So what exactly is a strength? A strength is a personal characteristic that can be used on behalf of God in service to others. Usually strengths are present throughout our lives but can be enhanced through experience or training. Strengths are part of who we are while skills are more about what we do.

**Find Your Strengths: 5 Minutes**

Circle three strengths that apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adventurous</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Organized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave</td>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>Protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>Frugal</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>Resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>Gracious</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courageous</td>
<td>Hardworking</td>
<td>Sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined</td>
<td>Hospitable</td>
<td>Talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devoted</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easygoing</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Wise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic</td>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>Add your own…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you're still wondering if the words you circled are strengths, then you can put them through the STRENGTH test:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Does it help me serve God and others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Has it been present throughout much of my life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Do others see this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Do I feel energized when I'm living this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Does this come naturally to me most of the time? Or do I know God has intentionally developed this in me even though it doesn't?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glory</td>
<td>Does God ultimately get the glory from it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trials</td>
<td>Even in hard times, does it usually come through somehow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Does this really feel like a core part of who I am?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your Skills

To help us figure out our skills, I’ve got another list. Take a look and find yours.

**Find Your Skills: 5 Minutes**

Circle three skills that apply to you.

| Acting | Decorating |
| Adapting | Empathizing |
| Administering | Encouraging |
| Advising | Evaluating |
| Analyzing | Expressing |
| Appreciating | Growing |
| Assembling | Guiding |
| Believing | Helping |
| Building | Imagining |
| Challenging | Influencing |
| Cleaning | Initiating |
| Collaborating | Leading |
| Cooking | Listening |
| Communicating | Maintaining |
| Connecting | Managing |
| Constructing | Motivating |
| Coordinating | Negotiating |
| Counseling | Nurturing |
| Creating | Organizing |
| Persevering | Persuading |
| Planning | Prioritizing |
| Problem-solving | Protecting |
| Relating | Responding |
| Risk taking | Serving |
| Sharing | Speaking |
| Supporting | Teaching |
| Training | Writing |

*Add your own…*
Connecting Strengths and Skills

Skills Circles can be a fun way to connect strengths with skills. Draw a circle and write one of your strengths in the middle. Then draw small circles around the edge and write related skills in them. The size of each circle is related to how much I express that strength through the skill. For example, I write a lot more than I speak.

Have fun with this! Doodle, put these in your journal, write them on napkins next time you’re stuck on a plane. This isn’t meant to be a big project—just a little tool.

Here’s a personal example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill (What I Do)</th>
<th>Strength (Who I Am)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Connecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpts from *You’re Already Amazing* by Holley Gerth. Copyright © 2012.
Our strengths and skills aren’t meant just for us. So the next step is to take some time to consider who shares our lives and stories. Before we do so, I’d like to bust the myth among women that goes something like this: “Everyone else has lots of relationships, but not me.”

Facebook, Twitter, and all the other social media sites out there can make it seem as if the whole world is one big party and we’re not invited. The enemy can use that to lie to us and make us feel alone. But it’s not true.

According to an article in USA Today, 25 percent of Americans do not have even one friend they can confide in. Including family, the average number of close relationships is still only two. What I want to highlight here is this: you are doing okay in your relationships.

That being said, let’s take a closer look at the relationships in your life. I’ve created a little diagram to help us out.

**Your Social Circles: 5 Minutes**

- **Heart Relationships**
  This is your inner circle, those with whom you can truly share who you are, the ups and downs. Some family members and your close friends would be here.

- **Personal Relationships**
  These people share your life in your neighborhood, church, work, family, and so on. You care about each other, but they are more casual relationships than the first group.

- **Functional Relationships**
  These connections are very casual, and interactions have a practical purpose. You might call them acquaintances.
Who You’re Called to Serve

After you know your strengths (who you are) and skills (what you do) as well as understanding the relationships in your life, then you’re ready to explore who you’re specifically called to serve.

Yes, we’re all called to love each other. And yet there’s usually a group of people that has a special place in your heart. You might love working with kids, women, older adults, or inner-city youth. Knowing your who can help you make strategic choices about which opportunities to pursue and which to pass up.

Find Your Who: 5 Minutes

° I feel especially drawn to:

° I’m at my best when I’m with:

° God has given me a tender spot in my heart for:

° My strengths and skills seem to help:
Growth

I love the verse in Proverbs that says, “The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (4:18).

Growth in our lives often looks like the chart below. We go through peaks and valleys. We make some progress and then slip up. When that happens, it feels like we’re all the way back at the bottom. But we’re not—we’re further along than we were before. We’ve gained new wisdom, developed our strengths a bit more, and leaned a little harder into God.
Replace the Lie: 5 Minutes

° A lie I’ve believed:

° The truth God wants me to remember instead:

° Scripture that shares this truth:

° God has the ultimate word on who you are—not your spouse, friends, parents, co-workers, or spiritual leaders or even you. And he declares you’re loved, valuable, accepted, and irreplaceable.
Let’s take a closer look at your unique approach to emotions. While we can do so in a lot of different ways, let’s start with the simplest: head or heart. Take a look below to see whether your head (those lines on the coloring page) or heart (all that color) tends to be the dominant force in your life.

### Head or Heart: 5 Minutes

While we all use both our heads and our hearts, circle the option on each line that sounds like you more often:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I prefer facts.</th>
<th>I prefer feelings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People are more likely to describe me as logical.</td>
<td>People are more likely to describe me as emotional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone expresses a strong emotion, I often want to withdraw.</td>
<td>When someone expresses a strong emotion, I often try to find a way to engage with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In conversation, I most often say, “I think...”</td>
<td>In conversation, I most often say, “I feel...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree more with this statement: “Use your head.”</td>
<td>I agree more with this statement: “Follow your heart.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I grow in my relationship with God most by learning a new truth about him and applying it practically.</td>
<td>I grow in my relationship with God most by experiencing him in an intimate way through a personal situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it fairly simple to compartmentalize my life. I can think about one thing at a time.</td>
<td>I find it difficult to compartmentalize my life. How I feel affects every area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is one of my favorite verses: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).</td>
<td>This is one of my favorite verses: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Start of Your Emotional Style

Since our families are important influencers in our lives, let’s start by exploring what emotional hand-me-downs they passed on to us. They might be quality vintage, or it could be time for a new look. This isn’t about right and wrong or blaming anyone—it’s simply about understanding.

Families and Emotions: 5 Minutes

Read the descriptions below and then circle the title (Stuffers, Screamers, Surfers) of the one that reminds you most of your family.

Stuffers:

These families like to keep emotions where they seem safest—on the inside. Have a bad day? Keep it to yourself. Have a really big accomplishment? Settle down. Home is a safe, peaceful place. Please don’t rock the boat.

Wardrobe item: A sturdy, all-season raincoat

Screamers:

The neighbors already know if you’re in a family of screamers. Emotion? Bring it on. Or better yet—bring it out. Emotions are made to be expressed, not suppressed. Conflict is present and passionate. So is making up. When it comes to emotion, these families are loud and proud.

Wardrobe item: A bright, bold purse that holds a lot

Surfers:

If you’re in a family of surfers, everyone just rides the waves. Low tide, feeling a little sad? That’s okay—we’ll hang out down there with you. High tide, everything fantastic? We can get up to that place and share the joy too. Conflict ebbs and flows naturally. Emotions are just part of life.

Wardrobe item: A pair of shoes that can handle it all—wet or dry

Of course, these descriptions are intended to be lighthearted. They’re also stereotypes, so no family fits neatly into one or the other. What’s important is recognizing that every family does approach emotion in certain ways that teach us about how we “should” engage with emotion too. Sometimes that’s really helpful. Other times it leads us astray. What matters most is recognizing those patterns, testing them against what God says is true, and proactively choosing what to do about them in our lives. Otherwise we just naturally repeat what’s familiar.

So let’s follow that up with a few more questions about emotion in your family:
In my family, it was okay to feel . . .
(circle three positive and three negative)

- Afraid
- Amused
- Angry
- Annoyed
- Anxious
- Ashamed
- Blessed
- Bold
- Bored
- Brave
- Broken
- Calm
- Cautious
- Certain
- Cheerful
- Comfortable
- Compassionate
- Competent
- Confident
- Confused
- Content
- Courageous
- Defensive
- Delighted
- Depressed
- Determined
- Disgusted
- Ecstatic
- Embarrassed
- Empty
- Encouraged
- Enraged
- Enthusiastic
- Envious
- Excited
- Exhausted
- Fearful
- Foolish
- Forgiven
- Free
- Frightened
- Frustrated
- Fulfilled
- Furious
- Giddy
- Glad
- Grateful
- Grieved
- Guilty
- Happy
- Hopeful
- Humble
- Hurt
- Hysterical
- Jealous
- Joyful
- Lazy
- Lonely
- Loved
- Mad
- Overwhelmed
- Peaceful
- Pressured
- Protected
- Quiet
- Sad
- Satisfied
- Scared
- Shocked
- Shy
- Silly
- Strong
- Supported
- Surprised
- Suspicious
- Sympathetic
- Timid
- Understood
- Valued
- Weary
In my family, it was not okay to feel . . .
(circle three positive and three negative)

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<td></td>
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</table>
Experiences and Our Emotions

We’re born into our families, and they influence our hearts from the second we come into this world. As we grow up, experiences also impact our emotional style. The good, the bad, and the ugly all play a role in shaping how we learn to respond to life. Dr. Ryan Rana, a Christian counselor and friend of mine, says we all have an emotional range. In other words, if emotions are on a continuum, then we’ve each got a comfort zone. My translation of that range looks a lot like this:

negative emotions
(anger, sadness, fear)
 neutral
positive emotions
(joy, anticipation, affection)

God’s intent is for us to appropriately experience the full range of emotions. Even fear plays a helpful role when we encounter a dangerous situation. But often life comes along and we learn that some of those emotions aren’t allowed or don’t feel safe. In particular, abuse can cause us to narrow our emotional range.

So, Dr. Rana explains, instead of being open to the full continuum of emotions, we may stop ourselves from feeling certain ones. For example, a woman who had a difficult childhood might decide to protect herself by limiting the negative emotions she allows herself to feel. Her range would look like this:

negative emotions
(anger, sadness, fear)
 neutral
positive emotions
(joy, anticipation, affection)

The X represents how far she’ll go with those negative emotions. She might let herself experience a little bit of sadness, but not much. Most of the time she keeps it tightly controlled. She thinks, “If I don’t let myself have negative emotions, that will keep me safe.” But here’s what happens:

negative emotions
(anger, sadness, fear)
 neutral
positive emotions
(joy, anticipation, affection)

negative emotions
(anger, sadness, fear)
 neutral
positive emotions
(joy, anticipation, affection)

Excerpts from You’re Already Amazing by Holley Gerth. Copyright © 2012.
I allow myself to feel . . .
(circle three to five)

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(circle three to five)

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</table>
Am I in Egypt? 5 Minutes

Is there an area in my life where I feel like I'm in Egypt?

- In bondage
- Out of control
- Oppressed
- Separated from God's presence

If so, what area is it?

- God, I want out of Egypt. Please help me to

- Someone I trust and can confide in about this is

And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into ... a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exod. 3:17)

Am I Encamped? 5 Minutes

Is there an area in my life where God is asking me to “encamp”?  

- Waiting
- God may seem silent
- Doors aren’t opening for me to move forward
- I feel the need to rest or heal

If so, what area is it?

- God, sometimes simply staying where we are is difficult. Please help me to

- Someone I trust and can confide in about this is

The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exod. 33:14)
Setting Out

Encamping doesn’t last forever, and when the cloud of God’s presence lifted, the Israelites knew it was time to move. When God does the same in our lives, we may have several responses. Which one sounds most like you?

- **The Settler**
  “What? Set out? I’m quite content right here. I just got things the way I want them. You go ahead and maybe I’ll join you later. Change is pretty scary, after all.”
  - **Strengths:** Good at maintaining security and peace. Willing to stay with something as long as it takes. Faithful and trustworthy.
  - **Areas for growth:** Tends to view change, even when it’s from God, as negative. May get stuck in a rut and refuse to move forward.

- **The Explorer**
  “Bring on the change! I’ll race you to the Promised Land. I may not be sure where I’m going, but I’m making good time. Life’s an adventure and new is fun.”
  - **Strengths:** Willing to take risks and go in a different direction. Moves forward and often helps others do so as well. Embraces and encourages change.
  - **Areas for growth:** Sometimes takes risks or tries new things for the experience rather than being led by God. May put tasks ahead of relationships for the sake of progress.

- **The Traveler**
  “I’m packed and ready to go. I feel a little uneasy, but I’m still willing to take the next step. We’ll see what happens. Life is just as much about the journey along the way as it is the destination.”
  - **Strengths:** Takes life in stride and tries to move at the pace of God and others. Flexible and adaptive. Interested in what is ahead but doesn’t rush to get there.
  - **Areas for growth:** Sometimes can end up wandering longer than necessary. May be indecisive or too easily sidetracked by others.

---

**Am I Setting Out? 5 Minutes**

Is there an area in my life where I feel like God is asking me to “set out”?

- An urge to take the next step
- God seems to be speaking and guiding
- Doors may be opening for me to move forward
- I’m sensing the need for change—even if it’s hard or uncomfortable

If so, what area is it?

- God, it seems you’re asking me to “set out” with you. Please help me to

- Someone I trust to walk with me through this is

---

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:9)*

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The Promised Land

After we escape from Egypt, do some camping, and move forward when God says to, then we finally make it to the Promised Land.

Am I in the Promised Land? 5 Minutes

Is there an area in my life where I feel like God has brought me to the Promised Land?
  ◦ A desire or prayer answered
  ◦ A sense of being where I belong
  ◦ Renewed joy and anticipation
  ◦ Passion to possess and defend what’s been given to me

If so, what area is it?
  ◦ God, thank you for bringing me to the Promised Land. Please help me to

  ◦ Someone I can celebrate this with is

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God
for the good land he has given you. (Deut. 8:10)
Your Life Map

The Israelites’ divine GPS guided them every step of the way and eventually got them to the Promised Land. God promises that if we follow him, he’ll do the same for us too.

Let’s think back to my little GPS—the one in my car that we talked about in the very beginning. I mentioned how I “zoom in” to the little red dot representing my car because it helps me know where I am and where I’m going. We’ve been doing the same for your life.

One more way I use my GPS to stay on track is to “zoom out” so I can get the full view. Then I see that little red dot in the full context of where I am and where I’m going next. Because our lives are complex, we actually have more than one dot. As I said before, you might be in one place personally and someplace totally different professionally. That’s even more reason for us to step back and see the big picture.

To tie everything together, let’s build a map of where you are in different areas of your life. Take a look back over your answers in each section of this chapter and use them to fill this in:

*My Life Map: 5 Minutes*

Under each section draw a dot and write the areas of your life that fit in each one.
Your Social Strengths

Structure

Now that we’ve looked at which settings you’re drawn to with others, let’s talk about the structure of those relationships. There are three primary relationship structures: leading, partnering, and following/serving. Depending on where you are (work, home, etc.) these may vary for you. But there’s usually one that you naturally gravitate to more of the time.

If you made graphs of each of these they would look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading</th>
<th>Partnering</th>
<th>Serving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leading:**
If you prefer the leading structure of relationship, then you’re confident being in charge. You enjoy setting direction and inspiring others to join you on the journey. Those in your life likely listen to you and look to you for advice. When you’re not depending on God as your ultimate leader, you may come across as controlling. But when you’re being directed by him, you have the ability to take many people to places God wants them to go and to guide them well along the way.

**Partnering:**
If you’re drawn to the partnering structure of relationship, then you view everyone in life as your equal. You want to be side by side or face-to-face. You see connecting with others as an endless process of give-and-take. You care little for power but don’t want to be taken advantage of either. You may become agitated by issues of balance and fairness. You have a strong capacity for coming alongside others and encouraging them, sometimes simply by your presence through whatever they face. You believe we’re all better together.

**Serving:**
If you fit closest with the serving structure of relationship, then you see humbling yourself as the best way to lift others up. You’re willing to do whatever is needed and offer support without resentment or envy. You likely feel uncomfortable with the spotlight and avoid attention. You may sometimes use service as a way to make yourself feel needed or earn love rather than giving freely and confidently. If you find a worthy leader, you are quite content being a follower. You’re a strong, steady support and gain joy from helping others in the journey of life.

Which one sounds most like you?

° My strongest social structure is:

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Sphere of Needs

When you use your social sight to focus on others, needs begin to appear. And of course you want to meet them. The needs that stand out most to you and the ways you feel compelled to fill them for others are the final aspect of your social strengths.

We can think of needs this way:

Practical:
If you’re drawn to meet the practical needs of others, you’re likely to see what needs to be done and then do it. You use your hands to meet needs—whether that is cooking, setting up, writing a check, or making something happen in a tangible way. You feel satisfied when you see actual results from your giving.

Emotional:
If you’re wired to meet the emotional needs of others, you offer your heart first. You know when someone is hurting or desires to have someone rejoice with them. You give through intangible ways most often—comforting, encouraging, bringing hope. You don’t need to see actual physical results from the way you give other than a smile appearing or a tear being wiped away.

Relational:
If you desire to meet the relational needs of others, then you see your presence as the best gift you can offer. You show up whenever it matters most—in the hard times as well as the happy. You may not even talk about what the other person is feeling or be compelled to take a specific action. You simply want to be there for support, to share the experience, and to be a connector.

Intellectual:
If you focus on the intellectual needs of others, you’re likely to try to connect them to truth first. You might offer to pray for them right away, share a helpful Scripture, or pass along a book that offers wisdom for their situation. You want others in your life to know what matters most because you believe it impacts every area of their lives.

Which one sounds most like you?

° My strongest sphere of needs is:
Let’s talk about your LIFE statement—Love Is Faith Expressed. (Okay, okay, maybe it’s a teensy bit cheesy. But it’s easy to remember, right? And I am an unashamed acronym fan. So let’s just go with it, okay?) I think express is such a wonderful word because it implies creativity, individuality, and you doing what you do in a way no one else can. Your LIFE is one-of-a-kind. It’s a combination of all we’ve talked about in the previous chapters. Drum roll, please . . . We’re now ready to summarize all of that in one sentence.

As I said before, we all start with a common foundation from Galatians 5:6:

I am created and called to express my faith through love . . .

Now you’ll finish that statement with your unique way of doing so in the world. That part will have this structure:

. . . especially by (verb ending in “ing”) + (what) + (who) + (how)

Here’s my LIFE statement:

I am created and called to express my faith through love,

especially by bringing hope and encouragement

(what)

to the hearts of women through words.

(who)  (how)

Another one might be:

I am created and called to express my faith through love,

especially by meeting the practical needs of

(what)

my family, friends, and community through service.

(who)  (how)

Try yours here (this is just a start—you can think and pray about it more later):

I am created and called to express my faith through love, especially by

(verb ending in “ing”) + (what) + (who) + (how)
What Does “Much Required” Really Mean?

As I thought about being free from expectations, a bit of panic started to kick in for me. I thought of a comment recently made by someone in my life: “To whom much is given, much will be required. A lot has been given to you, so a lot is expected of you.” I remember how I wilted at those words. And yet I knew that phrase came from the Bible. Why did Jesus say that, and what did he really mean?

I turned to Luke 12 and read that phrase in context. It appears in a story about servants and their master. Yes, it did say to whom much is given much would be required . . . by the master. A lot of the expectations in my life aren’t from my Master. I make them up or take them on from someone else. In that case, I’m not required to meet them. And neither are you. As servants, we’re not in control of our own lives, and we don’t have to take orders from other servants either. Only God has the authority to tell us our duties, what’s required of us.

That made me want to dig deeper. What did God require of me? I pulled out my journal again, ready for a long list. But a quick look at my concordance and a trip over to Micah 6:8 stunned me with its simplicity: “The LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (NLT).

Period. End of story. No long list of rules. No endless expectations. It’s all there in one verse. And it’s all about relationships.

Let’s take a closer look at those phrases from Micah 6:8:

° **To do what is right**—This is about practicing self-control, which leads to loving ourselves as well as others the way God intended.
° **To love mercy**—This is about our relationships with others. We are to love them as ourselves.
° **To walk humbly with your God**—This is about our relationship with God. We are to love him above all.

Amazing, isn’t it? Yet it’s so difficult to really live this way. The challenge is nothing new. The Galatians, those in one of the early churches, struggled with putting themselves back under the law too. The apostle Paul asks them this question: “After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?” (Gal. 3:3 NLT). It’s a question we’re called to consider too.

What expectations in our lives are from God—and what have we added as laws he never intended for us to be under?

We did a little practice listing an expectation above. Write that expectation again below. Then next to it write the real source: yourself, others, or God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation:</th>
<th>Source:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I have to…</td>
<td>(myself, others, God)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIFE gives us direction, but we still need to know specifically what steps to take next. These verses show us the starting line: “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Heb. 12:1–2).

Are you ready to run a marathon in life? Or you might be sitting on the curb wondering if you even have what it takes to make it to the end of the block. Either way, the best place to start is with one small step. It’s the only way to bigger things with God. As Jesus said, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much” (Luke 16:10).

~ My “Do What You Can Plan” ~

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change God wants me to make:</th>
<th>Small next step:</th>
<th>How I’ll celebrate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We just talked about running your own race, and every athlete knows that self-care is essential to crossing the finish line well. In much the same way, taking care of yourself is going to be important to accomplishing your “Do What You Can Plan,” fulfilling God’s purpose for your life, and loving the people in your life well.

Another way to think of it is like a bank account for your heart. Certain things are like deposits: coffee with a friend, a long bubble bath, time spent praying. Others are withdrawals: an overwhelming project at work, a child with the flu, an especially busy season of life. We live in a fallen world, and there’s never going to be a time when our emotional bank account always stays full. We don’t need to feel guilty about it getting low sometimes. But we do need to be intentional about replenishing it so that we have something to give next time we’re needed.

These are three common ways people try to refill their emotional energy accounts:

- Trying to earn the approval of others—In this mindset, we treat life like a job and the approval of others like a paycheck.
- Taking what we want because we’re entitled to it—In this scenario, we grab all we can get because we believe we deserve it.
- Receiving what our hearts need as a gift of grace—We remember Jesus said to love others as ourselves (see Matt. 22:39), so we invest in ourselves because he says we’re of great value.

I’ve done all of the above. You too? Our goal is to move more toward the third option. So let’s pause for a moment and take a look at your emotional energy account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawals (things that take emotional energy in my life right now)</th>
<th>Deposits (things that increase/restore my emotional energy in my life right now)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Conflict with my teenage daughter</td>
<td>Example: Coffee with a dear friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hint: If you’re having trouble thinking of things, then fill in the blanks below:

- I feel the most drained after I
  (withdrawals)

- I feel the most energized after I
  (deposits)
In each of the areas below, brainstorm ways to be renewed. **These are not goals.** They shouldn’t make you feel pressure or as if they are something you must do. These are deposits in your bank account—not withdrawals. For example, social might be “coffee with a friend” and physical might be “taking a walk on a nice afternoon to enjoy God’s creation.” Use the deposit list you made earlier in this chapter as a starting place and then add anything else that comes to mind. Take a few moments to ask God to show you how he made you and what you really need.

Also, if you don’t enjoy it, then don’t do it. The reason? While we need to push through and do hard things out of discipline in our lives (and you probably have those on your “Do What You Can Plan”), those won’t maintain or rebuild your serotonin levels. That only happens when you’re doing something you enjoy. If you’re feeling guilty right now, remember, this is about receiving so that you can invest.

Here’s an example in each area to get you started:

- **Emotional**—Watching a movie that makes me laugh
- **Mental**—Reading a book I really enjoy
- **Spiritual**—Writing a page in my prayer journal
- **Social**—A “girls’ night out” with friends
- **Physical**—Walking the dog
Go Deeper Guide
(for Individuals and Groups)

In addition to the following questions, visit www.holleygerth.com for more tools, encouraging content, and even life coaching opportunities.

Holley Gerth
Chapter 1: A Heart-to-Heart Talk

1. If you had coffee with a close friend today and she asked how you were *really* doing, what would you say?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Which story at the beginning of the chapter did you relate to the most (the friend at lunch, counseling client, or woman sending the email)?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. The “it girl” is thought of as a woman everyone wants to be like in our culture. Do you ever feel pressure to be like women in the media? Share one example.

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. In contrast, through Scripture God says you’re an “is girl.” He looks at you and says, “She is __________.” Fill in the blank with a few of the words your heart most needs to hear today. (Example: She is loved.)

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. We sometimes feel shame about who we are or what we do. We tell ourselves, “Most people don’t . . .” But those very things can be important parts of the unique way God has created us to make a difference in the world. What are those for you? Finish this sentence below: “Most people don’t, but I . . .”

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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6. We all have brokenness in our lives, and that can keep us from seeing who we really are in Christ or believing he can use us. Write a short prayer asking God to heal your heart and make something unexpectedly beautiful out of your hurts.

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7. One of the most powerful passages of Scripture about who God made us to be and how intimately he knows us is found in Psalm 139. Read it and write a short prayer that includes a few phrases from it below (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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Chapter 2: Who Am I, REALLY?

1. Look back to the strengths you circled on the list in this chapter. Write your top three here.

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. If you haven’t already, put them through the STRENGTH test below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Does it help me serve God and others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Has it been present throughout much of my life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Do others see this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Do I feel energized when I’m living this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Does this come naturally to me most of the time? Or do I know God has intentionally developed this in me even though it doesn’t?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glory</td>
<td>Does God ultimately get the glory from it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trials</td>
<td>Even in hard times, does it usually come through somehow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Does this really feel like a core part of who I am?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. We often think of weaknesses as a negative thing. But research shows that having weaknesses in certain areas actually helps us to be stronger in others. God also says that his “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9 NKJV). What’s a weakness you wish you didn’t have? In what ways could it actually help you be who God created you to be? (Example: Being weak at details helps make you strong at seeing the big picture.)

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4. Look back to the skills list in this chapter. Write your top three here.

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Chapter 2: Who Am I, REALLY?

5. Skills circles can help us see how our skills support our core strengths. Try drawing one here (look back to the example in the chapter if you need help).

6. Social circles help us understand who is in our life and how we’re connected to them. You began thinking about that in this chapter; now you have time to actually write some names in each of the circles below. (If you need a reminder of what each circle means, look back to the definitions in the chapter.)

7. Look back to the “Find Your Who” exercise in this chapter. If you haven’t already, fill in the blanks. When you look at your answers, who does it seem God most wants you to use your strengths and skills to serve? Write a short prayer asking him to use you in new ways (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).
Chapter 3: Why Is It So Hard to Believe I’m Amazing?

1. Lie #1: “I have to be perfect.” How does knowing “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14) change that for you? What does God want us to pursue instead of perfection?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Lie #2: “I need to be more like her.” Who do you tend to compare yourself to? What helps you focus on who you are in Christ instead?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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3. Lie #3: “I don’t have anything to offer.” What keeps you from “putting your truffles on the table” for God and others? If you had no fear about the worth of what you had to share with the world, what would you do?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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4. Lie #4: “Being confident will make me prideful and selfish.” What’s the difference between insecurity and humility?

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5. Lie #5: “I am who others say I am.” What have others said to you that has impacted the way you see yourself? What does God say about you instead?

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6. Are there any other lies you’ve become aware of that you need God to replace with the truth? Write them below.

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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7. Write a short prayer asking God to continue revealing any lies in your life and to lead you into the truth about who you really are in him (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

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Chapter 4: Why Do I Feel This Way?

1. Are you dominated more by your head or heart? Look back to the descriptions about both and write a few phrases that sound most like you.

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Emotions make great messengers but bad bosses. What helps you make sure you’re ultimately obeying God rather than your feelings?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Which description most fits your family growing up—stuffers, screamers, or surfers? What parts of your emotional history still fit you well and which ones have you outgrown?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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4. We talked about having an emotional range and how if we don’t allow ourselves to experience negative emotions, then we limit our ability to experience positive ones as well. Are there any experiences in your life that have caused you to shut off part of your heart? If so, write a short prayer sharing them with God and asking him to heal you and free you to feel again (if you’re in a group, take time to talk to God together and pray for each other).

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5. Look at the list of emotions in this chapter. Which ones are you most comfortable expressing? Which ones are you least comfortable expressing?

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6. Read the story of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14:1–9. They chose faith over feelings and were the only ones to see the Promised Land. What’s one thing they did that you can apply to your life?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23 NIV 1984). What’s one specific way you can guard your heart this week? Write a short prayer asking God to help you do so (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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Chapter 5: Where Am I Going?

1. Egypt: Are there any areas in your life where you feel like you’re in Egypt? What is God prompting you to do so you can move on from that place?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Encamped: Are there any areas in your life where you feel like you’re encamped? Review the reasons in the chapter why God sometimes has us stay put for a while. Which one did you identify with and why?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Setting out: Which one of the profiles in this section (settler, explorer, traveler) did you relate to most? What’s the next step God is asking you to take in an area of your life?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. The Promised Land: Are there any areas in your life where you feel like you’re in the Promised Land? What are you doing to possess, defend, and enjoy it?
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Chapter 5: Where Am I Going?

5. If you didn’t do so in the chapter, fill in your Life Map below:

\[\text{My Life Map}\]

Under each section draw a dot and write the areas of your life that fit in each one.

6. None of us are intended to go through life alone. Who encourages you on your journey? Who else might be willing to do so?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Based on where you are now, write a short prayer asking God to help you take the next step in his plan for your life (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Chapter 6: Who’s with Me?

1. Do you ever feel lonely or out of place? What are the lies the enemy tries to whisper to your heart when that happens, and what’s the truth?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. The word for “helper” in the Bible that describes Eve is the same word often used when God helps us. When you thought of Eve being called a “helper” before now, what did you think it meant? How does seeing that word in this context change that?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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3. What makes you afraid that you won’t be loved? Do you ever hide from others? Describe a time when you overcame your fear and found the courage to reach out instead.

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. “Love all. Please One.” What’s the difference between loving someone and trying to please them?

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. There’s a “Safe Person Checklist” in this chapter based on 1 Corinthians 13:1–8. Take a moment to read that passage. Who are the safe people in your life?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

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Chapter 6: Who’s with Me?

6. As daughters of Eve, we all struggle with the desire for control—we just display it in different ways. In the descriptions of internal and external control, which one could you most relate to? What helps you let go of control and trust God so that you can freely love?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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7. This quote by C. S. Lewis is powerful:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.1

If loving is so risky, why does God ask us to do it? Write a short prayer asking him for the courage to love (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

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Chapter 7: How Do I Connect?

1. Have you ever thought of the ways you connect with others as strengths God has given you? What are some ways that others frequently describe the way you connect with them (for example, outgoing, compassionate, fun, kind)?

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2. Which setting (one-to-one, one-to-few, one-to-many) are you most drawn to? Describe your favorite way to spend time with other people.

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3. Which structure seems to fit you best (leading, partnering, serving)? Describe a situation in which you used this to help others.

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4. When it comes to sight, are you more internal or external? Write down some phrases in the description that sound most like you.

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5. Which sphere of needs does your heart feel called to most (intellectual, relational, emotional, practical)? Describe a time when God used you to meet a need in that way.

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6. We are all part of the body of Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. If you were to choose a part of the body that you feel best represents you, what would it be and why? (Example: “Hands, because I love to reach out and serve.”)

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7. Good news: we don’t have to rely on ourselves to live in our strengths or deal with our weaknesses. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7 NIV 1984). What’s a specific way you can apply this verse in your life this week? Write a short prayer asking for God’s help to do so (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

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Chapter 8: What Does God Want Me to Do with My Life?

1. Most of us have busy schedules. What's the difference between “life to the full” and simply “a full life”?

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2. If you have not done so already, take time to write your LIFE statement here:

I am created and called to express my faith through love, especially by

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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(verb ending in “ing” + what + who + how)
If you’ve already written it, make any changes that come to mind.

3. Expectations are like laws we place on ourselves. “You are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Write some of the expectations you feel below:

I must ___________________________________________ or this will happen: _____________________________________________________.

I must ___________________________________________ or this will happen: _____________________________________________________.

I must ___________________________________________ or this will happen: _____________________________________________________.

Where are those expectations coming from? What does God want to replace them with instead?
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4. If you knew you would be completely loved and accepted no matter what, then which items would you cross off your (mental or actual) to-do list?
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Chapter 8: What Does God Want Me to Do with My Life?

5. When you read your LIFE statement, what would you like to add to your to-do list instead?
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6. In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus shares what matters most to God. Read that passage and paraphrase it in your own words below.
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7. Write a short prayer asking God to help you live your LIFE statement more fully (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).
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Chapter 9: What Are My Next Steps?

1. “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1–2). What tends to hinder and/or entangle you?

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2. What did you think of the “Do What You Can Plan”? Which aspect stood out to you most? Describe a time when God prompted you to make a change in your life and you did it. What helped you?

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3. If you didn’t fill out your “Do What You Can Plan” in the chapter, you can do so now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change God wants me to make:</th>
<th>Small next step:</th>
<th>How I’ll celebrate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. How will these changes help you live your LIFE?

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5. What’s your strategy for dealing with slipups and setbacks in your plan?

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6. Which organizational personality sounds most like you? Write down some phrases that stood out to you in the descriptions.

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7. Write a short prayer asking God to help you make these changes and move forward in all he has for you (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

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Chapter 10: Is It Okay to Take Care of Myself?

1. Write down more deposits/withdrawals in your emotional bank account:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawals (things that take emotional energy in my life right now)</th>
<th>Deposits (things that increase/restore my emotional energy in my life right now)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Conflict with my teenage daughter</td>
<td>Example: Coffee with a dear friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Why is it so hard for many women to receive? Which of the common reasons listed in this chapter did you most relate to personally?

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3. What fills you up and brings you joy?

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4. Think of the people in your life. Who encourages you the most?

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5. We receive so that we can invest in the kingdom and others. Try starting to make a receive/invest plan below:

I will make a deposit in my emotional account by

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

so that

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Ask yourself:

- Why am I doing this?
- Who will it benefit in the end?
- How will I make sure it happens?
Chapter 10: Is It Okay to Take Care of Myself?

6. It’s important to be intentional about receiving just as we are about giving. If you haven’t already done the Personal Investment Plan in the chapter, do so here. If you have, add a few more ideas.

In each of the areas below, brainstorm more ways to be renewed. Here’s an example in each area to get you started:
° Emotional—Watching a movie that makes me laugh
° Mental—Reading a book I really enjoy
° Spiritual—Writing a page in my prayer journal
° Social—A “girls’ night out” with friends
° Physical—Walking the dog

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.... Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30–31)

7. Write a short prayer thanking God for all he’s given you and asking him to help you receive from him and others all that you need (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).
Chapter 11: What God Really Wants Your Heart to Remember

1. As you think about making changes in your life, what is your greatest fear or obstacle? What can help you with it?

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2. What are the “loaves and fish” you want to offer Jesus? What would you like to see him do with the gifts and strengths he’s given you?

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3. What’s one new truth you’ve learned about how much God loves you through this book?

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4. Do you ever feel “I was made for more than this”? What do you think of the idea that those thoughts are intended to point us toward heaven?

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5. What helps you make the most of every moment in this life? What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?

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6. How do you see yourself differently now than when you started this journey?

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7. Write a short prayer expressing your heart to God and asking him to show you what’s next on your journey with him (if you’re in a group, take time to pray for each other too).

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