

WALKING TOWARD
Eternity

Making Choices For Today



ENGAGING THE STRUGGLES OF YOUR HEART

JEFF & EMILY CAVINS

Journal


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FROM THE AUTHORS

Welcome to *Walking Toward Eternity Series Two: Engaging the Struggles of Your Heart*. This study grew out of our desire to be more like Christ and to focus on key obstacles that hinder us from growing spiritually. Taking the time to step back and assess our lives on a topic-by-topic basis led to many moments of self-understanding, which then allowed us to turn those hurts, failures, and dead ends over to Christ to heal us. We found that the Scriptures and *Catechism* contain many answers for daily living if only we will submit ourselves to God's loving instruction. Listening and responding to God's Word is the key to the transformation we all seek.

This study is different from a typical Bible study. We have designed each lesson to use Scripture as a way to encounter Christ in meditation and prayer. As St. Augustine said, "When we pray, we speak to God; when we read the Scriptures, God speaks to us." We hope that as you study God's Word and continue this intimate conversation with him, your relationship with the Lord will deepen.

Using the Scriptures and your Journal, you will experience daily meditative prayer that will allow God's Word to work in you to instill the mind of Christ and begin to give you the grace necessary for change. Group discussion time will provide community and support, and the lectures will help focus you and challenge you to take action. Because making personal changes can be difficult on your own, these discussion groups will also keep you accountable as you follow through on the commitments you make each week.

The most dynamic aspect of this study is that each week will end with quiet time spent in the Lord's presence, where you will commit to one specific step to take in the following week. Your journal, group discussions, lectures, and actions will work together to help you identify and begin to overcome some of the obstacles that keep you from walking in the fullness of Christ: unruly appetites, shame, envy, anger, fear, loneliness, and hopelessness.

We are glad you can join us as together we engage the struggles of our hearts!

—Jeff and Emily Cavins



one

LIVING ON PURPOSE



“The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter ...”

– Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 2563



“O Lord and Master of my life!

*Take from me the spirit of sloth,
faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.*

*But give rather the spirit of chastity (integrity),
humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.*

*Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors
and not to judge my brother,
for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.”*

– Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian¹

Session One Outline

Video Presentation: “Living on Purpose”

This video session will introduce the Walking Toward Eternity program, explain the various parts of the program, and share what you can expect to get out of it. Add your notes to the talk outline below:

I. The Interior Part of Our Lives

- A. Focus on change, personal growth
- B. Growth starts with a sober awareness of who we are

II. How to Approach Our Struggles

- A. Eradicate them (as in envy) or listen to and manage them:
 - 1. With the help of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word
 - 2. Psalms 139:14 —“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”
- B. Ask these questions:
 - 1. Is God trying to say something to me?
 - 2. Is there a warning I need to heed?
 - 3. Is there a change I need to make in my life?

III. Struggles are Normal

IV. Moving From “Automatic Pilot” to “On-Purpose” Living

- A. Slow down and evaluate why we do what we do

- B. Come to know ourselves better
- C. Scrabble analogy—finding the “missing letters” in our lives

V. Hearing the Word of God

- A. Genesis 1—God spoke his Word into chaos, bringing order
- B. Matthew 11:28—God gives rest to the weary
- C. Hebrews 4:12—God’s Word gives power to change
- D. James 1:22-25—God’s Word is like a mirror
- E. 1 Kings 19:11-12—God speaks in a “still small voice”
- F. Isaiah 55:11—God’s Word will accomplish his purpose

VI. The Need for Conversion

- A. These spiritual challenges can be controlled (Proverbs 16:32)
- B. Our goal is to become saints²
- C. The importance of humility—a proper assessment of who we are in relationship to God and others

VII. Using the *Walking Toward Eternity Journal*³

- A. Daily meditation (Days One–Four in Journal)
- B. *Lectio divina* (“the divine reading”)

1. Reading (*lectio*)
2. Meditation (*meditatio*)—in Hebrew: hagah
3. Prayer (*oratio*)
4. Contemplation (*contemplatio*)

VIII. Other Materials

- A. Bible (RSV-CE or NAB)
- B. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (optional; for reference only)
- C. Bookmark with steps of *lectio divina*

IX. The *Walking Toward Eternity* Process

- A. Step 1: Prepare at home with *Walking Toward Eternity* Journal and Bible
- B. Step 2: Participate in small-group discussion
- C. Step 3: View video presentation
- D. Step 4: In prayer, ask Jesus three questions:
 1. What are you putting your hand on in my life?
 2. What specifically should I do?
 3. When?

X. Conclusion

Group Discussion

During this time you will get acquainted with others in your small group and learn more about the materials and home study portion of the class.

Small-Group Assignment

Facilitator _____

Phone and/or email _____

Location _____

Walking Together

This study is designed to assist you in moving toward real change in your life through prayerful daily meditation on Scripture. The others in your small group are on the same journey. After you have studied each topic, Jeff Cavins will encourage you to take one concrete step to put into practice what you have learned and create change.

Starting next week, the facilitator of your group will ask a simple question at the beginning of each discussion time: “Did you take the step?” A simple “yes” or “no” is all that is needed, but you may share more as time allows.

We all know how difficult change can be. Please remember to pray for the others in your group.

How to Use This Journal

1. Home Preparation: Days 1 to 4

This journal will guide you on your daily “walk” as you prepare for the days you meet with your group. The study you do at home is less about learning than it is about hearing from God in his Word, letting that Word come into contact with your life, and responding to God in prayer. It is important to spend a small amount of time each day—fifteen to twenty minutes should be sufficient—rather than doing it all at once or at the last minute.

Four days of prayerful reading are outlined for each session. Every day, you will be prompted to think in a different way about the obstacle under discussion that week.

Day 1: Meaning

The first day’s questions help you discover the nature of shame, anger, hopelessness, or another obstacle to your spiritual growth. Sometimes you will be asked to look up what the Bible says about the issue or provide your own observations. You may be asked to reflect on how you have struggled with the obstacle in your life. You will be provided with several Scripture verses to read and think about. Linger over this exercise, allowing the verses to penetrate your mind before recording what stands out to you.

Day 2: Importance

The second day takes this same obstacle and turns your focus to God’s perspective on the issue. As in Day 1, you will be prompted to read Scripture to learn God’s view on the matter. What does that obstacle look like to him? What effect does it tend to have when left unchecked? What is his answer to it? Once again, take time to savor God’s Word; don’t simply taste it and move on.

Day 3: Practice

The third day is similar to Days 1 and 2, but the questions build on what you have already read and ask you to consider what steps you can take to overcome this obstacle in your life. Along with the brief list of verses you are given to read carefully, you may be presented with a longer passage from the Bible that illustrates the issue or how to engage it correctly. You then will be asked to begin thinking of how your own life measures up and to decide whether something is standing in the way of change.

Day 4: Praying Scripture for a Change

After three days of thinking about the topic, Day 4 asks you to enter into a deeper, more personal encounter with the passage that has meant the most to you that week. Using *lectio divina*, you will be asked to meditate prayerfully on your chosen Scripture passage, listening to hear the voice of God speak to you and responding to him in prayer. After the group discussion and video presentation, you will once again pray—this time deciding on and committing to the step you will take toward change. (The instructions for *lectio divina* are on the following page.)

Optional Further Reading

Days 1 to 3 each close with a list of additional verses. These are for optional reading, if you have time and want to explore the topic more. Feel free to use a Bible concordance to find even more verses, if you desire.

Notes for Group Discussion

Space has been set aside on each day's page for discussion notes. At the top is a question that summarizes the theme for that day (for example, "What's wrong with indulging?" at the far right of Session 2, Day 1). You need not answer the question at home; it will be used later to guide group discussion of what you have gleaned during the week. The extra space will allow you to add insights you gain that day from other group members.

2. Meeting Day

Each week on your meeting day, a small-group discussion and the video presentation will help prepare you to take the first step toward overcoming a particular obstacle. The "Meeting Day" pages of your journal are designed to help with this process.

Small-Group Discussion

To help you recall what you have been reading and thinking in regard to that week's topic, you will begin with a brief group exercise of *lectio divina* on a passage that gets to the heart of the topic. Praying with *lectio divina* in a group is a bit different than praying with it in solitude. (Directions for leading a group discussion in *lectio divina* can be found on page 12.)

The majority of the small-group time will be spent discussing the insights you have gained. Four general questions are provided that summarize the goals of day. They are repeated on appropriate pages to minimize the need to flip back and forth in your journal during discussion.

Several additional questions are offered to answer if there is time remaining.

Video Presentation

An outline of the video presentation is included in your journal. Feel free to take additional notes there as desired.

Quiet Time in the Lord's Presence

At the close of the video presentation, you will be asked to spend time in quiet prayer—before the Blessed Sacrament, if possible—asking the Lord three questions:

- What are you putting your hand on in my life?
- What specifically do you want me to do?
- When?

My Step for the Week

The last journal page for each session contains a “contract” of sorts on which you may record the specifics regarding the step you have determined to take the following week. Write it down and ask God for help as you dare to “walk the walk.”

Instructions for *Lectio Divina* (“Divine Reading”)

Choose a brief portion of Scripture to meditate on. Spend a few moments in a quiet place preparing your heart and asking God to meet you in his Word. Follow these steps to praying with the Scripture passage you have chosen:

1. **Read** (*Lectio*): Slowly read the verse(s), looking for details. Notice key words; verbs and nouns; and anything repeated, compared, or contrasted. What does the passage say? Write down words or phrases that stand out to you.
2. **Meditate** (*Meditatio*): Mentally “chew” on key words or images to extract their meaning. Let the words sink in and take hold. What do those words mean? Write down what you discover.
3. **Pray** (*Oratio*): Pay attention to the way your meditation connects with your life, and respond to what you find. Talk to God (not “at” him) about this.
4. **Contemplate** (*Contemplatio*): Savor being in God’s presence.
5. **Resolve to Act** (*Operatio*): Make a practical resolution by which you hope to overcome the obstacle you have been reading about.

Leading a Group Exercise of *Lectio Divina*

The principles of *lectio divina* have been adapted here to help your group prepare for a fruitful discussion. You may find that people arrive to the group distracted, their minds full of cares and undone tasks. This exercise will help them slow down, set aside their concerns, and recall the Scriptures they've meditated on during the week.

A Bible passage has been carefully selected for each lesson that is rich in thoughts and images related to that topic. You will read it prayerfully as a group three times. Between readings, members of the group will speak aloud the word or phrase that stood out to them. There is no need to exhaust the passage or to get everyone to speak. Keep it simple, no more than five to ten minutes long: just enough to allow people to catch their breath and prepare their hearts.

Choose three people to read the passage out loud and respond as described below.

1. **Open with prayer.**

Facilitator: Pray in your own words or with these: "Lord, open our minds, our ears, and our hearts, that we may be transformed by your Word." Sit still for a few minutes, quieting your hearts and preparing to hear the living Word of God, spoken to you.

2. **Read (*Lectio*):**

Reader 1: Read the Scripture passage aloud slowly, thoughtfully.

Group: Listen prayerfully. What did you hear? In the following silence, speak aloud the word or words that stood out to you.

3. **Meditate (*Meditatio*):**

Reader 2: Read the same passage again, slowly.

Group: Reflect on how Christ is speaking to you through the text. Allow his Word to speak into your heart, to touch your life. What is he saying to you? Speak it briefly into the silence that follows.

4. **Pray (*Oratio*):**

Reader 3: Read the passage slowly a final time.

Group: Listen quietly to God speaking to your hearts; respond silently to him. After a few minutes of silent prayer, you may share with others what is in your heart.

5. **Contemplate (*Contemplatio*):**

Group: Spend several minutes of quiet rest in God's love.

6. **Close with the Our Father or other prayer.**