



### **Introduction**

I begin this introduction with a confession. I am someone who, from an early age (as you probably already know from reading the book), was driven to perfection. I suffered from an anxiety to perform at my best, no matter what the task at hand was.

As I sit down to write this study guide, I am still pressed by the need to come up with something spectacular, something that will impress you, and, of course, add value to your life. You see, what I am trying to tell you is that I am a fellow traveler with you down this road. This is the kind of road where you are always learning new things and discovering new dimensions because it is the road where I believe God travels and hangs out.

As you know, I have been down this road now for several years, and that probably means that I find myself a few steps ahead of you. I want you to know that it is this very journey and this wonder of *Holding On Loosely* that keeps me going. It is what gets me to a place where I can indeed sit down and do this study guide without all those other unnecessary pressures that have dictated my every action in the past.

So with no further delay, welcome to the study guide for *Holding On Loosely*.

I am glad that you have chosen to download it. You might be using this guide as you read the book, or you might have read the whole book and are now starting to work through the guide bit by bit. It doesn't really matter which way you have chosen to do it. What matters is that you are taking the time to go through this and will hopefully pick up the pearls that are available and that will make a big difference in your daily life and journey.

As a professional tennis, life and business performance coach to high performance athletes and individuals, I know too well that unless the information in this manual is practical, it is worth very little. This is the reason we have taken the time to put together this study guide. It is intended to help you understand and to see this reality take place in your life every day.

The study guide is divided into 11 sections. You will find in each section references and questions pertaining to the main topics of the book. Hopefully, they will stir your heart and mind and encourage you

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

to think and seek God for answers. At the end of the study guide, you will find practical exercises that will help you to stay present and live your daily life in the beautiful tension where I believe God encourages us all to live. They are also the main scriptures that God has given me as He has revealed this truth to me over the years.

I believe with all of my heart that as you work your way through this study guide with an open heart, God will meet you and help you in the same way He did and continues to do with me each day. This is a journey and not a lesson that can be learned in one day. As you read earlier, I am and will continue to learn new things about living in this beautiful tension for the remainder of my days until my body ceases to exist and my spirit goes through that thin veil where there is no tomorrow or yesterday but just the present. That place in eternity called Heaven, which took residence in my new heart while I lived here on earth.

Always for you!

Pablo

## **Chapter 1**

### **Religion**

*Instead of bread I get groans for my supper,  
then leave the table and vomit my anguish.  
The worst of my fears has come true,  
what I've dreaded most has happened.  
My repose is shattered, my peace destroyed.  
No rest for me, ever—death has invaded life.  
- Job 3:25-26*

What are 3-5 different ways that you've been working hard to get what you want out of life?

What was taking place in your life the last 2-3 times that you didn't feel "good enough"?

We all long to be making "it" in life. Looking honestly into your life, what was taking place the last 2-3 times that you felt you were blowing "it" or losing "it"?

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

What keeps repeating itself in your life that makes it seem like you are not getting to where you want and need to be?

Reflect over each decade of your life. What circumstances keep showing up? Make two lists and label *has* and *has not*:

God *has* been pleased with me:      God has *not* been pleased with me:

## **Chapter 2**

### **Loosening the Grip**

*Dear God,  
I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!  
Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?  
Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?  
Please help me to gradually open my hands  
and to discover that I am not what I own,  
but what you want to give me.  
And what you want to give me is love,  
unconditional, everlasting love.  
Amen.*

-Henri Nouwen

When you stop to think and listen, there are so many differing voices in this world vying for our attention. It does not matter where we live on the planet or what our individual circumstances are. Too often, our hungry souls are willing to listen to just about anything to get a quick fix on the issues of our lives just to feel better—no matter the cost.

Even we, who have an affinity for God, can get caught up in the quick fix mode: 3 steps to a better life, 17 ways to be the leader you need to be, 9 steps to being the perfect parent or spouse, 31 prayers that will make it all better between you and God. You know the drill. It can quickly get exhausting. We can easily end up trying to be jugglers, though we may deny it.

There is an intriguing verse in the Bible that states that God often speaks to us, his creation, in a "still small voice." Amidst the clamor, cheering and intense moments of our lives of the past year or two, when might you have heard that "voice" in your own life?

Thinking deeper into your own hopes, dreams and frustrations, what have you been hearing in the good and the not so good moments of your life?

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

In what ways do you hear that voice when things are going great?

When things are not so great?

Are you even aware of any forms of inner promptings? If so, what thoughts seem to be showing up in your own soul?

When in your life have you been trying—again and again, harder and harder—to make something of yourself that works for a while and then you're back to square one, picking up the pieces and beginning again?

Go back to the beginning of this chapter and read Henri Nouwen's honest interactions with God. This time, don't make those his words...make them yours. Do this, maybe several times over the next few days, when you can be still for a few minutes, read/pray them out to God, laying down what you are juggling and listen.

Now, let's keep going on this journey together.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Zone**

*I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.*

*-John 10:10*

Thinking back over the years, when in your life have you experienced being in "the Zone"? Some people may say they experience this often. Others may say they don't know. But even in the hardest of circumstances, there are times when things may seem "close to okay, about right." What might have been going on the last 2-3 times you felt you were experiencing any kind of "Zone" moment?

In that "Zone moment," how were you feeling about yourself?

How were you feeling about the people closest to you?

How were you feeling about the people you work with?



## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

Sometimes, when things are beginning to go well in our lives, we don't quite know what to do with that. Often, this is because we are longing for some "zone moments" in our own lives. Then, if someone dares to discover and admit that God is showing up in these moments, you can get all kinds of responses —maybe even an odd glance or two. We are human, and if we are honest with ourselves, we'll discover that we are longing for something more, something different, something better in our lives—no matter our age or circumstance. What may be harder to process is figuring out where to look to explore our longings? Where have you been looking as your own circumstances, both the plus and minus ones, continue to show up day after day in your own life?

Please remember that what you've just read is a story gleaned from facts I've lived. I'm not suggesting any easy answers here. Be good, help little old ladies across the street, smile at least three times an hour to strangers, and life will be well for you. Answers are not easy for most of us...BUT...Learning to live the fact that God *does* love me (and you)—warts and all, accomplishments and good moments—is a key that only each one of us can choose to use in moments of joy, when, for a moment, we've found "a zone" and again when we are not in a good place.

As we continue walking through the pages of this story, write down the times that you have felt in positive control of your life and the times that you have felt out of control, maybe even done in. In two or three sentences, sketch out below what was taking place within you and the circumstances around you when you were:

In control:

Not in control:

## **Chapter 4**

### **Learning to *Hold on Loosely***

*Be still and know that I am God. –Psalm 46:10 (NIV)*

In the Hebrew Scriptures, this Psalm is verse 11.

בְּאֶרֶץ: אֲרוֹם בְּגוֹיִם אֲרוֹם אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי-וְדַעוּ הָרְפוּ  
(יא פסוק, מו תהילים)

הָרְפוּ = "**HARPU**" meaning: *Hold on Loosely*

Because of our global lifestyles, time seems to ramp up faster than most of us can take in. When something happens half-way around the world, it seems like news services are letting us know what is taking place within seconds to minutes. Subconsciously, this immediacy puts an intriguing pressure on us to be up on things, be present, be perfect, be in control, be aware, be brilliant, be adequate (even way more than adequate), be your best...now!

*Hold on.*

*Don't let go.*

*There could be both danger and delight ahead.*

On this wild ride into our futures, we've bought into the myth that we need to stay ahead of our game—whatever it may be.

*Relax.*

*Rest.*

*What? You kidding me?*

These are familiar thoughts that people have in almost any country and culture these days. Danger does lurk. Delight seems to evade us far too often, though it still shows up from time to time.

If you and I were in the same space right now, we might be carrying on a conversation like this:

You: *Hold on loosely? If you knew my circumstances—what others*

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

*know and what only I know—you may not suggest that, Mr. Giacobelli. Sounds like an easy answer to me that you indicated earlier, but it may not be available where I'm living.*

*Me: You know, I can understand that. At the outset, it can seem too easy. I thought that as well. However, I encourage you to keep reading to the end of the story. You just may end up in a place that your soul really longs to be. Therefore, let me suggest something for right now, before you read any further:*

Take a few moments to think through some more of your own life story. Both you and I have had good and not-so-good events in our lives. Both you and I have made some wise choices, and others...well...we wish we hadn't made.

Some of the people in our lives have been happy with us, maybe even blessed us. And, others have been disappointed in us, and maybe even cursed us. We all have our stories—some haunting, some happy, as most of our lives are lived in between the extremes—that you and I can think of.

What Terry says to us toward the end of this chapter needs to be read and digested again. I, too, need to keep reminding myself of that wisdom. Go back a few pages to where Terry enters this part of the story. Read with the questions that follow in mind and listen for that "still small voice" that is waiting to whisper some life-giving thoughts into your own soul:

*Where in my own life might I be holding on too tightly?*

*What is my imagination telling me will happen if I should dare to loosen my grip on those events, happenings and relationships?*

*In what ways is the need to win and be in control keeping me from living the life that I, down deep, keep hoping for?*

### **Chapter 5**

#### **Making it Real**

*If you are a preacher of mercy, do not preach an imaginary but the true mercy. If the mercy is true, you must therefore bear the true, not an imaginary sin. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides. We, however, says Peter (2 Peter 3:13) are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign. It suffices that through God's glory we have recognized the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day. Do you think such an exalted Lamb paid merely a small price with a meager sacrifice for our sins?*

*-Martin Luther 1521*

There's some crazy making that we do to ourselves when we take the time to admit to our failings in life. These failings (often called sins, which, by the way, no human is without, truth be known!) and how we admit, repent and handle them will make all the difference in how we are genuinely living on this planet. We can easily buy into the myth that we could never be forgiven which, frankly, is a flat lie!

One truth here is that we won't accept the forgiveness that is available by our God and others if we don't forgive ourselves—no matter the wrong done against us or how many times we've done wrong toward another. Lack of forgiveness for ourselves breeds lack of acceptance by God. Lack of forgiveness for ourselves also breeds lack of forgiveness with anyone we may have offended, wounded, or hurt in some manner.

Forgiveness of ourselves and whatever others may have done to us is thoroughly possible, not some pie in the sky unreality. Welcoming and choosing to live into God's forgiveness (there is *nothing* he will not forgive!) is a huge key to living free, whole, as we were originally designed to live.

God is not surprised at any of our failings. His son, Jesus, has paid the price for whatever we have done and will do. Our Father/God is so welcoming to take us right where we are and, by his Spirit, take us

## *Holding On Loosely* Study Guide

---

where we need to be in our future. That is what we call amazing grace!

I contributed to the ending of my first marriage. I've grieved that ending. My first wife, my three precious kids, and me—we all bear certain scars from that happening. No one wins.

But, praise God. That is *not* the end of the story, as you have read in this chapter. Especially with my amazing kids, healing continues to happen, and *only* our God could make happen. There is hope for continued honest healing for more and better in all our lives, as we all grow into the future living from our heart for life, for each other and from our reactions to life and each other.

Forgiving and being forgiven makes deep life-giving listening possible in fresh ways. Forgiving and accepting forgiveness is one of the most sustainable ways of *holding on loosely*. Here are some questions for you to ponder before you head into Chapter Seven. If you are able, find some space where you may ponder without too much interruption:

When in your own life have you not experienced being forgiven when you sought it out?

What comes to mind when you think back through the years of when you needed someone to ask for your forgiveness?

Granted, wrong things happen to us. But, it is the justification that we have for holding grudges against those who do us wrong that also makes it hard for us to forgive or ask for forgiveness—when we know we've done our part to hurt a person or situation.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

What might you be holding against someone? Be honest. We all do this to some degree.

What would happen within you if you dared to “hold on loosely” and let go of the resentment toward yourself and others, no matter what has taken place?

In your sacred imagination (with which we've all been gifted by God), what would life be like if you were forgiven or you forgave?

What might your future life be like for you?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Being Present**

*Then Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the People of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"*

*God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.** Tell the People of Israel, '**I AM** sent me to you.'"*

*-Exodus 3:13-14 (emphasis added)*

*"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."*

*Mathew 6:34*

I have a new friend who is a student of advertising. For better, or for worse, ads are created to influence us. That's why I began this chapter talking about the influence of an ad.

It may be a stretch to say Jesus was an "ad man," but if we read his words slowly in the Bible, there is so much to ponder and soak up...one sentence and thought at a time. It would be intriguing to read John's Gospel or Matthew's and just meditate for a whole day on one phrase or sentence, allowing it to sink into the recesses of our mind. My guess is, if we did that, we would hold on to the thoughts that bring life and let go of the struggles our thoughts can easily hatch up.

That Matthew 6 passage from "The Message" is potent for pondering. Go back to the beginning of this chapter and carefully, slowly, one phrase at a time, read those 146 words. Do that now. Listen for the Spirit of our God to whisper one or several things into your own soul. Then come back here.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

I just did what I asked you to do. Though these are familiar words, I heard some new thoughts. What did you hear in this sacred moment—no matter where you find yourself?

What is God beginning to say to your own heart and life? Write those down here:



## **Chapter 7**

### **Friends for the Journey**

*...In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into being...    –C.S. Lewis*

All of us are people who have either a lot of friends or just a few. It is important to understand that life was never meant to be lived in isolation, even when some of us have chosen to do so. Even Jesus needed friends.

If we look at Jesus' life, we'll see that he had thousands of people gathering around him. There is the indication that several dozen men and women were often with him. Sometimes, that number pared down to around 30+. Then, there were the 12 disciples...his choice. Three seemed to have some extra care from him and for him. One of those, John, he called beloved, showing that caring, even intimate, relationships were crucial to the man Jesus.

There is a vital model for sharing life in all this. Relationships need to be equally important to each one of us. Jesus easily called those who gathered around him "friends."

Frankly, to be friendless is also a choice. But Jesus, the God man, knew that relationships were crucial to life. If we are to be whole-hearted followers of him, then what is taking place with our friends? Write 2-3 sentences about the three best friendships you have enjoyed in your life?

Who are the 2-3 people who would say they consider you an extra special friend...and why?

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

In the last decade of your life, what are 2-3 times you knew you were a very good friend to someone you knew? They received great kindness and love from you, and it made a difference in their lives.

As you reread this chapter, think about whom in your life have been the finest examples of the Terry character?

Just between you and God, being honest (God can handle that and so can you), what comes to mind when you consider the times when you have put other things and circumstances ahead of your relationships?

What have you done lately to let these friends know you remember and are thankful for their special friendship?

## *Holding On Loosely* Study Guide

---

If you haven't done that lately, when will you make a date to let them know how much you value them?

Good news! With new friendships, we can begin again to care for others and encourage them to do the same.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Ripple Effect**

*Some things are caught not taught.*

*-Anonymous*

A wise old man once told me: *To speak the truth about ourselves, people need an atmosphere of safety where acceptance is the rule.* That is hard to come by, sometimes.

However, in our story, you see that happening with Terry, Stacey and me. Truth is one of the opposites of control. When you and I are in "over control" in any form, trust flies out the window, and we begin to create how we are going to survive in our world. Control becomes, whether we want to admit it or not, the inner game we play to protect ourselves from any further wounding, whether it is real or perceived.

That same old man also told me: *Truth will not penetrate my heart unless I trust it, acting upon it in faith.* And: *Truth ignites the heart because it forces me to choose what to believe.*

As this chapter began, both Stacey and I, in our own ways, were soaking up the beginning of a new day via the God-given privilege of our five senses: sight, touch, sound, taste, smell. Most of the time, we are too busy zipping through our lives to recognize that these profoundly simple gifts are given to help us center, focus and get ready to taste and see that our God really is good and has our very own lives fully in mind at all times.

Hang with me here a bit. No matter what time of day you are reading this, stop for a few minutes and think back to the start of your day, just like Stacey and I were doing at the beginning of our day in the story. Using a continuum from good to not so good, what were your actual five senses informing you about your day so far?

### **Sight**

What I saw that was good:

Not so good:

**Touch**

What I touched/felt that was good:

Not so good:

**Sound**

What I heard that was good:

Not so good:

**Taste**

What I tasted/savored that was good:

Not so good:

### **Smell**

What was fragrant that was good:

Not so good:

Too often, we forget to let our God speak to us through what he has already built into us to experience the grace and blessings of each day. Of course, sometimes, we see what is not good; pain enters our lives personally or through others; sounds cause us to remember the hard places; life can quickly become soured and, sometimes, life just stinks. But all these senses, in time, have an opposite if we are willing to explore and discover what is waiting for us, just like you read in the story.

When I asked Stacey, "What is on your heart this very moment?," she was invited to open up and share her life. Her senses were already speaking to her, whether she realized it or not, in that phone call with her father. She was beginning to realize that the wounds of her past were distorting her senses and responses to how she had been living her life. Her statement, "I realized that fear is underneath my attempts to control..." was a key to opening her heart to trust others and to be loved as she had been longing to be loved all her life.

You are encouraged to take the time to reread this chapter, but do so with one thought in mind. As you, yourself, are learning to "hold on loosely," whom might you need to call to tell them you love them and that you are learning to let go of what has happened between you and them. Tell them, no matter the wounding, that you love them. Be careful not to rehash old junk, just let them know you are choosing to let go and not hold anything against them.

Tell one other person what you are going to do. Keep the call short. And then, tell them that both of you are set free because of

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

what God is doing in your own life, and that you will be praying for that same freedom in their life.

That same old man, whom I mentioned earlier, shared one more wise thought with me: *Understanding who I am is virtually impossible without interacting meaningfully with others.* I am praying that you will know today that you, too, can "*taste and see that the Lord is good*"—no matter your circumstances. That is one of the important steps that guides us to the life we long for.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Reality Check**

*I admit I once lived by rumors of you;  
now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears!  
I'm sorry—forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise!  
I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor.  
-Job 42: 5-6*

There's a bit of a myth "running around" through much of Christianity. Yes, this is a radical thought. But so often, we are trained, taught and encouraged to think of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) as having first place in our lives. Although a unique and noble thought, it is not a Biblical thought.

One of the mentors our God has brought into my life has become a welcomed spiritual father to me—unexpectedly and by God's amazing grace! He resides in Colorado, and we've been using *Skype* regularly, as our friendship deepens weekly.

He has helped me to see that "God first" is a *noble* myth. Not necessarily a "wrong" thought, but not a Biblical thought. The intent of inviting God into our lives is critical to any healthy spiritual life. However, beyond those exceptional words of Jesus in Matthew "...seek first the Kingdom of God...." there is no encouragement to live in a linear manner with God with everything else trailing behind.

My mentor and spiritual Dad is helping me to see the "seductive fallacy" of living with God at the top of a list. Thus, the question: Doesn't God long to be involved in **all** our lives, in every facet and every dimension of our existence? The answer: Yes!

God longs to be at the core, the center, of who we are and who we are becoming. As you have read in this chapter and as Terry, Stacey and I experienced what has happened and is happening in our lives, God longs to have equal access to **all** of who we are, not just life by a list. Therefore, no matter our wounds or joys, sins or saintly actions, God longs to live with us at the core, the very center of our lives, within our heart, the seat of the soul with access to all of us, not just part of us at the top of a list.



## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

God wants to live at the center of who we are, right in the middle of our messiness and our life-giving motivations. That is good news. That's the ancient, time-proven context called "the Gospel."

Frankly, it's exhausting to live by a list, no matter who you are or where you live on the planet. But, oh my, how healing and good to allow God access to **all** of who we are and are becoming. The worst about us, God embraces. The best about us, God embraces. You can read that in this chapter of this continuing story.

So...a few questions to ponder before you continue reading this story:

What are several topics, categories, happenings in your own life that you are afraid or concerned to talk about with God—or even have others know about you? Be honest. We all have areas of our lives that we don't want to be headlines in tomorrow's newspapers.

What are some of the habits, fears, reactions to life that keep showing up that you sometimes struggle to admit to?

Who are the 3-5 people in your life whom you trust to know **all** about you, from A to Z, from the not good to the very good?

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

When you are wounded in any way, what is your first reaction to the person who wounded you?

In what ways do you need to be trusting God's great love for you, and trusting the fact that there is ***nothing*** about you that would prevent you from being embraced by his unending grace?

In what areas of your life will you trust our Father/God with ***all*** the details?

Who are the 3-5 people you will soon tell about these life-giving decisions?

I hope you are ready for the final stretch of this story of *holding on loosely*!

## **Chapter 10**

### **The Final Stretch**

*Then He isn't safe? Said Lucy.*

*Safe? Said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course He isn't safe. But He's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

*-The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Few things in life are better than a restored relationship.

Few things in life are harder to accomplish than restoring a relationship.

Some of the best news, however, is that restoration is not impossible. It can be accomplished. Carefully. Sometimes, even surprisingly.

What are relationships in your own life that need restoration?

What were some of the causes of the breach that brought you and your relationship partner to go your separate ways?

Without attaching a percentage of blame (an ugly game to play at any time in one's existence, no matter what wounds have been received or given), what might have been your part in the separation? To what degree—just a little or a lot?

You and I both know this. Life is simply too short to go through it holding things against another person. We don't like it when anyone holds something against us. Ever wonder why you do that to yourself or others? I have. It's not a pretty picture. But then, beyond just a lame "I'm sorry" (which you and the other person may be, thankfully), there needs to be an owning of your "stuff" in the breach. (Remember, percentages of who did who wrong are not legit here, even if a great wrong has been done.) Neither of you can move forward in life until you have forgiven the other, no matter the offense. That takes the courage that only God's grace, healing and forgiveness can bring about.

I am always struck by some of Jesus' words, when hanging on a cross not too far from where I am currently living in Tel Aviv: "Father, forgive them..." In those very words He, too, was forgiving them as He hung on a cross via three huge nails. Oh, whoa, I can't even begin to imagine that moment.

I do need to imagine my own moments of forgiving and being forgiven. I need to live beyond what I imagine and forgive as Jesus did if I am going to count myself a whole-life, whole-hearted follower of His. That is what I long to be. That is what I pray for you as you read this book. The possibility of that increases as I forgive and seek forgiveness.

One of the hard, yet realistic, parts to this is that we cannot demand that someone forgive us. We can offer it, and then we need to trust God enough to let that rest in the other person's soul. To require forgiveness is not really offering it from an open and healing heart. Additionally, it is important to our soul that we then live toward that person as if we were forgiven. That is God's grace through us. Healing takes time.

I know healing takes time. Offered. And received.

The growing relationship with my own father wonderfully proves that out. I welcome the next time I get to spend time with him as his son.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Coming Home**

*...but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!"*

*-Luke 15:32*

*Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*

*-Psalm 42:7-8*

This part of our journey is about to wrap up. It's been good traveling with you through the pages of this book. As previously mentioned, it is my deep hope and prayer that you will take away the courage to *hold on loosely* as you journey forward in your faith walk into the rest of your life.

Part of what I hope is that you've taken seriously the encouragement in these questions and thoughts at the end of each chapter to restore your heart and your relationships where needed. I'm living proof that one can experience healing, wholeness and restoration in the most important of relationships.

Is it your parents (one or both) with whom there needs to be restoration?

What about your spouse?

And your kids...any one of them?

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

What about other relatives or work associates?

Neighbors?

Friends—from long time to new?

Thinking through the circles of my own relationships, there comes to mind the need to do some more restorative work. Thank God, it's possible.

We all say, I hope, that we want our past relationships made right, healed and whole. It takes courage that only our God can give. And it takes the first step like making that phone call. Right now, make a list of 7-10 people who come to mind in two of the previously mentioned categories:

People with whom I know I need to make amends:

People who I want to thank for having the love, courage and care to speak into my life:

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

Just like with my own Dad, don't wait until a crisis hits to tell those who have given you life that you do love them. My guess is that you know right where you need to begin *holding on loosely*. It took me some time and some unique courage, but taking the steps I did toward my own Dad freed me up to extend healing between us and to receive it from him.

Granted, sometimes, this may not work as it did for me. But, I also know that if you do not take the steps in making things right, they will not get done. I took the risk. God blessed the risk I took. An honest relationship, without expecting anything in return, is hard for another to deny in the long haul.

*Hold on loosely*, my friend. Do what you know is right. Love like you long to be loved. And know that for you, healing and wholeness are more possible than ever.

Get in the habit of writing notes to the people you have in mind, telling them what you are thankful for in your relationship with them. Pick up the phone and call from time to time. Texts and tweets are fine, some times, but there is rarely anything as good as hearing a voice or receiving a hand written note, especially one of affirmation and sincere care and love without expectation. The freedom you read about between me and my Dad is thoroughly possible for you. If I can break through the barriers and do so, then I know you can as well. So, what are you waiting for?

Before you close this book, take a few moments and sketch an outline of what you would like to say to the people who are coming to mind. Go ahead. Begin to put your thoughts down now while this is on your mind. Freedom is about to be released in your own soul.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

Ah ha! There you go! I knew you could begin to think and write what you have. Now write down when you will speak or write your words to them.



**Scriptures and Exercises for Further Exploration**

I believe it is important to understand that I am not giving you these passages and scriptures in order to further qualify this powerful reality and truth, but instead they are being given for the sake of those of us that have only until now known God through reading the book and not in person.

It is my hope—as you read these scriptures and put into practice the exercises I have shared with you—that you come into a new dimension in your relationship with Him. A dimension where your relationship with God will not be based on knowledge and on what a book says, but instead in a living and thriving reality as you walk with him and actually feel, know, and hear His presence and love for you. A place where you learn to understand that it is not the knowledge or the power of God that changes us, but indeed His presence. A presence that was all along with you, but your approach to this relationship prevented you from noticing because you were present somewhere else instead of right here in this moment in time.

Each scripture will be followed by a commentary explaining the revelation and practical connection to the *Holding On Loosely* message and the direct fruits that you will bear by choosing to live in this place.

I would like to begin with some scriptures from the Old Testament.

### **Genesis 3:4-5**

<sup>4-5</sup> The serpent told the Woman, "You won't die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you'll see what's really going on. You'll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil."

### **Commentary**

*Holding On Loosely* is about our intimate relationship with God and finding life in that space between control and resignation. It is a story that shares with you the unfortunate traps we are caught in when we attempt to approach God with the mentality that we think we have to do something in order to get a response from Him. Almost like a vending machine in which we have to put in money in order for it to deliver the goods we are after.

This approach shows you how, in time, we become trapped in this walk where we are told by others that if we want or need something from God, we must first do something to get his attention and hopefully stimulate Him into reciprocating our action by reacting in an equal way towards us. In recent years, this approach became very popular as people named and claimed everything they wanted. Many a preacher became rich as people gave at times more than they could afford with the purpose of getting. Sadly, many never got what they named and claimed as they found out the hard way that God isn't like a vending machine or a magical genie. This is because He wants to be so much more to us than just a source that meets our needs. This approach is based on manipulation and control and is very much where most of today's religious people and movements are. Its main root is fear and anxiety and not faith and love.

Unfortunately, this approach meant that many walked away from God seeing Him as someone who is not true to what He supposedly promises. A God that likes to hold out on us and seems to enjoy abusing us by withdrawing His help when we need it the most. A God that likes to keep our money and not give us what we "paid" for. Oh, how well I know this path and how glad I am that the eyes of my new heart have been opened so that I no longer see Him as a pinball machine, but instead as the person that He is. A personal God who all He longs for is to have a relationship with us so that we may discover the reality of the love we talk so much about, but know very little of.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

After reviewing the scripture from Genesis, we can see that this disease is not new. It began at the very start of time. You see it has been and continues to be the devil's main objective and that is to steal away the relationship we can have with God. This is exactly what he does as he insinuates to Eve that God is holding out on them and that He is indeed a God that cannot be trusted. He puts in doubt the very nature of God as he challenges her to eat the apple. He knows that by doing so the very relationship God longs to have with us because of who He is will be broken forever.

The eviction from Eden meant that the way of the Kingdom of God and how things worked changed. They became disconnected from God. Man came into a realm where he had to toil and suffer as this was and continues to be the direct consequence of a broken relationship with Him. Here it was where man began to acquire the survival mentality that plagues the world today. He no longer was able to trust in God, but instead turned his trust to what he could do and what he could produce. Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of God to us. He encourages us to seek His Kingdom and righteousness first. When He teaches us to pray, He reminds us to ask for His Kingdom to come here on earth as it is in Heaven. When Jesus spoke on the mount, He spoke of the way things were meant to be, the way things were and are in His Kingdom. He showed us the way it will be if we choose to walk away from our self-created and controlling religion, through which many of us attempt to manipulate our lives and God and invite Him to come into our hearts. This transaction will produce in us a new heart that, in time, as we get to know Him and how He loves us, will birth into the reality of our daily lives the abundant life He gave us both at the beginning of time and when He came to cure the way so we could have it again.

Notes:

**Exodus 3:13-14**

...'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"

<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I-AM-WHO-I-AM. Tell the People of Israel, 'I-AM sent me to you.'"

**Commentary**

In this passage, God clearly tells Moses that He is the present One. He doesn't introduce Himself as the I WAS or I WILL but the great I AM. This clearly shows us that in the spiritual realm and indeed in eternity, there is no time but the present. In other words, our bodies are trapped within time and are subject and aware of a past and a present, but our spirit isn't as our spirit is eternal. When we are present, we live from this place where our spirit is. Therefore, we become still as in our spirit we have no need to go to the past or the future to find our identity as we just "are"!

Our minds and egos require an event or a problem in order to draw energy to exist. In the present, such energy is not available and, therefore, the mind and the ego have to become quiet and dissolve. Take for example, how many of us spend most of our time in the future fantasizing what we wished things to be like. If we are honest, we will own up to the fact that we do this in the hope that the fulfillment of this thought will bring the answer and redemption to many of the things that took place in the past. The thought "I will be okay when" or "can you imagine if that happened" unfortunately rarely comes to pass. Please understand that I am not discouraging you from having a vision. It is important to have one; however, once you acquire it, make sure you don't spend most your time in the fulfillment of it instead of staying present and working towards it one day at a time as Jesus said.

The past is much the same. Many of us carry our pasts with us, as we live in regret of the missed opportunities we had or what would things have been like if we did this or that, but unfortunately we didn't. It is important to understand that the past was a present that has been and the future a present that hasn't taken place yet. If we live in either of these extremes, we miss the only thing we have, which is the now. God presence is in the Now. This is why He encourages us not to worry about tomorrow or look back on what was or could have been. By all means, it is okay to plan and make appointments for the future;

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

however, once these plans and appointments have been made, return to the present.

Ultimately, like most things, you have a choice where you live. Choosing to spend your time in other places away from the present will mean that you are probably being fuelled by fear and a lack of trust, which stem from someone who does not understand who God really is.

Notes:

**Exodus 16:19-20**

<sup>19</sup> Moses said to them "Don't leave any of it until morning."

<sup>20</sup> But they didn't listen to Moses. A few of the men kept back some of it until morning. It got wormy and smelled bad. And Moses lost his temper with them.

**Commentary**

When the Israelites were in the desert, God provided manna for them for each day. Apart from the 6<sup>th</sup> day, He didn't provide for the next day, but only for the day they had. Interestingly enough, they were not able to use bread from the day before either as we see on verse 20.

Now, I have been to the Sinai desert, and I must admit that its surroundings and weather are quite overwhelming. Any normal man would be forgiven for wanting to collect as much as possible, as this is a place you can't afford to run out of water and food. Yet, with this stern reality, God provided just for the day they had and not for the one they would have. This, I believe, is a clear picture of God asking his people to stay present and live in the moment. Those that attempted to hold on tight and control the situation by gathering more than they needed ended up losing it and stinking up their tents (lives).

You see, when we seek to control and manipulate, we find it very hard to loosen our grip on life. This, unfortunately, means that we leave no room in our hands for God to give us anything new, and so we end up doing the same things over and over, experiencing the same old results over and over until we burn out and fall into resignation. God wants to bless you, but for that, it is necessary to stop holding on to yesterday's blessing or glory as this will only produce a false sense of security and prevent you from moving on in your life and relationship with God.

Notes:

**1 Kings 19:11-14**

<sup>11-12</sup> Then he was told, "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before GOD. GOD will pass by."

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before GOD, but GOD wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but GOD wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but GOD wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

<sup>13-14</sup> When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there...

**Commentary**

In this passage, I would like to focus on where and when the voice of God was heard. Being present quiets our minds as our ego, guilt, fear, anxiety, etc. cannot survive, since they do not have an event from the past or the future to attach themselves to in order to exist.

As we read 1 Kings 19, we see that God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. He was indeed present in the still small voice. It was then that Elijah felt His presence and had to cover Himself and hide in the cave in Mount Carmel, which I have personally visited.

The hurricane, the fire, and the earthquake represent the noise and a total lack of stillness we find in today's world—perhaps, even what it's like within us each day from all the activity that goes on inside our mind. Like Elijah, we also need to come to that still place inside us if we are going to be able to hear the still small voice of God. It is possible to hear the voice of God in the midst of the noise and hassle and bustle of daily life. But, this will be possible only if within ourselves we are able to remain still and present with God.

Many people seek God for his power and the miracles this power is capable of doing. Many a preacher has used techniques like shouting, including yours truly, when praying for people or for oneself to somehow usher in more authority and greater power. Yet, as we see in this passage, the person of God is not found in these things, instead He is found where it is quiet and still. Shouting will not give you more authority or change things any quicker than they are supposed to be. The truth is that we already have all the authority and power within us as we have the whole of God living in our new hearts. It is, therefore,

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

very important to realize that approaching things in this manner will only isolate us from the world, as the last thing they are looking for is more noise.

One more thought about this is how Elijah hid and covered his face when he felt the presence of God and withdrew himself into the cave. You might feel a presence that might cause you to want to hide and withdraw as Elijah did. This is perfectly normal, so be easy on yourself as you are entering holy ground, as Moses did and maybe, just maybe, becoming aware of a presence you have never felt before. Be still and enjoy. He is here...

Notes:



**Job 3:24-26 and Job 42:5-6**

<sup>24-26</sup> "Instead of bread I get groans for my supper,  
then leave the table and vomit my anguish.  
The worst of my fears has come true,  
what I've dreaded most has happened.  
My repose is shattered, my peace destroyed.  
No rest for me, ever—death has invaded life."

---

I admit I once lived by rumors of you;  
now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears!  
I'm sorry—forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise!  
I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor."

**Commentary**

The ultimate aim of living by *Holding On Loosely* is to experience God through a living relationship that is based on how He loves us instead of our daily performance.

The book of Job is a book that, for years, gave me the creeps when I read it or even thought of it. It is a book that many of us know, but very few of us like to remember or even use as a point of reference. If this is how you feel, and trust me when I tell you that I did, too, in the past, then I invite you to consider that perhaps you are missing the main message behind this wonderful book. You see, Job was a man that attempted to control everything that he had been given by God. He figured that if he did his part, then God would be happy and all would be well. Bear in mind that Job was a very wealthy man. so one would have to assume, especially how the book ends, that Job spent a considerable amount and energy in trying to control everything so that he would not lose the blessing of God.

This is exactly what religion is like. We tithe, give, serve every Sunday, read two chapters in the Bible every day, pray three times a day for more than 10 minutes, turn the TV off when we see some flesh, smile at the old ladies, etc., and then God will see to it that we are protected and cared for and, most importantly, will not withdraw what He has given us. This approach basically means that we are working and paying God for his protection and blessing.

In Jobs case, the outworking of this inner approach was in the shape of sacrificing even for sin that might have been committed by his

children. You see, Job suffered from the same decease we all suffer from when we approach this walk with God from a religious point of view. We are filled with fear and to tame that fear, we attempt to control as much as we can like Job tried through the sacrifices he made on a regular basis. The reality is that we are controlled by this fear and anxiety because we don't really know God or have a relationship with him that develops the kind of trust and peace that is able to confront the anxiety and fear we all feel at times while remaining present and still.

It's very interesting when God invokes the devil and points Job out to him, He speaks about his goody two shoes attitude and his squeaky clean character and record before the Almighty. He mentions the firm grip that Job has on his integrity. These are wonderful attributes to have if we are living in a performance-based relationship; however, as we can see in Chapter 3, verses 24-26, they don't produce an inner life that experiences the fruits of the spirit like peace, love, trust, stillness, etc. Here, Job describes very vividly the state of his inner life by saying:

"The worst of my fears has come true,  
what I've dreaded most has happened.  
My repose is shattered, my peace destroyed.  
No rest for me, ever—death has invaded life."

Now, Job's trial is a very severe one where he loses everything he tried so hard to keep and control. Yes, it is a trial that can easily happen to any of us. But, that's not the point that I am trying to make here. Instead, it is a trial that can happen to us. It is only those that choose to live on a performance-based relationship with God that will constantly have this hounding fear within them of this happening, instead of the peace and trust that comes from getting to know the love of God.

It is also interesting to note the reaction that Job's friends have when he is in the midst of his trials. Not one of them thinks from a perspective of relationship, but instead question and suggest to Job from a place of Religion, accusing him of breaking the rules and the trial being the consequence of sin when it clearly wasn't.

The beautiful lesson, I believe, God seeks to show us through this story is seen at the end of Job in Chapter 42, verses 5-6, where Job finally meets God face-to-face and, from a place of relationship, confesses:

## *Holding On Loosely* Study Guide

---

"I admit I once lived by rumors of you;  
now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears!  
I'm sorry—forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise!  
I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor."

We also see how God rebukes his friends because of their religious approach. Finally and interestingly, He blesses Job with twice as much as he had before. I believe, it is imperative that we realize that this double blessing doesn't happen because Job passed the trial, but instead, because his new-found relationship and approach would mean that the blessing of God would no longer burden him as it did in the first part of his life. Job had finally understood how to *Hold on Loosely* to life and tight to God. He learned the secret that would help him to understand how to handle more than before without worrying him to death.

Notes:

**Psalm 46:10**

<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God! ("Loosen your grip, and know that I am God") – Hebrew Bible Psalm 46:11

**Commentary**

The words "be still" come from the Hebrew root word "Harpu," meaning to loosen our grip over something. It is interesting that this Psalm describes so much of what is actually going on in today's world: natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, kingdoms are crumbling and nations are in chaos through the financial crisis we all face without exception. In the midst of all of this, His recommendation to David is to be still, *Hold on Loosely*, and know that He is God.

We are living in a world today where things that we all thought would never crumble are crumbling. When many think the worst is over, another wave of bad news seems to invade our homes. The experts no longer know what's going to happen, and so we are left with one starch reality—to understand that if we continue to seek control and security for our lives in our own efforts, we will, like the worlds systems are doing, crumble and end up resigned.

If we, however, follow the advice that God gave to David more than 3000 years ago—which was to *hold on loosely*—we will be able to live through this crisis as our focus is directed towards knowing God as we remain in the moment with Him. We are living in days where we need to understand that now, more than ever, we control very little if anything. As the Psalm shows, the only place we will find unshakable peace, security, and strength—like the city where God dwells in verse 5—will be inside of us as we enter this place by loosening our grip and being present with Him.

Notes:

**Ezekiel 47:1-5**

<sup>1-2</sup> Now he brought me back to the entrance to the Temple. I saw water pouring out from under the Temple porch to the east (the Temple faced east). The water poured from the south side of the Temple, south of the altar. He then took me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the gate complex on the east. The water was gushing from under the south front of the Temple.

<sup>3-5</sup> He walked to the east with a measuring tape and measured off fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water waist-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet. By now it was a river over my head, water to swim in, water no one could possibly walk through.

**Commentary**

In this passage of Ezekiel, we see how God invites Ezekiel to a place in the river where he is unable to touch the ground. As a child, I spent many days back in South America playing in a river when we used to go to the mountains on weekends during the winter. My Dad always told me that I had to stay by the shore and never let the water go any higher than my knees. My father, by asking me to observe this, was basically letting me know that as long as the water remained below my knees, I would be able to remain in control. If I went any further, then I would lose control, and the current would sweep me away. He explained that even though the water was up to my knees, I was still in the river. He said to just play and sit in the water but, you know, my eyes were always on that deep part, and if I am honest, I didn't attempt to reach it because of the fear that was within me of what could happen if I did. How similar is this picture to the way so many of us approach our walk with God these days? We long for the deeper end, but because of our need to remain in control, we are unable to invite mystery into our lives, and so we are prevented from going any deeper than the puddle pool where the children usually play. It is also important to point out that the water where the children play usually becomes stagnant and, over time, putrefied. Very little happens in the shore. Although it seems like a place of safety, in reality, it is a place where we become stale and forsake the growth we will only find in the deep end of the river.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

There are also some of us who have attempted to venture into the deep end with the same mentality and approach we had when we remained in the shore. As we did, we were tossed around and nearly drowned. Upon returning to the shore, we became resigned as we figured that God was not for us or wanted us to go deeper. The reality is that he doesn't just long for us to come deeper, but He actually yearns for it. The problem is that if we attempt to reach the deep end of the river and remain there through our own control, we will drown, as this place was never designed around our performance and good intentions. It was designed around His grace and love for us, and until we don't loosen our grip, we will always struggle to accept and allow these beautiful things to enter our lives that usher us into the relationship with Him that will produce the faith and trust that is required to remain there. Yes, the deep is scary, but it is also wild and free, and it takes you to places you will never see if you remain in the shore.

To further prove the point that God wants for us to be in the deep end, we can look at the passage in Ezekiel where the Spirit of God asks Ezekiel to continue walking into the river where he will deliberately lose control as he would not be able to touch the ground any longer, but he would instead have to float. This is a very fitting picture for *Holding On Loosely*. You see, in the middle of the river where we can't touch the ground with our feet is where the current is at its strongest. Here, the best thing we can do if we find ourselves in this place is to not attempt to regain control by swimming and fighting the current, as I said before, but instead remain afloat and go with it.

Always remember, the surface of the water is sometimes rough, still, or choppy. Yet, no matter what is taking place at the top in the deep part, at the bottom it is always still. This stillness can only be experienced in the deep end of the river, as the bottom in shallow end is too close to the surface. People that choose to reside in the shallow end are always affected by what goes on outside them (circumstances) as they have no depth to their lives. Whereas, those who choose to live in the deep end—though the things outside them change, like the condition of the surface of the water—inside them, they remain still as they have understood how to *hold on loosely* to what goes on at the top and tight to what they find in the bottom.

Finally, note that the deep end of this river leads to a place where the leaves of the trees are for healing, just like the journey God took me in as He asked me to trust Him by *Holding On Loosely* and allowing Him

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

to take control and take me. All I had to do was stay afloat and enjoy the process by staying present and leaving the end results to Him.

Notes:

**Scriptures from the New Testament**

**Mathew 6:30-33**

<sup>30-33</sup>"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

**Commentary**

In this beautiful passage in the book of Mathew, Jesus himself shares with us what it is like to be present in this space where, I believe, He hangs out and I like to call *Holding On Loosely*. As he addresses a crowd of people, He points out to them that what most of us in this life work so hard for and give up so much to get is not really the way that He intended it to be.

You see, when you live in a performance-based relationship with God, every part of your life and thinking gets taken over by this mentality and approach. Toiling and getting at all costs replace receiving and trusting in a loving God. Our outlook begins to focus outward and not inward as we become more and more entrenched in the cares of this world and, in time, we find ourselves spending most of our time in the past where we find our identity according to what has happened and to the future for the fulfillment that will hopefully change what has already taken place.

Not only do we forsake the present moment but, more importantly, we become dislodged in the very center of our being. Feelings of God being absent, chronic worry, anxiety, and fear begin to surface and, in time, take us over. The harder we try, the worse it gets as we continue in our vain attempts to control our lives. Many, of course, fail and so, in time, they leave the space of control as they become resigned within themselves. This inner pendulum goes on and on until we realize that the abundant life Jesus came to bring us is not something we can work for or get, but instead it can only be experienced as He gives it to us.



## *Holding On Loosely* Study Guide

---

Our part is to *hold on loosely* to life and what we need and even want out of it. As we hold it loosely—unlike when we try to control and hold it tight or give up and disable our hands altogether—we leave room and space in our hands to receive from God. We also realize that the ones that were absent were we and not He. He was actually all along standing with us as He promised He would be. But, we just didn't notice as our beings were not centered and aligned with that place within us where God lives.

This passage has never been more relevant than today as we seek to live in a world where it is becoming increasingly harder to get what we need. The choice is, of course, ours. We can either double our efforts and consume our lives or—like the eagle—open our wings and allow Him to use the wind of the storm to take us to heights we have never visited before.

Notes:

### **Mathew 6:34**

<sup>34</sup>"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

### **Commentary**

Let me begin by sharing a brief story that I believe represents what being present is very much about.

There is an ancient proverb that author Brennan Manning likes to quote. In this proverb, a monk is being chased by a tiger and reaches the edge of a cliff. He sees a rope hanging over the edge and so he grabs it and begins to climb down, away from the danger. The rope is too short to reach the bottom. He looks up and sees not only the tiger, but also a mouse that is beginning to chew through the rope. He looks down and sees jagged rocks. Then, he looks directly at the cliff and sees a wild strawberry growing. He plucks it and says to himself, "This is the most delicious strawberry I've ever tasted!" Living in the moment... no matter what lies ahead, no matter what lies behind... we live right where we are.

One of the main fruits of *Holding On Loosely* is being present and living in the moment. We saw that this is where God hangs out, as He is not bound by time or driven by fear, anxiety, or worry. We instead, like Jesus was, live in time where things have a beginning and end as well as an in between. When we live from our minds and not our new hearts, we find that in order to function, we need to have an event or a problem to identify with. These problems and events are found either in the past or in the future. In our attempts to control the outcomes in our lives, we transport ourselves into the future as we seek to guess what we can do now in order to best affect it.

This, on face value, seems like a harmless way of living; however, in time, this need to control and manipulate becomes an addiction that ends up controlling us. You don't have to look very far to see the consequences of this approach—consequences like heart disease, nervous breakdowns, anxiety, fear of the past or the future, worry, and even mental illness.

When you are present, none of these foes can survive, as there is no event for them to attach themselves to in the present moment. You

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

see, when you are present, there is only stillness and peace. The mind becomes quiet and ceases from its attempts to control you, which funny enough is what you thought you were using to control your life in the first place.

In the present, time also disappears as you begin to flow out of the center of your being and as you do this, you are then freed to relate and focus on a loving relationship with God that revolutionizes your life from the inside, instead of trying to impact the inside by what you get on the outside.

This is why Jesus Himself reminded us and taught us to "Give your entire attention to what God is doing **right now**, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow."

We need to understand that being present will mean leaving the impact the past had on us until now and arriving to the future better prepared. This is because we are strengthened and, at the same time, so is our trust and our relationship with God as we are in constant fellowship with Him.

Notes:

**Mathew 12:25**

"A house divided amongst itself will not stand."

**Commentary**

In this passage, Jesus is answering to the accusation of the Religious establishment of His time. Nothing new here, as this unfortunately is still taking place today every time God raises up someone who challenges the status quo by challenging what has become common practice. The accusations are also much the same with people insisting that if it doesn't fit into their religious box or experience, then it must be from the devil.

The topic of centering oneself is something I have been speaking about in this workbook and book by sharing the concept of being present. As you know by now, we are made up of a body, a soul, and a spirit. When we are not centered, we often find ourselves living from our mind and our emotions, and rarely from our new hearts. It can happen that even our minds and bodies can disagree with each other, bringing even greater division within us.

When a person is not centered, it means that these three dimensions are out of sync. The mind is full of noise and activity, which is mainly focused on the past or the future. The emotions become the thermometer of our lives as we measure how we are doing, depending on how we feel. If things are good, then we are hot. If things are not great or appear to be out of our control, then we either overheat or grow very cold. Then, there is our heart where God lives and where our direct fellowship with Him takes place within us. Yet, if we are controlled by our other two senses, it is virtually impossible to experience this fellowship from a first-person perspective.

Centering our being brings stability and balance as well as stillness within us. By aligning all three of these dimensions, we begin to live from our core, the place where God is found within us. Our minds begin to quiet down as we become aware and present. There is a verse that says that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. I believe this is true; however, it will not happen by enrolling or teaching our minds to think in certain ways. This will take place as we access our mind from our new hearts, so that we can have the mind of Christ that we have been given according to the scriptures. In other words, God will be thinking through us as the thoughts that rise up

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

within our minds will proceed from Him, as we will not be divided within by doubt and fear.

Religion divides a person, as it is everything but spirituality. The divisions we saw in Jesus' time, that we still see today, are the symptoms and outworking of the division that exists within each of us that have not been shown and understand these principles of the spiritual life, which often lead us to becoming religious and spiritually dead.

Therefore, the next time you don't "feel" the presence of God, it will not be because He has decided to take a hike or gone on holiday. You will probably feel this way because you are the one that is absent from His presence, as you battle the division within yourself and between what you think, feel, and the truth.

Notes:

### **Luke 9:62**

<sup>62</sup>Jesus said, "No procrastination. No backward looks. You can't put God's kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day."

### **Commentary**

Through this scripture, Jesus—I believe—is speaking to us about living in the moment once again. We saw, through the passage in Mathew earlier, how He spoke about not worrying about tomorrow (future) and here, I believe, He is encouraging us not to look back in regret or fear, but instead to focus on the moment and day at hand. One of the things Steve Jobs said that struck a chord with me was that he lived each day as if it were his last. I believe that Jesus would encourage us to do the same. We need to learn to become comfortable with the fact that if we are going to have the kind of walk we all long for with God and, more importantly, the walk He longs to have with each one of us, we are going to have to become very comfortable having mystery in our lives.

Hesitation from our part to accept this will mean failing to fully embrace the kind of individual relationship God has prepared for each one of us before the beginning of time. Remember, if you constantly look back, you are probably living a life that is running away from your past or is full of regret and fear. If you are constantly looking to the future, then you are probably living a life that is paralyzed and anxious. Either way, you will be missing out on your life as you fail to see the blessings and opportunities that He will be giving you each day to relate with Him and better understand how He is loving you.

It is interesting how we often say that time seems to fly by when we are having fun. We also hear people confess that life, as we get older, seems to fly by. Both of these statements are real, and people genuinely feel this way. Yet, have you noticed when you are having genuine fun how, at the end of it, you feel satisfied and filled as opposed to empty and numb as you look back in your life and can't understand where all that time went?

When you had fun, you were fully present. Whereas, on the other hand, you weren't. Welcome to the reality of the zone. You, too, can experience this by choosing to be a protagonist in your life and not just a passenger. Everything you need is already within you, including God if you have invited Him to come into your heart.

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

Remember, the past is a present you missed, and the future is a present you can't access until it is here. All you have is the now, so make sure you show up each day where the rubber is really hitting the road in your life!

Notes:

**Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28-31</sup>About eight days after saying this, he climbed the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John, and James along. While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with him. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over his exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem.

<sup>32-33</sup>Meanwhile, Peter and those with him were slumped over in sleep. When they came to, rubbing their eyes, they saw Jesus in his glory and the two men standing with him. When Moses and Elijah had left, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, this is a great moment! Let's build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He blurted this out without thinking.

<sup>34-35</sup>While he was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: "This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him."

<sup>36</sup>When the sound of the voice died away, they saw Jesus there alone. They were speechless. And they continued speechless, said not one thing to anyone during those days of what they had seen.

**Commentary**

The mount of Transfiguration is a passage I spoke about in the book, when speaking about the space we know in sports as the zone. For many years, I didn't quite understand the reasons for Jesus showing his three disciples and us this event.

As the eyes of my new heart have been opened, after many years of meddling in religion, I began to understand one day, as I asked God about the zone and this space between control and resignation. My attention was immediately taken to the passage on the mount of transfiguration. As you can probably imagine, I struggled to see the relation at first. Still, I persevered and as I reflected on this, I began to discover that what Jesus was showing me was the dimension that He was in touch within himself when He was here on earth. Stay with me.



## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

You see, the zone is something that takes place within us. In sports, when this happens, everything becomes still and quiet within you. Time disappears and suddenly you no longer live or function from your mind, your emotions, or even your body. What takes place is truly amazing, and as hard as it is to describe, it is truly a spiritual experience because what is actually happening is that you become centered. And as you do this, you begin to flow from the core of your being without interruption.

Jesus, I believe, lived centered each day of His life. There was no division within Him. He was fully connected to His Heart and functioned from this place. This is why He said to us that He did what He saw His Father doing. Yet, His Father was not seen by anyone else. Yes, I know He meant His mind, but it was a mind that was filled and activated and accessed from His core, and that is what I believe we got a glimpse of when we see Him speaking with Elijah and Moses. We see His true nature, who He really is, and what is really going on inside Him, which I believe as we learn to *hold on loosely* and center ourselves to know His presence within us, we will also experience this kind of fellowship He had in our own lives as we relate with Him on a daily basis.

Notes:

### **Luke 10:38-42**

<sup>38-40</sup>As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. "Master, don't you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand."

<sup>41-42</sup>The Master said, "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it's the main course, and won't be taken from her."

### **Commentary**

In this passage, Jesus shows us what is really important as we walk with Him. Two sisters approach Jesus' visit in two very different ways. One is performance focused, and the other is relationship focused. This picture is perfect when it comes to showing us the difference of what religion is like compared to living from our new heart and *Holding On Loosely*.

You see, when we have a religion and feel guilty—unless we don't do what we think we are supposed to in order to please the Master, as Martha does—we miss the whole point as we are too busy doing instead of being. We look for our salvation and well being in what we do and not in whom we know. This attitude stems from a controlling and manipulative mindset and approach to our walk with God.

The opposite way is what we see Mary doing. It isn't that she is lazy or doesn't want to help Martha to get the kitchen work done. This girl is connected with Jesus from her heart. She is fully centered and alive and present before Him. She can't pull away even if she wants to as she is completely overtaken by Him. This is what a relationship with God is like when we approach it from a place of freedom, where our salvation and lives are not based on what we do or don't do, but instead in how He loves us, His grace, and who He is.

One more point that I believe is worth addressing here in relation to *Holding On Loosely* is that when we live in a place of control and manipulation, we become very angry when we see others who seem to

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

have the relationship we so desperately want with God, but seem to miss. Something inside us erupts with anger, as it did with Martha, as we can't understand why someone else—who doesn't seem to be keeping score and counting the good and the bad—can have such a real and impacting relationship with Him that blesses their life daily.

Finally, please make sure you understand that I am not telling you to stay like Mary all day doing nothing on the outside. We all know that we need to work and be active; however, amidst all of our activity, there is no reason why—while we are occupied on the outside—we can't be fully alive and present to Him on the inside, just like Mary was.

Notes:

**Mark 5: 21-36**

<sup>21-24</sup>After Jesus crossed over by boat, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the meeting-place leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, "My dear daughter is at death's door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live." Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him.

<sup>25-29</sup>A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, "If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well." The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

<sup>30</sup>At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?"

<sup>31</sup>His disciples said, "What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you're asking, 'Who touched me?' Dozens have touched you!"

<sup>32-33</sup>But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story.

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to her, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague."

<sup>35</sup>While he was still talking, some people came from the leader's house and told him, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher anymore?"

<sup>36</sup>Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, "Don't listen to them; just trust me."

**Commentary**

In this last passage, I will share with you how once again we see the evidence of Jesus being fully present and in the moment as He leads a

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

life that is not controlled or manipulative, but one that flows and does what He sees His Father doing. While He is on His way to healing someone's daughter, He stops along the way as a woman touches the hem of His garment.

Jesus, being fully present, responds to this and stops his walk towards His original assignment. I love how in touch He is with himself that He actually knows when someone full of faith has touched Him. His sensitivity to His surroundings was staggering. I believe that this kind of sensitivity was not just the product of Him being the Son of God but, in fact, it was the product of a man that was fully present and centered and held loosely to life as he left the results to His Father. The same kind of sensitivity and life is open to all of us if we live in this same place where Jesus lived.

We need to understand that God is the God of the moment. You see, if Jesus was someone who was not present and was concerned with results, He would have never stopped to take care of this woman. He would have been controlled by His mind and emotions of duty and would have been too busy focusing on the future (getting to the house where the little girl was) to notice the opportunity that was present to Him that very moment.

As it is, He shows us that living in the moment is not at the expense of the future, but instead is something that adds value to the future that has not taken place yet. To help you see this, let me suggest this to you. Jairus would have been present when all of this happened. He would have seen Jesus stopping, noticing the woman, His disciples asking Him how he could have possibly felt a specific touch amongst all these people, and then seen the woman restored and healed. Imagine the faith that this would have caused to well up within Jairus. Now remember that town Jesus could not do anything because people didn't believe?

Well, maybe—just maybe—this sudden pit stop was not just for the sake of the woman, but it was also for Jairus' sake so that he could see and acquire now what he would then need for the coming future....

When you are present, you are fully aware. You see things and feel things that you will never see or feel if you are not. God is not in a hurry and neither should you choose to be. When people, thoughts, and circumstances come into your life, like they did in that moment with Jairus, and attempt to take you away from the present by

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

worrying you about the future or the past, stay present and remember what Jesus said to him: "Don't listen to them, just trust Me."

Notes:

### **Exercises**

One of the strangest things in the world is how unaware Christians can be when it comes to understanding the dimensions of the spiritual life and its make up, as well as the journey of self-discovery one can and must undertake in order to live from this place. Many of us are told and confess to be living life from our new hearts. Yet, we don't know what that really means or how it looks like when we practice living from this place. We think that it has to do with our behavior, going to Church on Sundays, and praying on a regular basis. Unfortunately, none of these make you any more spiritual than me being a hamburger because I went to McDonald's yesterday. This is not what spirituality is about. This is what I call religion, which is attempting to live an inner life through the efforts we make on the outside. Spirituality is about living life from your core, your spirit, where you are fused intimately together with the Spirit of God in a wonderful and wild love affair.

You see, our beings are made up of our body, soul, and spirit. Now, there has been much teaching in past years about the mind; however, no one has ever spent any considerable time looking at what it actually means or looks like to live from our spirits. Yes, we have spoken much about it; however, we fail to live from this place practically inside us which is what I believe is principally responsible for turning our journey into a religious one.

Being present and centered is not based on witchcraft or any Far Eastern cult. It is simply the common practice of aligning the three dimensions God has given us so that we may allow the flow from that place in the center of our beings that we often refer to as our new heart, without the noise in our minds and the pulls of our flesh and emotions getting in the way. Jesus said, in Matthew 12:25, "a house divided amongst itself will not stand." I believe that here He was giving the religious insight into their own lives and how divided and afraid they were within themselves that led them to ill judge Him and the fruit of His own life. In other words, He was showing them the only fruits religion can produce, which are instability, division, and a complete lack of stillness and truth.

Unfortunately, this religious spirit is alive and well today, and the evidence of it is everywhere in the established church. The divisions and rifts from the arguments of who is right and wrong are further evidence and the fruit of the division that exists within each of its members. You see, in Religion, we are told not to question or think but

## *Holding On Loosely Study Guide*

---

to just accept, thus alienating our soul and body. We are also told that we are sinners and that we must remain in a certain place and do certain things in order to make it when we bite the dust, further taking us away from our new heart.

You see, people who live under this kind of oppression end up exhausted from their attempts to make the grade. The problem is that as well meaning, hungry and zestful they might be, they are actually attempting to do something that in the above state is impossible. We were simply not designed to be divided into three areas. We were designed to live as one whole person, and the only way we are able to experience this wholeness after we have invited Jesus into our hearts is by centering ourselves. The world we live in is designed to be full of noise and distraction. It is designed to pressure us, and if we don't take the time and understand how to tap into our inside, we will live a divided life within us that will weaken us and eventually lead us to give in to the things we so desperately fight against unsuccessfully.

When we do this, our energy is no longer self imposed or generated, but instead we are able to function from the inside out instead of from the outside in. Therefore, with this in mind, I would like to invite you to practice the following exercises to help you come to that place where I believe God is within us, so you can fellowship with Him not just by thought and illusion but in reality by touching and knowing that He is indeed good and present within you.

Please remember that we seek to be present not for the reasons the world does for self gain and to feel the byproducts of being present but to be where God is—to be fully connected to Him in a thriving and living relationship and not one as if it was being done through satellite the day after it happened. Please, also understand that being present without a new heart will mean we will still be lost, as our lives will remain open to other spirits influencing us from our soul. It is, therefore, imperative that as you practice these exercises, you do it with an intention to find Him and fellowship with Him and not just to experience the power that is vested and packed within each of our lives—whether we believe or not.

I encourage you to please keep, when available, a journal or pad of paper and pen nearby because you may want to jot down some thoughts that come to you or perhaps something God might speak to you. It is important to do this, so you don't forget it, and you can seek Him to see what He desires for that part of your life that He has just revealed or spoken about to you.



Finally, in most exercises, it is up to you how long you do them, how often, and when. Early in the morning tends to be a great time to do this, as well as before you go to bed. Having said this, some of these exercises can be done while we are on a train, airplane, a presentation, a normal conversation, etc. The important thing is to give yourself enough time and not go in and rush through them, as this is unlikely to help you see the fruits that these routines can produce in your life.

### **Exercise 1**

Please take some time to walk outside on your own. Find a quiet spot where no one will interrupt you or seek your attention. This can be done inside your home, too. Although, being outside amongst creation is better.

Sit down comfortably and find something still you can focus on. It can be a tree, a part of a river, a flower, the moon, etc. As you sit there, allow every part of you to be taken up with this thing you are looking at. Choose not to judge anything. Avoid thinking about the thing you are looking at and how it is made up, etc. Observe it from your inside and remain curious and open. At first, you will find that, sooner rather than later, your mind will begin to attempt to take you somewhere else. This will be the first evidence that shows you that you are not present and are currently living from your mind and not your new heart.

The aim is to be able to do this without interruption for five solid minutes. Clearly, many of you, if not all of you, will struggle to do this so begin with whatever time you can. It may be 10 seconds. It may be 1 minute or maybe 3. It doesn't matter. What matters is that as you take the time to do this every day, you will begin to see that the time will increase and that your mind will begin to become quieter as you successfully begin to remain present. Please be aware that you might feel an overwhelming joy but, at the same time, you might feel sadness and grief. This is normal because you have been living in denial and have neglected to take life from your new heart.

You may also feel a presence that is alien, one that you know is there, but you also know that you are not very acquainted. This will be your God whom you have followed and fellowshiped mostly from your mind and acquired knowledge about as opposed to meeting Him face-to-face, as Job did, within your new heart. Enjoy!

### **Exercise 2**

This next exercise is also geared towards helping you to center yourself; however, it is intended to also help you to fellowship with God as you do it. I would like you to try something I learnt a while back but was refined as I read *Naked Spirituality* by Mr. Brian McLaren. To do this, close your eyes and be still and quiet. Stay in this place for a small while and then begin by saying from within yourself:

*I am here. You are here. We are here together.*

After, you may proceed with the following questions:

*Who are you God? Who am I? Who are we together?*

Repeat them slowly, from time to time. This will invite you and God to fellowship and meet in a way you have never done before, as you have probably been invoking God from your thoughts and not your new heart. You may, of course, use other words to the ones I have been using. Practicing this exercise regularly will help you to stop having to invite God to join you every time you pray or do something, as you will become aware of His awesome presence within you at all times, making the need to invite Him obsolete, as He is already here within you. You may also do this exercise when you go about your daily chores. I especially love doing this with my eyes open when I am in a meeting with someone or in a presentation.

### **Exercise 3**

Again, sit somewhere quiet where no one will disturb you. Close your eyes and start listening to your breathing. Do this for about a minute or so, until you become aware of your breathing pattern as it slows down. Then, slowly, gently and quietly begin to whisper **yes** every time you exhale and **yes** every time you inhale. Do this for about 30 seconds, after which, start to say yes only when you exhale. Replace the yes when you inhale by opening up your being and hearing God say yes to you instead. As you do this and are centered, you will begin to feel God's approval and love as he says "YES" to you and your life with every breath He gives you to keep you alive.

In time, as you do this, you will begin to sense an overwhelming surge of gratitude and love begin to overflow within you, as you sense His

presence and affection fusing themselves together between your spirit and His. Please be aware that you might also cry or experience grief and this is ok, too.

### **Exercise 4**

This next exercise is one that I have often recommended to my clients when they are in an environment under pressure either performing or in their daily lives—for example, after receiving some troubling news.

Stand up, close your eyes, and place your hand in the center of your body, which should be just below your chest around the area where your stomach is. Imagine that there is a big clock within you, and the center of its hands are where your hand is.

Now, begin to see at first both hands of the clock begin to circle around clockwise. You might find that you want to go around very quickly, or you are unable to see it or do it. This is normal, especially if you are one of those people who lives always on the go. Despite this, persevere by slowing it down. Do this several times.

Once you have completed the exercise clockwise, then begin to do the same counter-clockwise this time. Once again, attempt it several times.

After some practice, I would like to challenge you to stop seeing it with your mind and take your hand away from your body. This time, I would like you to move the hands of the clock from that middle section where you had your hand. As you do this, you will feel the clock instead of just seeing it. Please be aware that this will be very difficult at first, especially if you have never centered yourself before or this is new to you. Nevertheless, with practice, you will begin to feel it little by little.

Once you have achieved this, do it with your eyes open. When you reach this stage, this can be done while you are sitting in a meeting with other people, driving, and even talking, as you will have successfully been able to detach yourself from your body and mind and will be functioning from the center of your being where you are in constant fellowship with God.

There are many other exercises that I have used in the past; however, what is important to understand is that the exercises are there to help

us center and quiet ourselves, so that we may better access and remain in that place within us, where He knocks as in the book of Revelation, and lives when we finally open to the door to Him. That place within us we can call home.

### **Exercise 5**

For this next exercise, you will need music. Choose some slow, instrumental music that will help you to relax. It can also be the sound of water, or rain, or of nature. Lie down and center yourself. As you do this, commit this time to God and lie there still with your eyes closed.

Choose to remain open and still, not judging or expecting anything. Choose not to try and fabricate what you think you should or might feel in an exercise like this, but allow the spirit of God to take you and fellowship with you as He wants. Let your being soak in His presence as you drink from His hands. You might shake, you might tremble, you might cry, or smile and laugh. You may just feel a peaceful silence. The important thing is not to box this experience according to what you think needs to happen, but instead remain open and trust God and know that He will not let anything or anyone else intervene in this time with Him. The amount of time you remain here is up to you, though I recommend a minimum of half an hour.

### **Final Thoughts**

I would like to thank Wes Roberts for his invaluable input and contribution in helping me to put this study guide together. His insight and gifts were instrumental in bringing this part of the project to life.

I hope you have found that the book and this study guide have added something significant to your life. Clearly, we have begun a journey together, and I would love to invite you to stay in touch with me by visiting my web site, where you can connect with me directly. There is nothing more encouraging and exciting for an author than hearing the experiences of those that have read his book. You can do this through [www.holdingonloosely.com](http://www.holdingonloosely.com) where you will be able to leave me a message. Visiting the web site regularly will also enable you to keep up with my ongoing journey, as I will be adding new exercises, material, and regular updates related to the message contained within the book.

Finally, if the book and this study guide have blessed you and helped you to discover a new dimension in your journey and walk with God, then I invite you to consider buying a copy for a friend or close relative, so that they, too, will be able to come into the reality of all the beautiful things that happen when we learn to *Hold on Loosely* to life and tight to the One that gave it to us.

Once again, thank you! May the grace and peace of Christ be with you always!

Pablo

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*, Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.