

Healing What's Within: Discussion Questions

Chapter 1:

1. Is there a particular story in this chapter that resonated with you? A sentence (or two) that describes your current experience? If so, write it down and/or share it with someone you trust. Spend some time reflecting on what stood out to you and what invitation you might sense emerging from this recognition.
2. Did you sense any inner resistance to anything you read? If so, can you track it to a particular thought or theme? Is this something that you can sit with, pay attention to, even share with someone else?
3. We all experience some form of disconnection. What is one unique characteristic of disconnection in your life? And how might you articulate your desire for reconnection and flourishing? What would that look like? What would your inner experience be like? How would your relationships look different after reconnection?
4. How does it feel to consider your God-created worth, belonging, and purpose as evidence of your image-bearing inheritance? What is your inner experience of each of these? What do you need to be reminded of most?

Chapter 2:

1. Can you think of an experience from any period of your life when you suffered alone? What was it? How did it feel? If you were eventually met in it, how did that help? If you weren't, how does it feel even today reflecting on what it was like to suffer alone?
2. How did your family talk about painful things? How were you attended to when you were hurt? Was there a particular mantra that was spoken or an implied expectation about how to get over it or through it quickly? See if you can name some of the childhood lessons you learned about how you were supposed to deal with pain.
3. Has suffering alone become normalized for you, perhaps to the point that no one really knows what you're experiencing? If so, how might it feel to open yourself up to God by acknowledging that it hurts? How would it feel to share some of what you're feeling with a friend?
4. We sometimes tend to minimize our suffering through comparison. How have you done this? What is it like to consider that your unique struggle— no matter what it is— is the very place where God meets you?

Chapter 3:

1. What has been your relationship with your body and your emotions? What lessons did you learn from home or from church about how to navigate both?

2. Take some time to describe what Home feels like in your body today. On your very best days, when you feel calm and connected, when your emotions are rightsized, when you can handle a bit more, what do you experience within you? What are the conditions around you that make this possible?

3. Your dashboard alerts you to symptoms you might have been ignoring for some time. Take a few minutes to write down some symptoms you have encountered in the last several days as you experience them through your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, behaviors, and relational energy. Which of these, if any, are a surprise to you? Who might you invite into a conversation about what you're experiencing?

4. As you consider the Storm and the Fog, is there one you've spent more time in? Are there particular seasons of your life where you can see yourself living in that pattern? Do you feel stuck in one or the other right now?

Chapter 4:

1. How does Hezekiah's story help you recognize the importance of exploring your own story? What aspects of Hezekiah's situation can you relate to?

2. The challenges of life can chip away at our God- imaged inheritance of worth, belonging, and purpose. We can become mired in shame, stuck in aloneness and isolation, trapped in disillusionment. Use the following questions to reflect on this:

- Who in my story championed my worth and belonging, and called me to a sense of purpose? What particular memories of hearing these messages from someone can you recall? What was spoken? How did it feel?
- Whose words shattered these things, prompting shame, alienation, and disillusionment? Is there a core story or stories you recall around this?
- Are there people in your life today who speak words of goodness, kindness, and compassion to you? How? What can you do to assure that there are people in your life who do see your image-bearing self and speak words of dignity, love, and vision for your flourishing? What fears do you have about this?

3. Which attachment styles help put words to your own story and how you tend to relate to others even today? Can you identify particular attachment "wounds" that have rendered you more preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful/shameful in your relationships with others or with God? How does it help to understand that these aren't fixed personality styles but are patterns that can be changed through healing relationships and healthy communities? If there are others you are journeying with as you read this book, invite their feedback about how you relate and discuss what intentional things you might do to begin to heal.

Chapter 5:

1. Have you seen *Inside Out*? If not, take some time to watch it, perhaps with a friend or loved one. How does it help you personify parts of you that vie for control within you? Can you name your own inner characters? How does naming these parts of you elicit compassion for them?
2. What parts of you have you sometimes considered bad or unwanted? Examine one of them and see if you can't become curious about the role it has played within you. If you were to tell your story from the perspective of just this one part of you, how would you tell it? If this goes well, try doing the same thing for more parts of you.
3. What is your first instinct when you experience an uncomfortable emotion or bodily sensation? Most of us want it to go away. Journal or talk to a friend about this instinct within you. See if you can find a concrete example. And then through the practices below, see if you might greet that emotion or sensation with a hello next time it arises. See if you might ask it what it's trying to tell you.
4. What is it like to consider that God sees you to the core and calls you "Beloved"? Who are people in your life who offer the kind "hello" of Jesus, who mirror your image-bearing worth, belonging, and purpose to you?

Chapter 6:

1. Have you experienced moments when the books, podcasts, or other resources you've engaged with just don't seem to help, and when you've felt a sense of powerlessness or wondered how you'll get the help and care you need? How does this sense of powerlessness feel? When this happens, are you apt to redouble your efforts? Or descend into frustrated resignation? How could you try to approach this sense of powerlessness as a gift to be welcomed?
2. As you reflect on the "neon consciousness" that sometimes shows up in church, therapy, or other spaces, when/where/with whom have you known the pressure of demand, analysis, fixing, tinkering, controlling, and more? How did you respond? What approach would you have preferred?
3. Consider the mystery of your own unfolding story and the trauma you bear in your body, some of which is wrapped up in your ancestral story and some of which is an ancient and shared story of humanity's disconnection. How does that perspective help you approach your own inner work with more patience, gentleness, and grace? How might you open yourself to this larger frame for holding your own story?

Chapter 7:

1. How have you typically understood addiction? And how does it strike you to consider addiction not as a problem to be solved but as an attempt to solve a deeper problem? How might that shift your perspective on yourself or others in your life?
2. If we're all navigating some kind of trauma and if we're all attempting to comfort ourselves in some way, then each of us is invited to consider our everyday ways of self-soothing. Reflect on one

or two common behaviors you engage in that most might not see as addictive, but that represent a form of soothing (i.e., scrolling on your phone, spending hours playing video games or binge-watching shows, shopping). Consider what role this activity plays in your life. Is it something that is used to numb, distract, soothe, or stimulate?

3. If addiction isn't core to you or to anyone, if instead it's just an adaptation, a way of coping, even just a part of your trying to self-soothe, then imagine God meeting you for a conversation about one of your particular strategies for self-soothing. Take a few minutes to hear the question beneath the question God asks in Genesis 3 ("Where have you taken your hunger?") and sense the kindness of God's inquiry, the compassion in his voice. How does it feel to imagine God approaching you with compassion and kindness instead of condemnation for your bad behavior?

Chapter 8:

1. Are you familiar with St. John's language of the "dark night"? If so, how have you typically understood it? Many conflate this concept with depression, and yet it's something quite unique. Does it feel helpful to you? How would you articulate your own experience of it?

2. As you consider the parts of you that you'd rather have people see and experience, how would you describe this "you"? How has this "you" worked for you over the years? Why do you suppose this "you" emerged in the first place?

3. As you consider the parts of you relegated to the shadows, take a few minutes to simply ponder what it feels like to become curious about these parts of yourself in the first place. Is it scary? Overwhelming? Might it feel safer to put this work aside until you can engage this question with a therapist?

4. If you feel safe and comfortable enough to begin exploring in the shadows, what do you see? What parts of you were relegated to these places? Do you have a sense of why this was? And when? Try to focus on one aspect or part of you or your experience and see what you learn.

Chapter 9:

1. What is it like for you to consider the question, "What do you long for?" How is it to hear that question from Jesus himself? As you think about this, pay attention to whether it's challenging for you to long for more. If so, when did your longings diminish?

2. Jesus makes a way for us through his own "excruciating vulnerability." What is it like to consider your own courageous journey in light of God's self-giving love in his life, suffering, death, and resurrection?

3. How does it feel to be invited to participate in this journey as one who calls others to attend to what's happening within them? What resources do you need for your own journey ahead? What unique gifts might you bring with you as an ambassador of God's shalom in the world?