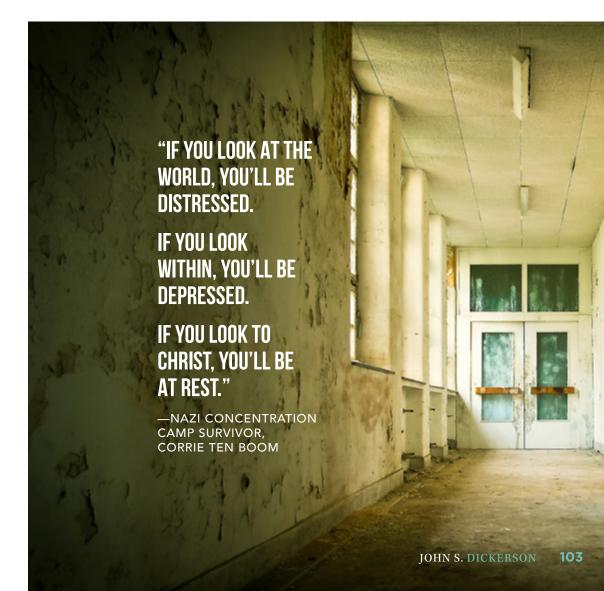
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Why did Jesus weep before raising Lazarus from the dead? (Page 171)	6. Fill in these blanks from the second step on page 172:
Do you believe that God weeps about the brokenness and pain in your life?	 " to God about your difficulties. Ask Him for specific provisions, trusting that He is "not yet" done with His rescue. Confidently request every bit of peace and joy you nee to continue enduring and surrendering, knowing that He will deliver these sustaining gifts in your storm." 7. How and when have you done this? Can you think of any tools that might help you do this?
Reflect on or discuss the dual realities that 1) Christ will raise the dead things in your life, and 2) Christ weeps with you as you await your restoration or resurrection.	8. We find on page 172: "In every situation," Paul writes, we really can rejoice like this be redirecting our thoughts and by bringing our requests to God with thanksgiving."
Fill in these blanks from page 172: "Paul is not advising a fake-smile denial of life's difficulties. Instead, he's saying that after you have mourned your difficulty, then:	Are you willing to learn this skillful focus on the deep hopes and promises of Christ?
your to thank God for the eternal rescue that has "already" started." What does it look like to do this? How do you redirect your mind like this?	9. John introduced the idea of seeking inner peace rather than external peacefulness back in Chapter 9. Since then, have you had any opportunities to pursue inner peace, even when your surroundings were not as calm, heathy, or peaceful as you would have liked?

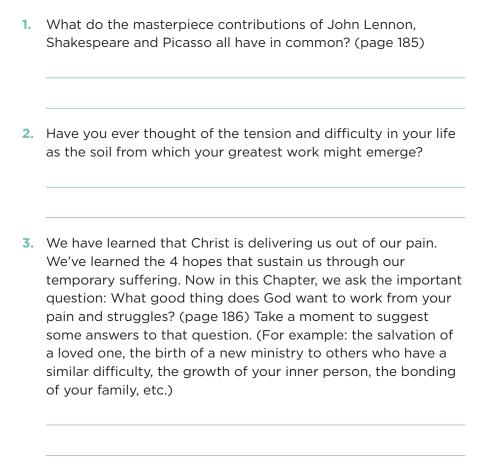
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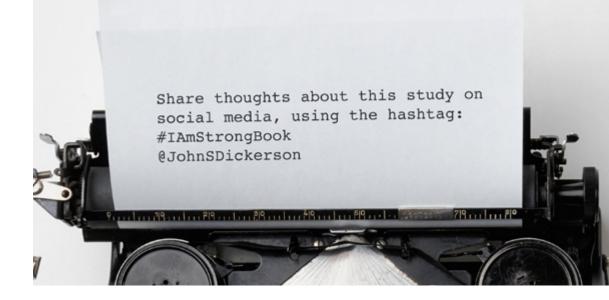
	To paraphrase the passage in Philippians, Paul says, "The secreto finding joy, peace, and contentment has nothing to do with your circumstances and everything to do with Christ's strength (page 176). What are you putting your hope in? How secure do you think that hope is? Do you think it will last?
2-	Fill in these blanks from page 178:
	"Here's a practical way of pressing this truth into our lives: The is to my focus from ending the storm, to claim Christ's sustaining strength in the storm, and to my on His plan to someday calm all storms, including mine."
3.	How hard would it be for you to turn your focus away from the storm and onto Christ's strength? Impossible as it may seem, can you choose today to begin learning Paul's secret to invincible inner peace? Will you ask God to teach you this supernatural skill?
ı.	Reflecting on the suffering in Nazi concentration camps, Corricten Boom said (page 183):
	"If you look at the world, you'll be
	If you look within, you'll be
	If you look to Christ, you'll be at

- 15. Corrie's words echo Paul's and God's in Scripture. How do they relate to you today?
- **16.** The Scriptures from page 184 come from Colossians 3:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 4:18 and 5:17. Would you consider memorizing one of these powerful passages?









4. Fill in these blanks from page 186:

	, 3
	"Your greatest in life may result from your greatest pain or weakness,"
5.	Have you ever viewed your suffering as opportunities for your greatest contribution?
5.	John writes at the bottom of page 186 and top of 187 about people who have helped millions, shaped history, and had lifechanging impact on real individuals. Would you ever want to have a quality or quantity contribution like that?
7.	The final paragraph of page 187 asks this question: "What if we began seeing our pain, not as something to be endured, but as something to be redeemed not as things to be immediately healed, but as things to be laid down for the healing of others?"
	Answer this question.

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8.	What does it mean to share in Christ's sufferings? (Page 189)
9.	Read page 191. What person or group of people could you begin praying to reach—because your pain connects you to them?
	"Your greatest is the
	power of your pain, surrendered."
	"Your greatest
	in life may be your greatest pain, surrendered." (Page 191)

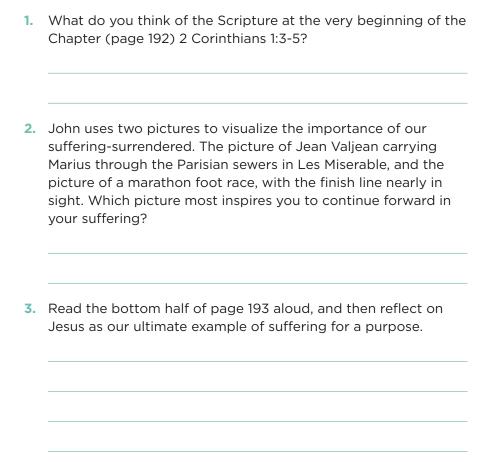


CHAPTER 17

FINISH YOUR RACE

The more you and I see our own personal suffering for what it is—not an end or affliction, but the path of our marathon journey toward heaven—the more we can lunge ourselves forward, throwing all of our weight and will at the finish line.







4. In what ways might you be able to view your suffering more like Christ viewed His suffering?

5. John writes that "No one else can share hope with the hurting people in your life like you can." How does that make you feel? Who are those people?

6. Can you tell of a time when God used someone to share hope with you? How about a time when you got to share hope with someone else?

7. How can you start sharing hope? When can you start sharing hope? To whom?

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8. Jesus described this scene for believers who lunge forward toward the finish line: "God will pick up the believer who fed on the hopes of heaven and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (page 197)

Visualize this moment, when you cross the finish line of this life, with all its difficulties behind you, and enter into God's arms. Describe your emotions as you think of this moment with Jesus.

- The indented paragraph on page 198 is a Scripture from Hebrews 12. Read it, and visualize the believers in Heaven cheering you on as you continue your race.
- 10. If studying as a group, discuss ways you can continue cheering each other along in this brief, but agonizing race to Heaven. If reflecting alone, take a moment to send a note, email, text or message to someone you know who might need to hear you are cheering for them today.
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- 4. John wrote this book to give you the gift of hope. To whom could you now give a copy of the *I Am Strong* book to, as a gift of encouragement? (Examples: a relative, classmate, co-worker, or neighbor who may be struggling with death, grief or disappointment) An audio version of the *I Am Strong* book is available at Audible.com.
- 5. On page 212, John lists some "Tools for the Road." The first is friends to join you. if you used this Study Guide alone, for personal reflection, is there a friend you could invite to walk back through the study guide and book with you, as a way to encourage them?
- 6. Tool 3: Have you ever gotten a Bible that is understandable? If not, would you consider getting one of the recommended Bibles listed on page 213?



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