

THE TRANSFORMED HEART

Excerpt: 30 Days of Transformation

by

Michael D. Warden



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The Transformed Heart

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This is an extended excerpt from book, *The Transformed Heart* by Michael Warden. To purchase your copy of the complete book, visit the following link online:

www.michaelwarden.com/my-books/

INTRODUCTION

IT'S a Big Life you're called to lead. There's a Big Dream in your heart, placed there by God himself. You know it's there, even though, like most of us, you lose track of it from time to time. It bubbles up in you, though, most every day. It comes upon you as a persistent desire for *something more* out of life. A desire to *do* something more. A desire to *be* something more. You know, deep down, that there's got to be more to your life than this. It's like you're being summoned to a Higher Purpose, and a Bigger Life.

Because, in fact, you are.

But there's a difficult truth we have to face. Living a Big Life is hard. It takes work and sacrifice, and most of all, a lot of faith. Leading a small life is far easier and more comfortable. However ultimately dissatisfying, a small, cozy, ordinary life is far less threatening. To die from a slow painless bleed seems better on the surface than to perish in the manner of a hero like William Wallace in the movie *BraveHeart*.

But then, no one around us would be set free.

The real question is this: On what will you spend your life? For it will surely be spent on something, whether consciously chosen or not. If you must spend it, why not then spend it for something as big and meaningful as God's big dream for you? To spend it on your own comfort or glory is the height of egocentricity. To spend it on trying to keep your heart "safe" is wholly insane. As Helen Keller so rightly pointed out, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure."

To choose the greater way—not the way of safety or comfort—is to abandon your life to a Greater Power and a Greater Purpose. It is to dive headlong into the rapids, knowing full well that in the moment you do, you relinquish your right to choose your own course. The ride through this world is no longer yours. Your job now is simply to stay in the main flow of the current, to enjoy the thrill and glory of the ride and the beauty of the surroundings. And to laugh for the joy you have found in surrendering your life to a Higher Call.

Isn't that the life you've always wanted, anyway? Of course it is. Because it is precisely the life you were designed to live.

The Transformed Heart devotional is your personal guide to experiencing that bigger life. Covering a period of six months, the weekday readings invite you to connect with Christ through his Word on a truly intimate, relational level—by learning to notice where God is already actively at work in your heart and life, and intentionally partnering with him in a way that leads to authentic life transformation.

To assist in this good work, each devotion includes not only scripture and a devotional reading, but also an interactive, challenging action step that is designed to inspire you toward God's heart and purpose for your life in practical, meaningful ways. To get the most from this journey, it's important that you do your best to complete all the action steps, even those that may take little extra time. You'll find the extra effort will be well worth the cost.

Weekends on this journey are reserved for reflection—to solidify what you've learned during the week and intentionally apply it to your life in meaningful ways. For that reason, instead of devotional readings, the weekend portions of the devotional include a guide for reflection and application. To maximize your benefit, I suggest you

take time on Saturday morning to go through the Weekend Reflection questions, then continue to ponder and journal your responses to those questions throughout the weekend.

Your big life in Christ is waiting to be revealed. So take heart, and hold on to your courage. Jesus loves you, and he is with you right now. Let the journey begin.

Note: For information on other resources related to *The Transformed Heart*, or to learn more about the author's life and work, please visit www.michaelwarden.com.

WHERE YOU ARE NOW
Week 1—Monday

*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.
He will come in and go out, and find pasture.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*
(John 10:9-10)

LET’S begin with a question: How satisfied are you with your life right now? I realize that can be a tough question to answer off the top of your head. So here’s a simple tool I’d like you to use right now to find out. Next to each life category below, rate your current level of satisfaction in that area from 1 to 10—10 being “absolutely satisfied in every way.”

Category	Level of Satisfaction
Career	
Money/Finances	
Personal/Spiritual Growth	
Health/Fitness	
Fun & Recreation	
Friends	
Family	
Significant Other/Romance	
Contribution/Service (making an impact on your community & the world)	
Where You Live (your home, city, region of the world)	

How’d you do? Now let me ask another question: If you really had “life to the full,” what would it look like?

Now wait. Don’t just breeze past the question and keep reading—stop a moment and really think about it. If your life truly was abundant and full in *every* way, in *every* arena of your life, in *every* relationship, what would it look like?

For example, where would you live? Who would be with you? What would be your career or ministry? How would you spend your free time? What sorts of things would you find yourself saying about your life? What would other people say about you? What impact would you be making on the world?

Most of us never ask ourselves questions like that. We’re too busy wrestling with the monotonous dragons of work and responsibility we face every day, or frantically trying to clear out the rubble-filled path of tasks and to-dos ahead of us—if only to make the walk a little easier for a day or two. We don’t have time to think about what a truly abundant life would entail for us. Besides, we realize, doing so would probably only bring us down.

But there's a deeper reason many of us rarely dream about what a life of true abundance would be like for us. Somewhere inside, we're afraid that if we allow ourselves to dream along those lines, we may have to confront how little we actually believe that what Jesus said is true: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

MAKE IT REAL!

Copy the results of the Satisfaction Test into your personal journal. Then, in each of the categories, write out a description of what a truly abundant and fulfilling life would look like in that arena. For example, what would it look like to have real abundance and fulfillment in your friendships? What kind of friends would you surround yourself with? What kind of friend would you be? What kinds of things would you do together? Do this for *every* category. Then take the descriptions you've created to God, and lay them brazenly out before him. Invite him to take you into your deepest heart, and father you toward the fulfillment of his highest dream for "life to the full" in you.

FINDING YOUR TRUE SELF IN GOD

Week 1—Tuesday

*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*
(Psalm 51:6)

IN his book, *Waking the Dead*, John Eldredge writes, "[Jesus] wants truth in the inmost being, and to get it there he's got to take us into our inmost being." But what does it mean to go into your inmost being? The Hebrew word for "inmost being" refers to our deepest thoughts and desires, the core of who we are. In other words, it's talking about our *hearts*. For Jesus to get his transforming truth into our inmost being, he needs us to take a journey into our hearts—and let him show us what's really there.

If you are frightened by the prospect of going into your deepest heart—don't be. For the heart is the place where Jesus dwells; it is his home in you. It's the place he meets with you, and you with him. And he has planted treasures there he's waiting for you to find—visions and longings of the life he meant you to have, which—contrary to what you may have been taught—is precisely the life you really always wanted. "Life to the full" isn't about self-worship or creating a life that serves your flesh. It's about becoming all that you were meant to be, being *fulfilled* in that regard, and bringing that gift to the world.

To choose this path, to actually lay plans to pursue the life of abundance Christ meant you to have, is a brave decision. It means breaking rules and busting through barriers that may have become quite familiar and even cozy because of the illusion of safety they convey. It means surrendering your control to a Power and a Will greater than yourself—

and letting him carry you to the very place you always wanted to go. “If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it” (Matthew 10:39, NLT).

That’s one reason the choice to live a fulfilling life in Christ is a radical act. We all live in a world that favors the mundane, the ordinary, the “just be like everybody else.” There will be a cost to going after “life to the full” in God. (They murdered Jesus because of it, if you’ll recall.) But at the end of the road, when you finally appear before the throne of God, you will be able to say with genuine joy that you lived well in Christ; that you went after the dreams he planted in your heart, and that you fulfilled your purpose in exactly the way you were meant to.

Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes once said, “Too many people die with their music still in them.” Committing your heart to pursue “life to the full” in Christ grants you the stage where you can finally let loose your own special song and dance in the special way that God made you to dance—a way that no one else has ever seen, or could ever do.

MAKE IT REAL!

When Christians talk about the “heart,” they often think they’re simply talking about emotions. But the Bible describes the heart as much more than just your feelings. To learn more about what your heart really is, do a study on the word *heart* in scripture. Using a concordance or Bible software program, look up every reference to *heart* or *hearts* in both the Old and New Testament. Examine the way the word is used in context, and take note of all the qualities the “heart” refers to within us. Be warned! Doing this will likely transform your relationship with God—and with yourself.

FORGIVEN

Week 1—Wednesday

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

(2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB)

WHEN I was a child, I used to dream about Christmas all year long. Early in the year I would begin compiling a list of the gifts I most wanted to receive. As the months went by, I would add to it new things, take away old things I no longer cared to have, and meticulously arrange the items in order of desire. I was careful to keep the list to myself until I was certain I had it just right, then I’d spring it on my mom, usually sometime in October, to make sure she had plenty of time to do my bidding. Of course, I rarely got all that I asked for. But I still savored with joy the anticipation of it all. During the final week leading up to Christmas morning, I would often spread out a sleeping bag on the floor next to the tree, and fall asleep to the blinking of the lights and my own dreams of all the fun I would have come Christmas afternoon.

In those days, I didn't really grasp all that Christmas meant—what it really stood for, or why we celebrated it. But I did understand that it was about receiving wonderful gifts. And it's still about that today.

I think Christians struggle so profoundly with genuinely receiving God's gift of forgiveness and forgiving ourselves because we do not understand the true essence of the gift that Jesus brought to us by coming to earth. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God did something far more than merely take away the punishment your sin deserves.

He gave you an entirely new heart.

MAKE IT REAL!

In your journal, write your response to these questions: What do you really believe about your own heart as a Christ-follower? What assumptions do you have about your heart? In what ways are you suspicious of it? What judgments do you hold against it? How much do you trust it? And finally, how do all of those responses line up against what scripture says is true about your new heart in Christ?

WHO YOU ARE NOW

Week 1—Thursday

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Ephesians 2:4-9, NASB)

THROUGH Christ's death and resurrection, you have been reborn with an entirely new identity through Christ. As Paul explains in Ephesians 2:4-9, through grace, your spirit which was dead, has been made alive in Christ. You have been raised up with Christ and seated with him as a co-heir in God's eternal kingdom. This is an accomplished work. It is finished. And it is a gift, received through the act of authentically placing your faith in Christ (Romans 4:22-24).

As a result of this miraculous rebirth, you exist today in a perpetual state of grace under God. You live each day in a state of forgiveness. You are no longer subject to condemnation because you have already been approved by God (Romans 8:1-2). Yes, you were once far from him, but by the blood of Christ, you have been brought near (Ephesians 2:13). You have been adopted as his beloved child (Romans 8:15). From the moment that happened, you have been his. And no person, no power, no act in all creation can ever snatch you away from his hand.

That is the fundamental gift of salvation—the regeneration of your spirit from death to life in absolute union with God.

It is, truly, an amazing gift. And it is only the beginning.

MAKE IT REAL!

Gather your responses to yesterday’s “Make It Real!” questions, and share them with a trusted Christian ally. Hold nothing back. Then ask him or her to pray with you for God’s grace to let go of any and all lies you have believed about your heart, and embrace the fullness of God’s truth regarding who you really are as a child of the King.

A JOURNEY OF RECLAIMING

Week 1—Friday

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, NASB)

IF you have come into a personal, ongoing relationship with Christ, then you are in the middle of a journey of radical transformation. Indeed, in the most fundamental way, you have already been changed. You have been made new; you are reborn. Your spirit—the eternal living core of who you really are—has been sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and through his forgiveness has been declared righteous. And that same spirit has been sealed in an unshakeable union with the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:13-14).

This regeneration of your spirit has fundamentally transformed the core of who you are, and set you on a journey of transforming and sanctifying all the other aspects of your identity—your thoughts, your will, and your emotions. This amazing state of grace has been granted to you because God loves you and is passionate about empowering you to become all that he originally intended. Without the gift of his forgiveness and grace, you will never become all you were meant to be. But now that you have received his magnificent gift, nothing can stop you from achieving that goal.

Nothing, that is, except your own unbelief.

MAKE IT REAL!

When God looks at you, he sees a beautiful soul reborn; a precious spirit set free, endowed with splendor and grace; a son or daughter who is absolutely, irreversibly, the apple of his eye. In your journal, ponder this: What if God is right about you? What then?

WEEKEND REFLECTION

TAKE a few moments this weekend to review the devotions you've read over this past week, as well as the "Make It Real!" steps you've done. As you reflect on the week, get curious about how God is moving in and through your life. Use these questions as a guide:

- ❖ What insights have you gained over the past week?
- ❖ What changes or shifts are you noticing in your relationship with God? with others? with yourself?
- ❖ What "Make It Real!" steps were the most meaningful for you? What made them meaningful?
- ❖ How will you live differently next week as a result of what you've learned?
- ❖ What support do you need to help you make that change?
- ❖ Based on your experiences over the past week, what do you most need from God right now?
- ❖ What do you suppose God might be wanting most from you right now?

CHALLENGE: If you missed one of the "Make It Real!" steps for this week, set aside time this weekend to complete it, and record your reactions, insights, and results in your journal.

A JOURNEY IN THE LIGHT
Week 2—Monday

But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:7-9)

BECAUSE of the gift of salvation in Christ, at your core you are no longer who you once were. You are different. You are a new creation. Still, though we are fully accepted by God and free from condemnation, our salvation is not yet complete. There is still an “old nature” within us, a nature that continues to resist God’s love and submission to his lordship in our lives. We are all intimately familiar with this old nature, and often tend to define ourselves by it—as if the old nature were, in fact, our “true self,” and that our new identity in Christ were some kind of idealized movie character role we are called to play as best we can. But as Paul explains in Romans 7:15-23, that old nature does not reside in your spirit or “inner being” (as Paul refers to it), but in your body itself (which is why the old nature is often referred to as “the flesh”). The old nature is not who you are now—for you have been made new in Christ—rather, it exists within you as the lingering vestiges of who you were without Christ.

So then, the second phase of God’s great gift—that is, the sanctification of your soul—is essentially this: partnering with the Holy Spirit to identify and subdue the remnants of the old nature within you so that the core of your true self in Christ is set free to live and follow God unhindered in the world.

The Apostle John called this “walking in the Light.” When you stray from the Path, no blatant theatrics are needed to convince God you’re sorry. No self-condemnation or self-abuse is required to pay for your error. Just repent, get back on the Path, and continue on with Christ. By practicing this process as a spiritual discipline, you will stay connected to the wonderful gift of God’s forgiveness and grace, and assure that your fellowship with him and with others will remain strong.

MAKE IT REAL!

Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper. Title the left side “My True Self in Christ,” and the right side “My Old Nature.” Under each heading, list the character traits or behaviors that you think define each one. Notice where you are unsure of what to write, or have trouble coming up with ideas. Complete your lists by going through the New Testament, beginning in the book of Romans, and looking for specific attributes or qualities that scripture identifies with the “flesh” or to your new nature in Christ.

THE GRACE-DRIVEN LIFE

Week 2—Tuesday

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:4-10)

FOR the Christian—indeed, for every human on earth—grace is everything. Grace is the secret of a heart set free. Grace is the power to become everything you were meant to be. It is the ability to overcome any obstacle, or to stand unmoved against any attack. It is divine power—holy, righteous, pure, and unbreakable...greater than any sin or any enemy. Grace is God’s love expressed. It is to the follower of Christ what air is to the wings of an eagle, or wind to the taut sails of a schooner on the open sea.

Grace is utterly beautiful. And utterly free. Perhaps, for so many of us, that’s also why it is so hard to accept as real, and surrender to it.

But only those who are willing to accept it—free and without conditions—will ever understand what it really means to follow God, or grasp just how much the love of God is willing to risk for the chance to win your heart.

MAKE IT REAL!

In your journal, create a timeline that describes your own personal history of experience with God’s grace. When did you first notice God’s grace showing up in your life? What happened? What other times in your history has God’s grace played an integral role? What about the times when grace seemed absent? What do you think was really going on during those times?

WHAT IS GRACE, ANYWAY?

Week 2—Wednesday

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into the this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

(Romans 5:1-2)

ALL of my life, I have heard *grace* defined as “God’s unmerited favor,” which is, of course, true as far it goes. But “God’s unmerited favor” is such a vague and frustrating

description of something so crucial to the Christian journey. After all, you could rightly say that God’s love, God’s mercy, and God’s kindness could all be defined as “God’s unmerited favor.” What, then, distinguishes grace from these?

Author and theologian Dallas Willard defines *grace* as “God acting in our life to accomplish what we cannot do on our own.” That comes much closer to something I can grab hold of, but even it leaves me a bit unsatisfied. It still feels too far removed from me—something God is up to over there, off in the distance. How do I *intimately live* in such a grace, and build my life upon it in any practical way?

I think the reason we struggle to define *grace* is because it is so radically foreign to the way we would do things if we were God. To our human sensibilities, God’s grace seems ridiculously reckless and unwise. How foolish to irrevocably proclaim someone as acceptable and worthy of love and honor and to promise them your full, permanent support before they’ve actually proven themselves to be the slightest bit worthy of any of these things. Such a gift could be easily abused. It could be taken for granted. It could be horribly wasted. Surely God is too smart for that.

But such is the daring love and wisdom of God. For grace is just such a radical gift. And it takes a radical faith to grab hold of it.

MAKE IT REAL!

Get together with a trusted Christian ally and talk about the role of God’s grace in each of your lives. How do you each define *grace*? What do you really believe about grace? What practical impact does grace actually have on your daily experience? How do you receive grace? How do you stay connected to it? What needs to happen for you both to grow in grace?

THE TWO SIDES OF GRACE

Week 2—Thursday

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

(Romans 5:17)

GOD’S grace is two-fold. It is first God’s absolute acceptance and approval of who you are, *just as you are*—based solely upon your expressed faith in the redemptive gift of his Son. Once you step into faith, and receive the gift of Christ, you no longer have anything else you need to prove or anywhere else you need to go or anything else you need to do to make yourself right enough or good enough or acceptable enough. You are already *good*—completely acceptable and approved. The God of the universe has proclaimed you as such. What higher court is there?

But if that weren’t ridiculously radical enough, grace goes farther even than this. For beyond the grace of absolute acceptance just as you are, grace is also the power to

become all that you were meant to be. To tweak Dallas Willard's definition, grace is God's power working *within us and through us* to accomplish what we could never do on our own. Such grace is not fueled by guilt or shame or the rules of religion, but rather through believing that what God has proclaimed concerning you is actually, really true. As a wise man once said, "Show me a man who tries to become righteous by doing righteous things, and I will show you a slave of religion. But show me a man who does righteous things because God has proclaimed him righteous, and I will show you a son of God."

Grace is the power to love sacrificially, the power to walk in intimate communion with God, the power to accomplish God's purpose in the world, the power to overcome any sin, the power to become in every way the whole person you were created to be. And we plug into that life-changing power through our faith—that is, through our confident belief that all of these things are not only possible for us; they are ours by right as sons and daughters of God.

MAKE IT REAL!

What does it mean to you to "reign" in life? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you say you are doing when it comes to "reigning" in your own life? If you scored yourself less than a 10, take some time to read and meditate on Romans 5–8. As you read, ask yourself, "What part of this am I missing in my own life?" Then ask God to show you the way to fill in the gaps in your understanding and experience of his grace.

THE PROCESS OF FREEDOM

Week 2—Friday

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

TO live in God's grace *is* to live in freedom. But too often, somehow we don't feel all that free. We fall short of grace. Honestly, we don't know what the problem is. Yes, we know God loves and accepts us. Yes, his power is available to help us. But it's not enough. For some reason, grace doesn't work for us. It doesn't quite reach us.

Why is that? Perhaps because deep down, we don't really believe that God is right. Sure, he sees us as acceptable and worthy and capable of becoming all we were meant to be. But we know better. So long as we hold onto that sort of subtle arrogance, grace will remain out of reach. As the scripture says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6 NASB).

It isn't enough to simply believe that *God* sees you as acceptable, or that *God* believes you can become all that he intended you to be. *You must see yourself that way as well.* You must let go of your own appraisal of your worth and allow God's grace to extend *inward*—into the way you see and deal with your own heart.

You see, when God proclaims you as acceptable and empowered, he's not just rattling off his opinion. He is pronouncing what is actually true. In fact, his very pronouncement *makes* it true, for his creative power rests in his words (Genesis 1).

When you walk in this inner grace of accepting and loving yourself in the way God accepts and loves you, you can finally give yourself permission to be where you are right now in your own journey, without any judgment or condemnation. You can let yourself feel what you are feeling, stumble where you are stumbling, and not know what you are unsure of—all without judging yourself unworthy or less than acceptable to God, yourself, or anyone else. And through it all, you can know that tomorrow you will be closer to the person God created you to be than you are today—because you are actively cooperating with his power, which is actively at work in you, transforming you inevitably into the image of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:10).

That is grace. Utterly beautiful. And utterly true.

MAKE IT REAL!

How are you at loving and accepting yourself just as you are—the same way God loves and accepts you? If you are in conflict over this, recognize that resistance as pride, and confess it to a trusted Christian ally or spiritual mentor. Repent and ask God for the grace to absolutely and completely accept as true what he has proclaimed is true about you.

WEEKEND REFLECTION

TAKE a few moments this weekend to review the devotions you've read over this past week, as well as the "Make It Real!" steps you've done. As you reflect on the week, get curious about how God is moving in and through your life. Use these questions as a guide:

- ❖ What insights have you gained over the past week?
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CHALLENGE: If you missed one of the "Make It Real!" steps for this week, set aside time this weekend to complete it, and record your reactions, insights, and results in your journal.

YOUR ROLE IN GOD'S STORY

Week 3—Monday

You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.

(2 Corinthians 10:7-8)

RIGHT at this moment, God is in the middle of telling a grand and powerful Story in the world. He has been telling this Story since the beginning of time, and its plot will continue to unfold until the day Jesus returns. It is a Story about God's passionate desire for intimate communion with all people everywhere throughout time, about the brokenness in humanity that has severed our hope for the communion he desires, and the power of his love to redeem and restore our hearts back to abundant life and intimacy with him.

For much of my life, I have been ashamed of the role God has called me to play in the Story he is telling. Like Moses on Mount Sinai, I have put God off, stammering on about this reason or that why I could not possibly take up the role he wanted me to play. It was too dangerous; too unlike me, I thought. I looked on the role with disdain and suspicion. Clearly, I believed, he had the wrong guy.

Every follower of Christ has a part in the Story he is telling in the world. It is a part unique to you, and you alone have been granted the authority and the privilege to carry it out. God has never chosen the wrong role for any of his children. You are perfect for the part he has called you to play. And the authority to play it has already been granted to you.

But you will never play it fully—or perhaps at all—until you surrender your doubt about yourself or the role, and accept the authority God has granted you to play it.

MAKE IT REAL!

What is the role God is calling you to play in the world? If you aren't certain, try this: In your journal, write a description of the role (or life purpose) you *suspect* God may be calling you to fulfill. Afterward, write a description of the role *you would love to play* in the grand Story God is telling in the world. Notice the similarities and differences in the two descriptions, and ask God to bring clarity to his vision for your life.

SURRENDERING YOUR TREASURE

Week 3—Tuesday

Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff,” he replied.

The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand...So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

(Exodus 4:2-4, 20)

THERE is always something you must surrender before you can take up with authority the role God is calling you to play in the world. The thing you must surrender is a little different for everyone, but is always something you treasure—something that you believe defines you or keeps you safe. Perhaps it is your dream for riches, for a particular kind of career, for marriage, or for health. Or perhaps it is something less tangible, such as your dream to be admired or respected, to be safe, or known as sensible and smart.

It is only when you throw it down that you see your treasure for the snake—that is, the *deception*—that it is. Remember the parable of the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46)? The role you are called to play in God’s Story is bigger, more lovely, and more valuable by far than any lesser “treasure” you have placed your hope in until now. But only when you let it go will you see it.

But God, rather than abolishing the thing you throw down, redeems it. He takes ownership of your surrendered treasure, and makes it into something new, weaving it into the role he calls you to play. Moses probably knew from early on that God had called him to play a significant role in the story of Israel’s redemption. But he could not take up the role until he surrendered his treasure to God. Who knows what Moses relinquished the day he threw down his staff? His safety? His desire to be respected? His trust in his own strength? Whatever it was, he remained a shepherd of sheep until the day he surrendered his staff to God, and became God’s shepherd to a nation.

MAKE IT REAL!

What is it that you resist surrendering to God? Make a list, then share it with one or two of your closest Christian allies. Ask them to join you in praying for the faith to surrender these “treasures” to God so that you can wholeheartedly say yes to his call on your life.

RISKING YOUR LIFE

Week 3—Wednesday

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them...Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go...Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

(Joshua 1:1-2, 6-7, 9)

IT takes extraordinary courage to say yes to your role in God's grand Story. The simple reason for this is that the role he calls you to is always bigger than you are. It is always well beyond your natural ability to accomplish. With every fiber of your being, you know that you cannot do it. You are clearly incapable. And yet, because it is God who calls, you say yes. You accept your role in the Story.

Now that is courage! But notice from where it springs. "Have I not commanded you?" says God. "Am I not the Lord? Am I not the Ruler of all the universe? Am I not the Source of all wisdom and knowledge, of all power and glory and truth? I Am. And I say that you are the one I choose for this role. You, and not someone else. Take it! Take up the role with courage and authority. Have I not commanded you?"

The success of the role God calls you to is not dependent on your ability, but God's. By commanding Joshua to fulfill the role of Israel's leader, God imparted to him his own authority and power to see the task accomplished just as he designed. Joshua's only true part in the story was to believe, surrender, and obey. Without that surrendering faith, Joshua would never have found the courage to say yes to the great role God called him to play. And without that same faith, neither will you.

MAKE IT REAL!

What would it look like if you really had "surrendering faith" around the role the God is calling you to play in his Grand Story? What would change about the way you live? What would you finally let go of? What would you grab hold of with all your heart? Write a description of your life as you imagine it would be if you fully surrendered to the role God is calling you to play.

OWNING YOUR AUTHORITY

Week 3—Thursday

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

(2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

ONCE you have surrendered your treasure to God and accepted the call to fulfill your unique role in his grand Story, there is still a deeper challenge you must face. You must willingly embrace the authority that comes with your new role, and learn to wield it with the confidence of Christ. This, too, is an exercise in faith, for you know full well the authority does not come from you and is not yours; it resides within the role to which God has called you. And yet, it is yours to wield. Indeed, God has chosen you to wield it. We are, in effect, stewards of God's power.

To do this effectively, you must relinquish your pet doubts about yourself, and radically believe—as God does—that you are the right person, at the right time, and in the right place to accomplish the role to which God has called you. You are not a poser. Your calling was not some Divine mistake. You are Joshua. You are Moses. You are Abraham and Esther and Samuel and Ruth and every other champion of God's glory and purpose throughout time. Not one of them accomplished their role in God's Story through their own authority or strength. Rather, through faith, they embraced and wielded the authority of God. And so must you.

The call of God is on your life. You have a key role in the grand Story of redemption he is telling in the world. Your role is unique. It is not a role for someone else. It is yours. But to truly live it out, you must stop doubting, and embrace it as your own.

MAKE IT REAL!

In your journal, write as much as you understand about the role God is calling you to fulfill in the world. After that, write five or six ways you could begin to step out more boldly in that role more boldly than you have so far. Then choose one and do it.

THE WAR FOR YOUR HEART

Week 3—Friday

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

(Proverbs 4:23)

THERE is a battle being waged on your life. Something deep within you knows this, even though at times you struggle to see it clearly. But you know there is a battle because you feel its effects on many fronts—in your thoughts, your feelings, your relationships,

your work, your health, your circumstances, even in your free time. You know when your life is under assault, even if you cannot see the attacker.

The truth is this: You have an enemy, and he has a goal. He is out to kill your heart.

By most standards, your enemy in this war is stronger than you are, and smarter. His tactics are proven, tested over several millennia of other battles he has fought and won. He never sleeps; he never stops the assault. He has devised a plan against you, and he is working right at this moment to carry it out.

And yet, he is afraid. He fears your heart—the very part of you he most wants to destroy. He knows that within your heart there lies a sleeping warrior waiting to be unleashed. And if the warrior is awakened, your enemy knows he cannot win. He cannot stand against a heart fully alive in the faith of Christ and the knowledge of his love. And so his only hope is to keep you ignorant, and sleeping.

MAKE IT REAL!

In your journal, describe where you see battle happening in your life right now. Why do you suppose the enemy is attacking those areas and not others? What is he really after here?

WEEKEND REFLECTION

TAKE a few moments this weekend to review the devotions you've read over this past week, as well as the "Make It Real!" steps you've done. As you reflect on the week, get curious about how God is moving in and through your life. Use these questions as a guide:

- ❖ What insights have you gained over the past week?
- ❖ What changes or shifts are you noticing in your relationship with God? with others? with yourself?
- ❖ What "Make It Real!" steps were the most meaningful for you? What made them meaningful?
- ❖ How will you live differently next week as a result of what you've learned?
- ❖ What support do you need to help you make that change?
- ❖ Based on your experiences over the past week, what do you most need from God right now?
- ❖ What do you suppose God might be wanting most from you right now?

CHALLENGE: If you missed one of the "Make It Real!" steps for this week, set aside time this weekend to complete it, and record your reactions, insights, and results in your journal.

THE ENEMY'S GOAL

Week 4—Monday

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

(2 Timothy 1:14)

WHAT do you imagine would happen in the world if every Christian were absolutely convinced to the core of their being that Jesus truly loved them with his whole heart, and that his love for them was unshakeable? If that were ever to actually happen—and let us pray fervently that it does!—then we would immediately be confronted with two powerful realizations. First, we would realize that we are each stunningly beautiful, uniquely endowed with splendor and grace—not because of anything we have done, but because our Lord God Creator, who loves us, has proclaimed us lovely. (His creative power, you'll recall, is released through what he speaks.) Second, we would realize that we are each created to do great things in the world—for we are each entrusted to bear his glory, and that, by its very nature, is a call to greatness.

Now, were this to happen, what do you suppose would happen to Satan's reign of power on the earth? Simply stated, he would be stopped. He would be trampled under the feet of the Glorious Free. He would be forced to flee, and would lose his stranglehold on the hearts of men and women everywhere our feet trod.

It's time you understood why Satan strives so desperately to keep your heart from living free. Because if you ever wake up to the realization that you are loved, lovely, and called to a beautiful greatness in the world, then he is finished. It is your heart—awakened to its splendor and in love with Christ—that has the power to stop him. His reign can only continue so long as you do not see or live in the truth of who you truly are in the eyes of God.

The essence of true spiritual warfare is this: to trust unflinchingly in the love of God, to accept his proclamation of who you truly are in your heart, and to build your life from *that place*. For it is in your true heart that God has planted his glory and his purpose for your life, and only by living from there will you find the power to render the enemy impotent to stop you.

MAKE IT REAL!

How free and alive would you say your heart is these days? On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "totally alive and free," rate the level of aliveness and freedom your heart typically experiences in an average week. What's happening in your circumstances or environment to hold your heart at that level? Now, look deeper. What might be happening in the *spiritual realm* to hold your heart at that level? As a warrior in the Kingdom, what might God be calling you to do to in response to what you see happening in the Spirit?

THE ENEMY'S TACTICS

Week 4—Tuesday

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

THE enemy employs a wide assortment of strategies in his schemes to defeat you. He may, for example, come against your finances. He may attack your health. He may stir up friction in your family or between you and your closest friends. But whatever the external focus of the attack, the ultimate target is always the same. The enemy is trying to *wound your heart*. He knows your heart holds the key to his defeat, and so he spends all of his energy trying to keep it distracted, weary, and confused.

Through his relentless, varied, and often subtle attacks on your life, your enemy will try to disconnect you from your heart so that you lose touch with who you really are. He will try to numb your heart so that you no longer feel your own passion or much of anything else. He will try to convince you that your heart is flawed beyond repair, that it is unredeemed and unredeemable so that you will hide yourself from love. He will try to convince you that your heart is weak and cannot be trusted so you will learn to hate it. He will try to convince you that your heart is undesirable and plain so you will live in desperation for the approval of those you deem more worthy than yourself. He will try to convince you that God doesn't really love you (though he loves everyone else), or that he is deeply disappointed in how your heart turned out so you will strive to win his approval through your performance. He will try to convince you that your heart has no purpose in the world, no meaning in this life, and no reason to keep resisting his assault.

Do any of these scenarios feel familiar? Then know that war in the heavens has been waged over you, and is being waged still. Your heart is the prize at stake. And the only way to win the battle is to keep your vigilance focused there.

MAKE IT REAL!

What lies have you historically believed about your own heart? Make a quick list of them in your journal. As you read through them, are there any you are still believing today—even a little? Place an asterisk next to any that feel suspiciously current. Then get together with a trusted Christian ally and share your list. Don't rush through it—really take your time in explaining how these lies have snared your heart. Then ask your friend to pray with you for God to fill your heart with a greater revelation of his love for you and his truth about who you are in him.

YOUR CALLING AS WARRIOR

Week 4—Wednesday

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

(Ephesians 6:11-13)

SPIRITUAL warfare is ultimately about uprooting lies, and calling forth God's truth to rule and reign in the world. God has provided his own armor to equip you for that fight, but you aren't likely to embrace the discipline of donning it every day until you realize that the spiritual battle is not just happening "over there" on some distance front. You *are* the front. And every day you do not equip yourself for the fight, your heart suffers harm.

The battle for your heart is real. It is happening. It is upon you. And no amount of wishing it otherwise will change that fact. If you do not open your eyes and consciously engage the fight, you will automatically forfeit the victory in life that could be yours...that by all rights in Christ *should* be yours.

You are a warrior for the Kingdom of God, and no other saint can fight the battle to which you have been called. It is your path, your calling, your purpose, your "good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). No one else can fight it for you, nor spare you from the struggle it entails. In order to win, you must first say yes to the battle.

But once you open your heart to the course ahead, and take up the armor, the sword and shield, and stand your ground against the enemy's assaults upon your life, you will find a strength of faith unleashed within your heart, springing up from the fountain of God's immeasurable love for you. And you will understand, perhaps in a way you never have before, that you truly are worth fighting for.

MAKE IT REAL!

What is the current battle that God is calling you to fight? Name it. Then take some time to create a strategic plan for the battle. Include a list of biblically-sound tactics for both attack and defense. For ideas on what some of these might be, consult the "Spiritual Warfare Verses" list. When your plan is complete, commit to follow it every day for the next 30 days. At the end of that time, schedule some time alone with God to examine the outcome of your actions. What worked? What didn't? What's changed?

SPIRITUAL WARFARE VERSES

2 Corinthians 6:1-7
Ephesians 4:25-27
Ephesians 5:7-17
Ephesians 6:10-18
1 Timothy 6:11-12

2 Timothy 2:3-4
James 4:7-8
1 Peter 5:8-9
1 John 5:4-5

THE JESUS WE NEED TO KNOW

Week 4—Thursday

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

(Philippians 2:5-8)

IT is an amazing thing that God became human. I'm not referring to the miracle of the act itself—God limiting his power and control of the universe, God taking on the form and attributes of something he created—as mind-boggling as all that is. I'm talking about the love. Imagine a love so large, so unquenchable and undeniable, that it could compel a perfect, self-sufficient, all-powerful Being like God to become one of us—for no other reason than to woo us to him in a way we could understand. From the beginning of time until this very moment, there has never been a more passionate or more abandoned act of pure desire than the appearance of Jesus on earth.

Christ came so that we might know God. Not know of him, not know about him. But truly *know him*. Jesus came to show you who God is, what God is like, and to provide a way for you to come to him unafraid—in the singular hope that you might fall in love with him, just as he has already most certainly fallen in love with you.

MAKE IT REAL!

In your journal, write a prayer to Jesus describing who he is to you. You might start each sentence with something like, “Jesus, you are my...” or “Jesus, you are to me a...” Don't fall into cliché, or write what you think you “ought” to say. Instead, really answer the question: “Who is Jesus *to you personally?*”

THE PERFECT REPRESENTATION

Week 4—Friday

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

(Hebrews 1:3)

CHRISTIANS often make a fuss about making Jesus too familiar, too much like us. They say that focusing too closely on his humanity will dilute our sense of his holiness, and tempt us to treat God as more of a chummy pal than as the Lord of our lives. And yet, it was not our idea to humanize God—it was God's idea to humanize himself. Jesus—the God Man—is the perfect revelation of who God is. The amazing truth is that Christ's

humanity reveals to us as much about God's nature as his divinity does. For while his divinity let us know that Jesus is God, his humanity let us know that God is a Person—a Person who longs to be known.

To know that Jesus is righteous, that he is holy, that he is loving and wise is merely the first step toward truly knowing him in the way he wants to be known. The prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament knew all about these attributes of God, and many others. But they longed for more. After Moses had received God's commandments on Mount Sinai, he cried out, "Now show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). But God showed Moses only his back. It is only in Jesus that Moses' prayer is fully answered. For only in Jesus do we finally see God's face. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."

Through Jesus, we come to know God as a Person. We see the way he moves through the world. We observe what he responds to and what he ignores. We watch him demonstrate what really matters to him through his actions and his words, as well as through his silence and what he chooses not to do. Through Jesus, we experience God firsthand, living among us. Without such a personal experience of God, there can be no true intimacy or friendship.

And that, after all, is what God is after. For Jesus didn't come to earth looking for servants. He came looking for friends.

MAKE IT REAL!

Do you consider yourself to be God's friend? If you could have any sort of friendship with God you wanted, what would it look like? Write a description of your ideal friendship with God, then ask God to show you what kind of friendship *he wants with you*.

WEEKEND REFLECTION

TAKE a few moments this weekend to review the devotions you've read over this past week, as well as the "Make It Real!" steps you've done. As you reflect on the week, get curious about how God is moving in and through your life. Use these questions as a guide:

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CHALLENGE: If you missed one of the "Make It Real!" steps for this week, set aside time this weekend to complete it, and record your reactions, insights, and results in your journal.

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY!

Thanks so much for taking this 30-day journey of transformation with me. I trust it's been life-giving and inspired new action and ways of being in your life with God. If it has, then please *don't stop here!* Continue the journey...

Visit "www.michaelwarden.com/my-books/" today to get your copy of the entire *Transformed Heart* devotional.

And while you're there, why not get one for a friend as well!

All my best,
Michael Warden