

From the author of *The Frazzled Female*

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Desperate

Seeking Simplicity...
Finding the Cross



Cindi Wood

Desperate

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About Cindi

Cindi Wood is author of LifeWay's bestselling *Frazzled Female* books. She is sought after as a speaker and Bible teacher, guiding women to deal with daily stress by experiencing a practical and deep relationship with Jesus Christ.

Her *Frazzled Female* Events have taken her across the United States and into other countries, sharing the good news about Jesus with thousands of busy women who struggle with the many demands of 21st-century living.

Biblically-based teaching coupled with humor from daily experience, her message offers hope and encouragement to women of all ages and walks of life.

Through public appearances, magazine articles, and guest interviews on TV and radio, Cindi's committed passion and

lighthearted delivery help women discover joyful living through a deep encounter with Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Simply reading her titles can bring a smile to your face: *The Frazzled Female* and *Victoriously Frazzled* Bible studies, *Too Blessed For This Mess*, and *I've Used All My Sick Days Now I'll Have To Call In Dead!*

Cindi lives in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, with her husband, Larry. They enjoy ministry partnership with their sons and daughters-in-law. Brandon is a photographer/designer (he's responsible for this book's cover art) living in Nashville, Tennessee (woodlabelphoto.com and indiebling.com). He and his wife, Bonnie, have one son, Charlie. Lane is on staff at Capital Community Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, as college and student pastor. He has served as a speaker and worship leader across the United States for the past decade (severelyyours.com). He and wife, Meg, have two sons, Durham and Ezra.

To find out more about Cindi's ministry or to schedule her to speak in your area, contact Regal Ventures at (800) 282-2561. You may also visit Cindi Wood on Facebook at www.cindiwoodfacebook.info and at www.frazzledfemale.com

Introduction

Are you desperate to make your life more manageable? Discover the power of the cross. Jesus said: "Whoever wants to save [her] life will lose it, but whoever loses [her] life because of Me will find it" (Matt. 16:25). My life has been transformed as I've researched Scripture, prepared content, and worshiped our Lord in preparation for this study. In my quest for simplicity, I've discovered the cross. Its truth has changed the way I approach life. Stress remains, but Jesus is greater.

As you journey through *Desperate*, don't let it be merely another item on your to-do list. Rather, expect God's Word to enlighten and refresh you. Its content is rich and life-changing if you meditate and savor its message. Allow the hymns to be part of your worship. God's Spirit may lead you to spend a week with one day or to take weeks for one section. Seek God's heart in new and fresh ways. Perhaps in the past you've joined the ranks of Bible-study dropouts. The pressure's off. You can be a diligent student without being fast-paced or stressed-out. Whether one-on-one with the Lord or taking a sister approach, design a format suitable to you.

Instead of including a weekly memory verse, you'll find "The Scripture Garden" on pages 134–35. Reflect and meditate on passages that go along with the weekly content. God's Word is full of verses to enjoy and memorize. The Scripture Garden will provide a starting place, or you may explore His Word on your own. Whatever your approach, it's critical and life-changing to memorize God's Word.

I pray this study will draw you deeper into relationship with God. It's especially when you're desperately holding on to your sanity by a thread that God wants you to turn His way and hear Him speak. Imagine this conversation:

"Lord, my mind is in a whirlpool of daily pressures and stress." — **"I can handle that."**

"My emotions seem untethered to Your stability." — **"I'll help you."**

"My schedule is slam-packed." — **"I understand."**

"I'm often distracted, disturbed, and sometimes depressed." — **"I know where you live."**

"I long for Your peace and joy. I need a real purpose for living." — **"Do you love Me?"**

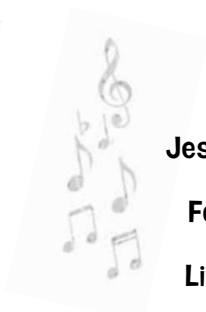
"Oh yes, Lord. I do love You!" — **"Take My hand; let's go."**

Dear Friend, if you've never begun a relationship with Him, your salvation is a done deal, waiting for you to accept. Joy, peace, and purposeful living await you in a relationship with Christ. Turn to page 133 to begin the journey of a lifetime. You can choose to redefine your life. The journey begins at the cross!

Enjoying His Grace,

Cindi

Jesus Loves Me



**Jesus loves me! this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.***

**Lord, You love me when I'm stressed,
even tho' my life's a mess.
When I give it all to You,
You will always see me through****

**Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.***

—Anna B. Warner, 1860*

**author's words

1

my life's
driving me
crazy!

day 1: balloon pop!

Focus: Becoming desperate for God

Scripture: “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.” Matthew 5:3, Message

embarrassed

For real, I am. Even so, I need to be straight up with you. I want you to know I have experiential knowledge of what’s at stake when stress turns you into a victim, arms flailing and words spewing, while those on the sidelines shriek back in horror or worse yet, laugh. Actually, I have many such memories, but one particular day springs to mind when I think over those many times I lost it.

First, imagine you are a latex balloon (a red-hot one of course). Each stress event in your day deposits a puff of air into you—the balloon. Here’s my real-life scenario and how it all went down.

My then 13-year-old son Brandon and I were finally on the homeward trek after a difficult day at the middle school where I taught and where he was in seventh grade. Lots of opportunities throughout my teaching day puffed those stressors into my balloon. Students bickering, parents calling, interrupted schedules, and unexpected reports had greatly increased my stress load since we’d left home at 6:30 a.m.

We were running on a tight schedule and had just enough time to get home, grab a bite to eat, and head out the door for the Little Theater production starring my son as lead character. Proud mama? Yes, but agitation was trumping the pride. There was no time for a hiccup in our plans. Tension mounting, nerves fraying ... let the countdown begin.

Brandon took a note out of his book bag. 5! “Mom, I need a pair of white socks for the play tonight.” 4! “What? Why am I just now hearing this?” 3! “I didn’t mention it because I thought I had white socks!” 2! “You do have white socks!” 1! “Mama, I thought I did, but I don’t have any white socks!” 0!

Balloon pop. It's over!

Calm mom. Usually even-tempered mom explodes when the white-sock agitator pushes her over the edge. I don't need to describe the explosion. You know what it looks like, sounds like, and how unforgettable it is for all who experience it. So, what are typical agitators for today's busy woman?

Anything, everything.

As fate would have it, the one that pops your balloon is often something insignificant. You see, it's not the thing itself. It's the fact that this one just happened to be at the end of a long string of stress harassers; and you, the balloon, have been stretched to your limit and can't deal with one more little bitty thing.

Has your balloon ever popped? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

If yes, underline the words or phrases that describe how you felt afterward.

embarrassed	sad	silly	ashamed	helpless
angry	worthless	out of control	low-down	other _____

they pile up

Stressors, I'm talking about. You know ... those little irritants that poke at your soul like little pin sticks. A couple or so don't bother you; you barely notice. Actually, you've gotten pretty good at making it through your day, paying little attention to all those trivial annoyances that add up until somebody gets on your last nerve, the headache that's been germinating all day finally sprouts, or the last e-mail of the workday sends you over the edge and suddenly you just can't take it anymore.

Circle the stressors or list others that have poked at your nerves.

uncooperative family	computer blips	clothes too tight
running late for work	crowded food store	bad hair day
others whining	waiting in long lines	interrupted sleep
too many phone calls	no time for self	a Facebook comment
other _____		

Most women I know truly do not want their balloon to pop. Busy women. Busy, good women long to exude happiness and self-control. They want their children, grandchildren, husbands, friends, and the people they brush by during the day to sense someone who is a confident manager of life's stresses.

But mostly, they want to experience it themselves. Ohhh, the longing to really experience daily peace and fulfillment—and in the middle of a hectic lifestyle. During the 21st century, do we dare dream that it's possible to live a life free from the bondage of stress?

Check each statement that applies to you.

- ☐ **Most days I live in stress-overload.**
- ☐ **It's rare to feel that life is stressful.**
- ☐ **Little things annoy me in big ways.**
- ☐ **Daily stress is my new normal.**
- ☐ **I desperately want my life to be peaceful and fulfilling.**

the first step

From one who is a daily seeker of peace, joy, and fulfillment, I can tell you the first critical step is a desperation for your heart to mesh with the heart of God. For much of my life, stress has had a hold on me. I've tried to prevent it, manage it, organize it, and pray it away. Not until I became desperate to know God, instead of being desperate to get rid of stress, did life really begin to change.

I don't understand it, but I know it's true. For me, God used the overload of stress in my life to reveal His Glory. What a blessing. I'm living proof that coming to the end of your rope can be a blessed event but only when it drives you to God's heart.

Right now, is your heart aching for a saner lifestyle? What are you feeling?

My friend, get excited. You're in the midst of a God encounter. That stirring is His Holy Spirit gently pulling you toward the realization that life can be better than it is and sweeter than you can imagine. He's longing to fill you with hope and new direction right in the middle of your balloon pop. That's the kind of God He is.

Think about how God might use your stress to bring you closer to His heart. Can you sense His love for you as you struggle to do good things? Are you confused about what and how you can let go of some of these things?

Worship with this week's hymn, and scribble your thoughts.

Dear Father, I finally admit it. I'm desperate for You to bring peace into my life. I know my efforts can't do it, and my love alone is not enough. I honestly don't understand how to deal with all of the stress that's in my life, so I come to You helpless and needy. You have promised to bless me when I turn to You. Here I am. I love You.

day 2: here comes Jesus!

Focus: Moving focus from self to Jesus

Scripture: Read about the blind beggar in Luke 18:35-43.

Take your time and sink into this passage, asking God to speak to your heart in a fresh way.

Some commentaries refer to the blind beggar as Bartimaeus, but Luke simply calls him “a blind man.” His identity and name may be uncertain, but he’s a favorite biblical hero to me. What does he do that ranks him at the top? He simply cries out to Jesus. Unstoppable and relentless crying out to the Messiah, until He looks his way.

Blind, poor, and a beggar; he’s done with it all. His loud and insistent cry for help won’t be squelched. He’s neither intimidated nor willing to bow down to the crowd who tells him to shut up. No. This man’s had it. He’s crying out to the only One who can save him. His cry of desperation gets my attention, but more importantly, it gets the attention of Jesus.

Are you at that “can’t-take-it-anymore” place? Check the statements that most accurately describe how you feel now or how you’ve felt in the past.

- ☐ I can’t deal with one more thing.
- ☐ I keep trying to _____, but it’s futile.
- ☐ Nothing seems to be working.
- ☐ I feel like I’m going crazy.
- ☐ If only I had a little help.
- ☐ God seems silent.

worse than terrible

Beggars were often seen at the city gate where people went in and out. This poor blind man was probably used to calling out to those who passed by, asking for

money and begging for alms. And he'd probably done so for much of his life.

The image of this man begging for help and attention tugs at my heart. A real person, loved by God, but often overlooked and dismissed by others. Can you imagine his low self-esteem heaped on top of being so physically needy? Being a pauper and totally dependent upon the wealth and goodness of passersby, he surely felt destitute of love of self and others.

Feeling like you're at the end of your rope can lead to self-absorption—which leads to physical and emotional manifestations.

Underline any you've experienced.

loss of sleep	physical pains	emotional depletion
loss of joy	uneasiness	extreme fatigue
restlessness	lack of desire	lack of concentration
anger	instability	other _____

Day in and day out, he dragged his tired body and positioned it where he could best be seen and heard. Not able to work because he was blind, he sat by the wayside begging. Blind, poor, and miserable, he sat ... and sat ... and sat ... until one day, here came Jesus! From the noise and chaos, he could tell the crowd was much larger than usual. The pushing and shoving prompted him to cry out to whoever could hear him, "What's going on?"

Then one in the crowd shouted back, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by!"

Can you imagine the trickle of hope that began to percolate deep inside his heart? A small anticipation that there could possibly be a proverbial light at the end of his long dark tunnel?

How does the hope of Jesus healing you physically, emotionally, or mentally make you feel? Circle all that apply.

excited	relieved	energized	grateful	undeserving
valuable	hopeful	honored	loved	comforted
eager for a fresh start		lighthearted		

Do you believe Jesus knows all of your needs and longs for you to experience these things? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

Explain your response.

faith crying

Realizing it was Jesus passing by, our blind friend began yelling at the top of his lungs, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 38). Those surrounding him rebuked him and tried to stifle his cries, but he shouted all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 39).

The Greek translation of “have mercy” in this passage means to “have compassion.”¹ The reputation of Jesus had surely preceded Him. This man’s plea was no helpless, feeble cry. It was loud and insistent. He surely hoped to get the attention of One who might possibly look on him with compassion instead of disgust. As he cried out to Jesus, the opinions of others simply did not matter.

Have you ever been caught up in what others may think of you when you’re going through difficult times? What have you assumed they were thinking?

- ☐ **She doesn’t have enough faith.**
- ☐ **She thinks things are worse than they are.**
- ☐ **She could do something to make things better.**
- ☐ **She brought it on herself.**
- ☐ **She deserves what she’s getting.**
- ☐ **She can’t handle tough situations.**
- ☐ **She attracts trouble.**

My friend, there’s One who understands you and everything you’re experiencing right now. On top of that, He loves you through and through and wants you to know it.

The blind beggar was just that; blind and begging. At the moment Jesus passed by, he readjusted his focus, from physical blindness to being blind to everyone and everything except Jesus. He went from begging for handouts to begging for healing. He set his mind and attention on the only One who could really help him.

You can do the very same thing, right now. At this moment, you can block out everyone and everything and simply set your mind and attention on the only One who can really help you, Jesus.

As you close today’s study, position yourself as the blind beggar. Reach out to Jesus and see Him tenderly turn your way as He hears your cry for help.

Worship with this week's hymn, and scribble your thoughts.

Dear Lord, oh how I need You. Right now I'm choosing to let go of my self-effort. Right now I'm choosing to let go of being consumed with what others think. I'm simply crying out to You to save me. Please help me to readjust my focus to You and Your love for me. I love You.

day 3: daily “to-do” things

Focus: Seeing desperation as a positive place

Scripture: Reread Luke 18:35-43. Prayerfully think about the desperation of this man crying out to Jesus. Ask the Father to help you see your own desperation.

My times of desperation seem to fall in one of two categories: accumulation of daily stuff and major life events.

Accumulation of daily stuff involves “today things” spilling over to the next day, then the next, and the next ... until I feel paralyzed and unable to move forward toward completion.

Major life events are happy, exciting times or heartbreaking occasions that open the door to extreme emotions. Marriage, births of children and grandchildren, buying a new home, death of loved ones, and career change are some of the major life events I’ve experienced.

We’ll explore these categories today and tomorrow. I want to help you realize that whether you slide into desperation gradually or are catapulted from the springboard of stress, this can be a great place if it brings you to the end of self.

Remember—“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule” (Matt. 5:3, Message).

daily things

I’m a planner—big time. Having things all planned out gives me a sense of control and organization. Proper planning of my daily schedule helps me be more efficient in managing my time and energy. Now this works out just great as long as I’m in control of my plans. What doesn’t work is when my planning depends on the planning of others and their plans don’t go along with mine. Get the picture?

Have your plans ever been contingent on the plans of others? ☐ yes ☐ no
If yes, what was the situation?

Explain how you felt not being in control of your plans.

Awaiting the birth of my first grandson gave me practice in the “others are not cooperating with my plans” department. We were about a month out. Baby’s mom was 35 weeks and holding, and I was about to go into labor. I was entering into a new phase of life and there was nothing easy about it. My birthing pangs were coming fast and furious.

Oh yes, I was desperate! Desperate because I was going nuts trying to get on top of all the daily things that had to be done before I became a grandma. It was not the birth of our baby that had me stressed out but the many things I had to attend to before he arrived, during his arrival, and in the months after he arrived. Many unknowns revolved around the completion of my list.

Place an X in the area that best describes how often you get stressed out over your to-do list.

never	weekly	monthly	pretty much all the time
-------	--------	---------	-----------------------------

Has your daily to-do list ever driven you to panic mode? ☐ yes ☐ no

Circle words and phrases describing how you felt.

anxious	afraid	hopeless	agitated	helpless
worn out	uncertain	angry	useless	attacked
done with it all	wishing for help			

Desperation can be your turning point. Refresh your mental image of the blind beggar screaming for Jesus. His was an irrepressible desire that kept him shouting louder and louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:38).

He knew what he wanted, and he was going after it. His cry was not directed to just anyone, but to the One who could restore his sight. “Son of David” as a title is equivalent to “Messiah,” as it signifies to the Jews a person who is the promised descendent of David who will sit upon Israel’s throne.²

He’d cried out countless times to others, hoping for physical relief from his poverty and hunger. On any given day, that was the best he could hope for. But now Jesus was passing by. By reputation, he knew this One was capable of giving much more than temporary relief. His was the gift of total healing.

Do you see the progression? Because of hard times (blind, hungry, and poor) he was positioned (physically and emotionally) to become utterly desperate for Jesus to meet his needs. If he hadn’t been desperate he may have totally missed it. Desperation becomes a great place when it causes you to cry out to Jesus, the only One who can save you.

Has the accumulation of daily stress ever caused you to be desperate for Jesus?

☐ yes ☐ no

Explain your answer below.

When you become desperate for Jesus in day-to-day activities, you will focus more on His love and grace than you do when you move in your strength and ability. By calling out to Him and recognizing Him as your Savior from daily stress, you’ll begin to experience more peace and joy as you work through the issues before you.

Circle the day-to-day areas where you’d like to experience more joy and peace.

paying bills	getting groceries	working
exercising	cooking meals	caring for parents
going to church	devotional time	cleaning the house
caring for children	running errands	family time

Fortunately, before my grandbaby was born, I finally came to the end of self-effort. I laid my agenda aside, trusting my Heavenly Father to guide me and pull everything together for me.

Before this desperation led me to Jesus, I felt distracted, discouraged, and depleted. When I finally admitted there was no way I could get all of these unknowns resolved on paper, I gave my list totally to Him. The unknowns were still there, but I moved from panic to peace. I can't fully explain it, but I sure did gratefully receive it. I spread my arms open and upward, giving Him full access to my heart, my mind, and my plans.

My desperation led me to Jesus. I gradually began to feel focused, encouraged, and energized.

Dear friend, a life full of too much to do and too many to take care of can hurl you into despair. That's a horrible and hopeless place to live. The great news is that you don't have to stay there. Just take the next step into God's provision. Relinquish your need to control it all, and let Him work it out. When you do this, you step into His peace. His peace will carry you through the days ahead. His peace will help you think more clearly, placing the burden of it all on Him, not you.

Want Him to take over?

Worship with this week's hymn, and scribble your thoughts.

Dear Father, I'm gradually understanding how being desperate can be a good thing. Thank You for revealing Your love to me. Thank You for helping me understand that when I'm at the end of my rope, I'm brushing against Your heart. I love You.

day 4: major life event things

Focus: Turning to Him when there's nowhere else to turn

Scripture: Ask your Heavenly Father to prepare your heart and mind as you seek Him. Prayerfully meditate on Jeremiah 29:13.

a healing miracle

Years ago, my mom and I shared an incredible experience. This particular morning, I sat by her side where she was an oncology patient at Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, North Carolina. When she left for tests, I found my way to the hospital's chapel. As my prayers gave way to tears, I didn't pay attention to the entrance of the man who rocked our world. Phasing out of my meltdown, I noticed him: quietly poised with clergy attire flowing under a kind, gentle face.

It was one of those days when I needed to talk. So when he asked, "What's troubling you?" I poured forth with volcanic gusto. It felt so good to have someone to share this burden.

Place a check by feelings you've experienced after pouring your heart out.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> relief | <input type="radio"/> embarrassment | <input type="radio"/> depletion |
| <input type="radio"/> joy | <input type="radio"/> strength | <input type="radio"/> encouragement |
| <input type="radio"/> freedom | <input type="radio"/> affirmation | <input type="radio"/> understanding |
| <input type="radio"/> renewal | <input type="radio"/> other _____ | |

My clergy friend then introduced himself as Leroy and invited me to continue. After I described the mass of cancer and the next phase of testing, Leroy simply said, "Tomorrow the tests will reveal that the cancer is not there."

That was it. No explanation, no wavering, just a statement of fact.

The next day, it happened just as he'd said. My mom and I were stunned—joyful, but stunned. We immediately set out to find Leroy, the hospital chaplain. Staff directory—no record of his name. Volunteer register—not there. Ministry logbook

where dates and times are logged with names of ministers—no listing of Leroy and no one recognizing him by the description I gave. After exhausting our search efforts, my mom and I hugged and thanked our Heavenly Father for this angel of ministry who had foretold her healing.

Have you had an unexplainable encounter? If so, briefly describe your experience.

The next months provided many opportunities to share this miracle story. Mom and I together told the story of Leroy and the cancer disappearing just as he said it would. God was glorified in the telling and the rejoicing that followed each sharing.

the unexpected

Three months after the miracle of “no cancer” occurred, the cancer returned. Without announcement or warning, it was back. As blown away as we were by its disappearance, the recurrence of this deadly disease left us even more dumbstruck.

Why would God do such a thing? Why would He allow or even orchestrate such an event so miraculous, only to seemingly unravel the reports of glorious healing? From the depths of my heart I wondered and cried.

Why did God take back our miracle? It would have been far better if we’d never experienced this miracle of healing. I couldn’t find a Bible verse to help me deal with this pain. The hurt I felt almost made me feel betrayed.

Have you ever felt betrayed by God? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, place a check by the area in which you experienced these feelings.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> end of marriage | <input type="radio"/> difficulty with children | <input type="radio"/> infertility |
| <input type="radio"/> miscarriage | <input type="radio"/> death of a loved one | <input type="radio"/> rejection |
| <input type="radio"/> loss of job | <input type="radio"/> health issues | <input type="radio"/> other _____ |

What were the cries from the depths of your heart?

1.

2.

3.

desperate

As my heart cried out to my God, one thought surfaced again and again—fear!

Not fear of cancer or of the journey ahead. Not even fearful of losing my mom to earthly death. The one consuming thought that strangled my peace and sent me into panic mode was this: *I was afraid of losing my intimacy with God.*

In all my earnest attempts to make sense of this latest development and to understand why God would allow such a tragedy, I simply could not. My heart was void of consolation and resolution. The sweetness I'd experienced with my Savior seemed vague and far away. I wanted Him to make it all OK but couldn't sense how He possibly could.

Second Corinthians 4:8-10 comes to mind now, as I still recall the pain of that ordeal. "We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."

I *felt* crushed and abandoned, but I knew I was not. In the numbness of the moment the only thing I seemed able to do was to grab hold of Jesus. The stench of death surrounded me, and I was desperate for Jesus to renew me with His thinking, His direction, His life.

And so I cried to Jesus. In planting my emotional and physical feet, I placed every ounce of energy I had in crying out to the only One who could bring resolution to my anguished soul. It was an intense time, an urgent and deliberate time of pouring my heart out steadfastly to Him. It seemed God had placed me in such a position of having nowhere to turn except to Him.

Has God ever placed you where you had nowhere to turn except to Him?

☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, explain.

from desperation to peace

For three long and desperate weeks, I cried out to Him, steadfastly planting my heart and soul before Him. I stopped asking questions and trying to make sense of it all. I simply cried out His name.

Jesus!

Then, after weeks of desperately crying out, I simply stepped into His peace. I can't explain it. To this day I cannot describe the spiritual nuts and bolts of how it happened. I only know it did. And when His peace was ushered in, it came completely and undividedly. One moment, utterly desperate. The next, totally peaced-out.

Mom's heavenly entrance marked her earthly time line shortly after this event. Oh, the peace that certainly engulfed her. Jesus, her peace, her comfort, her answer.

For me, I discovered that in the midst of my cries for explanation, He gave me Himself and He was all I needed. Jesus, my peace, my comfort, my answer.

My friend, tenaciously crying out to Jesus with a sincere and genuine heart will usher you into His peace. He is the source of peace whether your circumstance is resolved here on earth or later in heaven. He alone is your peace. His life stirs within you, filling you with hope and unexplainable joy—His joy. Are you desperate for His touch today? Do you need Him to be your answer for a troubling and uncertain time of life?

Worship with this week's hymn, and scribble your thoughts.

Dear Father, I need You to make it all OK. Give me strength to stand firm and call out Your name. Help me know You are my answer. I love You.

day 5: addicted to comfort?

Focus: Finding the ultimate comfort in Jesus

Scripture: Enjoy a sweet time of praise and meditation before entering into today's study. Steady your gaze and fix your attention on your joyful God as you kick back with Psalm 100.

chocolate, shoes, or Jesus?

Have you ever noticed God's sense of humor? I sure did the moment He revealed to me my addiction to comfort, or to be exact, coffee.

It happened when I was putting the final touches on a message about desiring Jesus. Early that morning, I'd headed down to the hotel lobby to grab a cup of freshly brewed, just right for me, cup o' java. When I reached the coffee bar, the words "Our coffee pot is broken" gave me fresh energy to sprint back up the stairs to my hotel room and plug in the little one tucked inside the closet. After two failed attempts of trying to resuscitate the long dead pint-sized version of a pot, He spoke.

"Are you as desperate for *Me* as you are for that cup of coffee?"

There it was. Loud and clear from the heart of the Lover of my soul. He'd shut me down with broken coffee pots to reveal my desire for lesser things.

Now you may be thinking this is no big deal. *It's just a cup of coffee.* But stay with me. If you're truly interested in going deeper with Him, you'll give some serious thought to this concept. Truth is, you could be missing out on some mega-charged blessings by turning to other people and other things to get your wants met. God designed it that way, you know. He's a jealous God and wants to be the first on your list of where to turn when life leaves you lacking. That yearning in your heart that will not be satisfied is from Him.

It's not only about needs, it's about wants. You were created with a hungering in your spirit not only to need God but also to want Him—to want Him more than you want anybody or anything. He put that craving there; it's from Him.

"The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God!" (Deut. 4:24).

On this final day of week one, we are looking at comfort addictions. Is every “want for comfort” you experience ultimately fulfilled in your love relationship with Jesus or in other things or other people? My goal is not to douse you with guilt, nor mute your enjoyment of life’s pleasures. Oh no! I simply want to give you some food for thought so that you’ll notice your subtle desires for lesser things. What do you get a hankering for when you’d like a little pick-me-up? What craving pops into your mind when you want some umppff to your day? In other words:

What scratches your itch? Check your answers and explain.

- ☐ **Food. What kind?**
- ☐ **Shopping. For what and where?**
- ☐ **Getting away. Where?**
- ☐ **Entertainment. What sort?**
- ☐ **Other** _____

got satisfaction?

Sometimes no matter what we do, no matter what we try, no matter how hard we work, or no matter what things we have, we just don’t feel satisfied with our lives.

Where’s your satisfaction deficiency? Briefly describe below. Skip any that don’t apply. (For example, Family: I wish my husband just enjoyed talking with me.)

Family:

Church:

Career:

Friendships:

Other:

Here’s the biblical truth: God “has planted eternity in the human heart” (Eccl. 3:11, NLT). Deep inside us is a craving that cannot and will not be satisfied with any earthly thing.

In thinking about getting our desires met, I’m not addressing the many sinful places we might turn. I’m talking about the relatively harmless ones, those superficial, instant-gratification places.

Every time we reach for that special something to appease our insatiable whim of the moment, we recognize there's a little something lacking in the satisfaction department. Craving and grabbing a piece of chocolate feels gratifying for the moment but soon leaves us pining again. We simply have this deep-seated drive to get our wants and needs met. There's a hunger that will not be totally satisfied and a thirst that will not be totally quenched. Even as believers, our hearts still long for something richer and deeper and grander.

Perhaps you're thinking it's a bit far fetched to link such insignificant desires with your passion for God. After all, they are a bit benign in and of themselves. That's true, but let me encourage you to delve a bit deeper. During the weeks following my coffee episode, I began noticing subtle cravings that I had not paid attention to before. Some had to do with food; some with other "fixes" like shopping or driving somewhere. I began talking to God during these impulses saying something like, "Lord, right now I'm turning to You with this appetite, instead of to _____."

Each time I forfeited the lesser desire for the Higher One, I sensed pleasure in my Father's heart. It wasn't that He was demanding this gift, but He seemed pleased that during this particular moment I preferred Him over His gifts to me.

Answer the following statements with *yes*, *no*, or *s* (for sometimes).

- _____ **I enjoy God's gifts to me more than I enjoy the relationship we share.**
- _____ **His gifts satisfy me more than His presence.**
- _____ **God's most precious gifts to me substitute for deeper intimacy with Him.**
- _____ **I am aware of reaching for other pleasures instead of for God's company.**
- _____ **I lack deep satisfaction in my life.**
- _____ **A deeper hunger for God is growing in my heart.**

the big cover-up

I encourage you, dear sister, to take a look inside yourself. Could you possibly be covering up unhappiness, guilt, fear, boredom, or anger with food and other things? Are you looking to these things for temporary satisfaction instead of finding ultimate satisfaction inside God's heart? I hope today's study will help you ponder a bit and bring refreshment to your spiritual journey. By all means, savor that piece of chocolate and cup of coffee. But instead of turning to them for comfort, let them be an opportunity to praise the Giver. "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4, NIV).

As we close this week's study, consider the essence of today's subject. Decide if you want to take this challenge to press in a bit and explore this notion of channeling your whimsical desires toward God's heart instead of toward lesser sources of happiness and comfort.

Worship with this week's hymn, and scribble your thoughts.

Dear Heavenly Father, I want to go deeper with You. Please, Holy Spirit, reveal Your truth. Am I enjoying Your gifts more than I'm enjoying You? Draw me to Your heart. Show me how to love You more. I'm listening with excitement. I love You.

1. "Mercy," *Word Study Tool* [online, cited 23 January 2012]. Available from the Internet: www.mystudybible.com
2. *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 1776.

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