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FREE TO

THRIVE

HOW YOUR HURT, STRUGGLES,
AND DEEPEST LONGINGS CAN
LEAD TO A FULFILLING LIFE

CHAPTER TWO

YOUR SEVEN LONGINGS

You walk into your local home improvement store and pause inside the automatic doors to get your bearings. Signs hanging from the ceiling identify the contents of floor-to-ceiling rows of shelves that seem to go on for as far as the eye can see.

You've been there many times before, but the sight never ceases to amaze—and even overwhelm—you. You look around for someone to help you. *Why do store personnel always seem to disappear the moment I enter a store?* Finally, you spot someone wearing the right-colored vest. You head toward her, but she turns the other way. You increase your pace; she walks faster. *Does she know I'm here?*

She turns a corner and you lose sight of her for a moment. You're afraid your quest will end in defeat, but then you see her. You catch up to her.

"Can you help me?"

"Yes, of course. What do you need?"

"Well." You're stymied for a moment. "I don't really know."

"What is it you're trying to do?"

"I don't know that, either. Not exactly."

She seems to be trying to gauge whether you're dangerous in

addition to being crazy. “If you don’t know what you need, I don’t think I can help you find it.”

“Of course.” You sigh and rub your forehead. “I just—I’m just not satisfied with the way things are. What I’m doing isn’t working, but I don’t know exactly what I need.”

“I see,” she says (but obviously she doesn’t). “When you figure out what you need, I’ll be happy to help.”

You’d never do that, of course. Who among us enters a home improvement store without knowing—at least in general terms—what we need? But as strange as that seems, many of us do something similar in the way we conduct our lives.

We know, as we said in the previous chapter, that there are deep caverns of cravings in our souls. We sense that there is something wrong, much that is unsatisfying, in the way we’re living our lives. Whether we’re desperate or just generally bothered, we know we need . . . something. But what?

Beyond Maslow

Everyone needs something. But not everyone knows what he or she needs.

Some of us don’t even like to think of ourselves as having needs. We recoil from the notion. We’re afraid that having needs makes us “needy”—and no one likes to think of himself or herself in those terms.

But God did not create us as robots. He made us organisms, not mechanisms. This need is evident in the very first pages of the Bible: God designed human beings to have needs. He put the first humans on an Earth and in a garden that was designed to meet their needs. From the earliest moments of human existence the needs for air, food, water, companionship, etc., have been present. And the humans and their needs were part of what prompted God to call his creation “good” (see Genesis 1).

When American psychologist Abraham Maslow formulated

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a hierarchy of basic human needs, he simply categorized what the Bible's earliest chapters depict. He suggested that all human beings strive constantly to fulfill certain needs and that we do so in a particular, predictable order. Our most basic needs, of course, are physical: food, water, sleep, breath, etc. When those needs are met, Maslow said humans instinctively and unavoidably seek safety and security—in our persons, as well as in employment, health, property, and so on. Next on his “hierarchy” (usually depicted as a pyramid) are the need to be loved and to belong, the need to feel a part of something and to feel important to someone, and the need to experience a sense of purpose and achievement.

Some people are surprised, when their physical needs are met and they experience a measure of comfort, even prosperity, to find that they still feel dissatisfied. I think this is often because they're still experiencing persistent cravings to satisfy a God-given need that they may not even know they have.

These cravings, or longings, are common to all people. When these needs are met, the abundant life Jesus promised becomes a reality. When he said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10 ESV), he was not promising material prosperity, as some television preachers suggest. Rather, I think he was saying that he is the gateway into the “rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10 NLT), in which all of our longings find their ultimate satisfaction. That satisfaction is found in the forgiveness and new birth that a personal relationship with him offers, and in learning to live the way he designed us to live. This is the life of thriving we were created to experience.

What Everyone Wants

What are those needs that cause us to feel deprived when they're not met, and fulfilled when they are? We call them the “Seven Longings.” Each can be defined by a word or phrase starting

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with the first letter of the English alphabet. As you read through these Seven Longings, be attentive to the times in your life when these longings were met and when they were not. The greatest fulfillment in life comes when these Seven Longings are met in our lives—and when we get to be a part of meeting these needs for others. Jesus’s promise of abundance can be experienced now—not just in the next life—for you and for those you know and love. And the process can start as soon as today.

As we describe the Seven Longings that lead to your unwanted behaviors when they’re unmet and to a life of wholeness when they are, our hope is not just to bring about understanding but to lead you to experience the life-transforming power that happens when each longing is met. Since we believe each of these longings is depicted and supported in the Bible, we’ll not only illustrate them from our experiences but also lay out the biblical basis for them. We realize that this chapter may seem unrealistically positive, but we want to clearly illustrate that each longing can be met and show what it looks like to have them met.

Acceptance

Everyone longs to be accepted—to be included, loved, and approved of as you are, no matter what. When this longing is satisfied it makes each of us feel like “I’m valued.” We want to know our *being* matters. We cannot truly thrive in life until this God-given longing is satisfied in him and experienced in our relationships with others. Those who have a personal relationship with God through salvation in Christ have experienced his gracious acceptance of us, just as we are, no matter what. Those who come to him in simple faith experience the mind-boggling, life-changing truth of Romans 5:8 (ESV), which says that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus knew all about the power of acceptance. The Bible describes one occasion when Jesus was swarmed by little children.

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His closest disciples, who were in the habit of arguing over their relative importance in God's kingdom, had it all wrong. They apparently thought they had to do something to make themselves acceptable and important to Jesus, and that Jesus would not accept those with no status, no importance, and no influence. So, when people began to bring little children to Jesus to be blessed by him, the disciples tried to put a stop to it. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16).

Sally Lloyd-Jones, in *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, writes:

Now, if you had been there, what do you think—would you have had to line up quietly to see Jesus? Do you think Jesus would have asked you how good you'd been before he'd give you a hug? Would you have had to be on your best behavior? And get dressed up? And not speak until spoken to? Or . . . would you have done just what these children did—run straight up to Jesus and let him pick you up in his arms and swing you and kiss you and hug you and then sit you on his lap and listen to your stories and your chats? You see, children loved Jesus, and they knew they didn't need to do anything special for Jesus to love them. All they needed to do was to run into his arms. And so that's just what they did. Well, after all the laughing and games Jesus turned to his helpers and said, "No matter how big you grow, never grow up so much that you lose your child's heart: full of trust in God. Be like these children. They are the most important in my kingdom."¹

When my (Josh) son Sean was twelve, he played on a Little League baseball team. A week before the season started, I got an idea about how to show him—and his teammates—acceptance. I bought twelve coupons good for ice cream sundaes at a local restaurant and took them to his coach.

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“Coach, these are for the kids,” I said.

The coach smiled. “This is great. I wish more dads took an interest like this. I’ll take them for sundaes after our first win.”

“No, Coach. I want you to take them for sundaes after their first *loss*.”

The coach looked confused. What I was saying wasn’t computing with his concept of winning, losing, and rewards for good play.

“Coach, I don’t know about you, but as I raise my kids I don’t want to acknowledge their success as much as their effort. And I don’t want to acknowledge their effort as much as their being created in the image of God. You see, I believe my son is created in the image of God and that he has infinite value, dignity, and worth, all of which have nothing to do with playing baseball. If he never played an inning of baseball in his life, I would love and accept him just as much.”

Sean’s coach looked at me for a long moment. Finally, he said, “Well, *that’s novel*.”

The season started and Sean’s team won their first few games. But they lost the third or fourth game, and the coach was true to his word. He gave each player an ice cream sundae coupon and they all went out to “celebrate” together. Sean must have thanked me at least five times for the sundaes, and over the next two weeks several of his teammates came up and thanked me for the special treat. I especially recall a boy named Jessie, who said, “Thanks a lot for the ice cream sundaes, Mr. McDowell. Wow! It doesn’t matter to you if we win or not—you love us anyway.” Nothing could have made me happier. I wanted to communicate to Sean and his teammates that they were accepted, based not on their baseball skills but upon the fact that they are created in the image of God with infinite value and infinite dignity. Is that kind of lesson too difficult for a twelve-year-old to grasp? Obviously not, especially when you use ice cream to prove your point!

There may be nothing that brings greater joy to the human heart than for another person to know all your faults and failures

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and accept you anyway, as you are, win or lose, no strings attached. Being approved of, accepted, and included sets us free to be vulnerable about what is broken and painful in our lives and helps us connect and really engage with others.

Appreciation

Appreciation is the longing to be thanked or encouraged for what you have done. When this longing is satisfied, it helps a person to believe that “I’m capable.” We long for acceptance, to know that our *being* matters, and we also crave appreciation—to know that our *doing* matters. Think about the last time you worked hard at something and someone noticed and thanked you—and how satisfying that was. Or maybe it’s easier to recall an instance when your efforts were overlooked and unappreciated—and how disappointed and disrespected you felt. Those are the two sides of the appreciation coin, so to speak. Our longing to be appreciated is not just a longing for praise, as important as praise can be; it has to do with *significance*—feeling that what you did or said was important, that your effort and your accomplishments make a difference to someone.

Jesus once took a lengthy and dusty journey, on foot, from Galilee to Jerusalem. As his tired, sandaled feet approached a village, where he might be able to rest or eat, he encountered a group of lepers. Because they were lepers, they had to stay outside the village, in isolation from everyone except other lepers, lest they infect others with their dreadful disease. But when they saw Jesus, the healer everyone was talking about, they lifted themselves onto their feet and began as best they could to wave their hands and shouted as loudly as their failing strength allowed, crying out for his attention to their great and horrible need. And it worked. Jesus stopped. But he didn’t even move from the road he traveled. He simply spoke to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

It was a strange thing to say. He said to go into the city, to

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the temple, and present themselves, according to the Law, so that the priests could certify them as having been truly healed. But they weren't healed . . . until they began to obey. The Bible says, "as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14).

The story concludes:

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:15–19)

Just one of ten said "thank you." And that made an impression on Jesus. He was "in every respect like us" (Hebrews 2:17 NLT), so he felt the slight of the nine who showed no appreciation, and the blessing of the one who did.

Appreciation is a deeply felt human need. It works wonders when we receive it, and when we give it to others. You've seen it when you thanked people on active military duty for their service. Or when you made a special effort to show appreciation for good service in a restaurant. Or when you expressed gratitude to a coworker or employee for a job well done. In fact, a study published in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* by researchers Adam Grant and Francesca Gino described the outcome of four experiments designed to measure the effects of appreciation in the workplace.

Experiment 1 involved participants editing a student's job application cover letter, receiving either a neutral or grateful email message from the student, and then choosing whether to help that individual on another letter. Experiment 2 examined whether participants would help a different beneficiary after

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they were thanked for helping the first student. Experiment 3 looked at how an annual giving director's gratitude toward fundraisers influenced further behaviors in raising money to benefit a university. Experiment 4 returned to the cover letter assistance task, but the gratitude message was delivered or withheld in an in-person interaction. Participants were measured as to how effective they felt they were at the requested task, as well as how valued they felt.²

In each of the four experiments, participants reported feeling valued—and more likely to work harder or help more—when they were thanked for their efforts.

While acceptance is the foundation for a secure relationship that leads to flourishing, appreciation can be considered a cornerstone of a “whole” life. What would it be like to work, live, and play with the kind of people who affirmed the big and the small efforts we gave? And to be that person in the lives of others?

You may think, “If I go around expressing appreciation to people for what they do and think all the time, they may think I only like them for what they do or say.” This is why acceptance is so important as the starting point for growing and developing vigorously (thriving). We all long to know that our being is enough—this is primary—but appreciation is needed as well.

Affection

Affection is the longing to be cared for with gentle touch or emotional engagement. It is another universal and acute human need. We all enter this world with a need to be cared for, touched, and engaged with emotionally. When we are, it produces a feeling of “I’m lovable.”

A 1944 landmark study conducted in the United States involved forty newborns. The purpose of the study was to see whether the infants could thrive if their basic physiological needs

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were provided, or if affection was also necessary. They were separated into two groups and housed in different areas. Specific instructions were given for each group's care. In Group I, the caregivers were instructed to feed, bathe, and change the diapers of the infants but to do nothing else; the infants were not to be looked at or touched more than was necessary and the "caregivers" were not to communicate with them at all. All of their physical needs were scrupulously provided, and the environment was sterile; none of the infants became ill. However, the experiment was halted after just four months when half of the infants died.³

At least two more died even after being rescued and brought into a more natural familial environment. There was no physiological cause for the babies' deaths; they were all physically very healthy. Before each baby died, there was a period where they would stop verbalizing and trying to engage with their caregivers, generally stop moving, nor cry or even change expression; death would follow shortly. The babies who had "given up" before being rescued, died in the same manner, even though they had been removed from the experimental conditions.⁴

While this was taking place, in a separate facility, the second group of twenty newborns were provided with basic physiological needs along with caring words, hugs, and kisses from the caregivers. Group II recorded not a single death.⁵ The results of the experiment were heartbreaking and tragic, but the conclusion was emphatic—nurture and affection are vital needs in humans.

A few years later, another project by researcher René Spitz influenced a major shift in children's homes and hospitals by filming the effects of emotional deprivation on children. He showed that a child who is deprived of human affection may survive but cannot thrive physically or emotionally. However, when a child is given skin-to-skin contact, care, affection, and proper nurture,

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the baby's immune system will be strong, his or her appetite will be healthy, and a robust weight gain will result.

No amount of affection is too much for children. Likewise, adults need daily affection and emotional engagement, and the longing to be shown such care never goes away. We see this in the biblical accounts of Jesus and the children, when “people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them” (Matthew 19:13). A gentle touch and words of blessing like this communicate a sense of value and provide emotional reinforcement, helping a person to believe that he or she is lovable. The Gospels repeatedly depict Jesus showing affection by speaking caring and honoring words and giving appropriate physical contact like a hug, a kiss, an embrace—even to his betrayer on the night of his betrayal (e.g., see Matthew 26:49; Luke 12:4; John 15:14–15). And the early church leader, Paul, repeatedly encouraged followers of Jesus to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12; see also Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:26).

Affection is so important to the human soul that God gave us the blessings of both sexual and non-sexual touch. God created us with the longing for appropriate sexual affection and gave us marriage as the safe and sacred place for that form of affection to be experienced. But “I love you” can be said and expressed in a wide variety of non-sexual ways as well—a hug, a peck on the cheek, an arm around the shoulder. Words of affection and appropriate forms of touch connect us with one another and make us feel close.

Access

Access is the longing to have the consistent emotional and physical presence of key figures. When this longing is satisfied, it gives us the feeling of “I’m important.” I will never forget one day when I (Josh) was in my study, busily engaged in several demanding projects at once. I was hammering out a chapter for

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a new book when my two-year-old son Sean wandered in with a ball in his hand.

“Want to play, Daddy?” he chirped expectantly.

“Son, how about a little later? I’m right in the middle of a chapter.”

Sean was too young to know what a “chapter” was, but he got the message: Daddy was busy. Unavailable. He trotted off without complaining and I returned to my manuscript.

Within minutes, my study door soon opened again. My wife, Dottie, came in and sat down.

“Honey, Sean just told me you were too busy to play with him. I know that this book is important, but I’d like to point something out.”

“What is that?” My tone wasn’t as kind and responsive as it should have been. After all, I was doing “important work.”

“I think you have to realize that you are always going to have contracts and you’re always going to have deadlines. Your whole life you will be writing and doing other projects, but you’re not always going to have a two-year-old son who wants to sit on your lap and ask you questions and show you his new ball.”

“Honey, I think I hear what you’re saying, and you make a lot of sense, as usual. But right now I’ve got to get through with this chapter.”

“All right, Josh, but please think about it. You know, if we spend time with our kids now, they’ll want to spend time with us later.”

It wasn’t long before I took a break from my writing and found my son. I didn’t want to give him the impression that he was less important than a chapter—or even a whole book. I wanted to meet his need for significance by letting him know he had access to me, by being as “present” and available as possible to him.

Having access to someone who is consistently present to engage with emotionally allows us to see and experience that we are important. This has become increasingly challenging in the

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era of the smart phone. People are alone together. We are hyper-connected, yet lonelier than ever because we crave more than a virtual “connectedness”; we need to know that we have access to those who are important to us, which conveys to us a sense of our worth and significance. The younger we are, the more we need to know that we have access to the important people in our lives, but we never outgrow that need. And, while physical presence is important, being emotionally present is just as crucial.

An incident in the Gospel of Mark may shine a light on this need in our lives, especially at critical times. Jesus and his closest friends and followers had reached the end of a long day of teaching and ministry. They finally escaped the press of the crowd and sailed across the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus lay down in the stern of the boat and soon fell asleep on a cushion. As he slept, however, a furious storm arose, and the waves began to threaten to swamp the boat.

In the midst of the storm, the disciples woke Jesus, saying, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

Jesus rose and spoke to the wind and waves. “Quiet! Be still!” The wind died, and the sea’s surface became calm again.

You may have read or heard that story before, but did you ever notice what Jesus’s disciples asked him? They said, “don’t you care if we drown?” Sure, they were afraid of the storm and its effects, but the words reveal something deeper: they thought his apparent unavailability meant that he thought they were unimportant. He went on to reveal that such wasn’t the case—that it wasn’t their significance but their faith that was too small.

Still, in his humanity, even Jesus couldn’t be accessible to his followers 24/7, which is why he ascended to heaven after his resurrection and sent the Holy Spirit, saying, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. . . . Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”

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(John 14:16–17; 16:7). In sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus made his presence available to his followers always and forever.

God has implanted in every human soul a longing to know that we are important, and that need is met when we know that someone who is important to us is accessible to us and willing to be present with us. How beautiful it is that God gives us the gift of his Holy Spirit so that we need never feel alone in the boat, so to speak. But he also intends for our need for access to be met through others, which is why the Bible includes more than 150 “one another” statements that encourage God’s people to be available to each other (e.g., see Romans 12:10, 16; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:32). Knowing that people we value are accessible to us teaches us that we are important and significant.

Attention

Attention is the longing to be known and understood with someone entering your world (by this, we mean someone taking time to recognize and participate in what’s important to you such as your opinions, dreams, desires, and interests). When this longing is satisfied, it produces a feeling of “I’m understood.” Have you ever entered a full room or a building (or a church) without being noticed and greeted by anyone? Do you remember how that felt? It’s a lonely feeling, isn’t it?

Every human being longs to be seen, noticed, and understood. We all want someone to enter our world and pay attention to us. Our need for attention isn’t a need to be in the spotlight, so to speak; it is a heartfelt need for someone to notice who we are, what we’re interested in, what we’re going through, and what we’re capable of doing and being. And we all long for that and need that every day.

When my son Sean was ten years old, he was intensely interested in sports cars. He would cut out magazine pictures of cars like the Maserati, the Lamborghini, and the Ferrari Testarossa and pin them on his bedroom wall. I wasn’t particularly interested

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in such cars, but I noticed Sean's interest. So one day I decided to surprise him by entering his world. I searched and picked out some of the top sports car dealerships in Beverly Hills, a few hours from where we lived at the time. I sent each car dealer a letter that said:

I'm a desperate dad. I'll do anything to spend time with my son, and right now he's into sports cars. Would it be possible for me to pull him out of school and bring him up to your showroom so that we could take some test drives? I want to tell you up front, I'm not interested in buying a car. I just want to dream with my son.

Amazingly, I got positive replies from every dealer. I called and made appointments for us, and we drove up to Beverly Hills for a day of riding in insanely expensive sports cars. Sean went on "test drives" and "tried out" just about every sports car imaginable. He was in heaven! Some of the salesmen even gave him posters of the cars he had ridden in, some of which were autographed by famous race car drivers.

On the way home, we discussed which cars we liked the best and went over all the flyers, books, and posters Sean had collected, and I took the opportunity to discuss values with him, in light of the very expensive machines he had ridden in that day. Years later, Sean said to me, "I'm convinced the lesson on what we value in life would have never stuck with me if you hadn't entered my world and demonstrated your love for me by focusing on my interests. The real lesson that day that molded and shaped me as a father and husband is that I am to enter the life of my wife and family in order to love and be loved."

King David wrote, "O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me . . . Every moment you know where I am" (Psalm 139:1, 3 TLB). The Hebrew word that passage uses for "know" (*sakan*) means a caring involvement. God had much

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more than an informational knowledge of David; he was caringly involved in David's life. God not only knows us and wants us to know him; he wants to be lovingly involved in our lives. In the ultimate display of love, he sent his Son into the world, into *our* world, as a human being, to share our trials, temptations, pains, and pleasures in a way that was beautifully designed to demonstrate his love for us and our importance to him. And he created us to need such attention in our lives, both with him and with those around us.

That longing for attention is why you may feel hurt or insulted when someone calls you by the wrong name—especially if it's someone who should know you. It's why you feel so let down when someone you care for gives you a generic or “re-gifted” birthday or anniversary present. It's why you feel devalued when someone close to you looks around you, talks past you, or stops listening to you. It's also why you feel blessed when someone enters your world, shows an interest in what interests you, and shares your trials, temptations, pains, and pleasures in a way that demonstrates their love for you and your importance to them.

Affirmation of Feelings

Another need we all share as human beings is the longing to have our feelings affirmed, validated, or confirmed by others. When this longing is met, it conveys a sense of authenticity; it communicates, “I'm embraced.” Having our emotions affirmed frees us to feel both the emotional highs and lows of life, which is a big part of thriving. When someone acknowledges what we're feeling, even when that feeling is negative, it has a positive effect, reassuring us that we're not “weird” or “crazy” to feel the way we do.

My friend Ray experienced the transformation that can take place in us when this need is met. His wife, Gail, had been repeatedly bullied by a coworker, and would often come home in tears at the end of a workday. Ray tried to be helpful by telling Gail

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things like, “You need to tell her to back off” and “You should tell her she’s not your boss, and if she continues such behavior, you’ll file a formal complaint.” All of his suggestions, however, seemed only to fuel the fires of Gail’s frustration.

One day, inspired by a friend’s wise counsel, Ray decided to respond to Gail’s complaints by affirming her feelings. When she arrived home crying, with a new report of fresh outrages committed by her coworker, Ray refrained from giving her any advice. He went to her and wrapped her in a hug, and she laid her head on his shoulder and cried.

“You’re angry,” he said.

“You’re darn right I’m angry.”

“You have every right to be angry. You feel disrespected and devalued, too, don’t you?”

She lifted her head. “Yes!”

“I would too.”

She dried her tears. “You don’t think I’m being too sensitive?”

“No. I’d feel the same way.”

“I feel like she just wants to hurt me.”

“I can see why you feel that way.”

A few moments passed, and Gail took a deep breath. “You know what? I need to tell her to back off, and if she doesn’t, I’m going to file a formal complaint.”

Ray later told me how amazed he felt at the effect his words of affirmation had on his wife. She didn’t need his advice, but she was calmed and blessed when he simply affirmed her feelings. He said it felt like “magic.” But it wasn’t magic; it’s simply what happens when this need for affirmation of feelings is met.

A familiar story from the Bible contains an often-overlooked example of Jesus recognizing and meeting this need. It happened one day in the village of Bethany, when Jesus and his closest followers arrived at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Martha leaped into action in the kitchen, to take good care of the Rabbi and his followers. But her sister, Mary, placed herself

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among his followers and sat at his feet to listen and learn as he taught.

Mary's action rubbed Martha the wrong way. It was audacious for her little sister to act like she belonged among the men, as if she could be one of the Rabbi's disciples just like them. But she also left Martha to do all the work of hostess and cook by herself! So Martha went to Jesus to complain.

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40).

Some people see Jesus's reply as a rebuke. But notice that he carefully—and, I think, sensitively—affirmed Martha's feelings: "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41–42).

It would've been nice if the Bible recorded Martha's response, but it doesn't. Did she stalk away in a huff? Did she glare at Jesus? Or at her sister? Or did she feel comforted that, at least, Jesus had affirmed her feelings? He didn't say that her feelings were wrong, though he may have suggested that she was going a bit overboard in her preparations. We don't know the answer to those questions, but I think it's possible that Martha was comforted and reassured by Jesus's words.

Jesus's words, both to Martha and about Mary, embody the truth of Romans 12:15, which says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." As the New Living Translation puts it, "Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep." When someone does this for us, affirming our feelings, we feel embraced and valued, and step further into the thriving life God desires for us.

Assurance of Safety

In addition to the longings we all feel for acceptance, appreciation, affection, access, attention, and affirmation of our feelings,

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we also feel a deep need for the assurance of safety—that is, to feel safe, protected, and provided for emotionally, physically, and financially. We crave more than just being told, “Everything is going to be okay.” We long for the assurance of our safety and security. We want to feel confident that we will be protected and provided for emotionally, physically, and financially. Mark and Debbie Laaser describe it this way:

We want to know that we are materially secure—that we have food, and a place to live, and enough money to support ourselves. We want to know that we are spiritually safe—that our God is a God who will not pull the rug out from underneath us, that he is a God who keeps his promises. And we want to know that we are emotionally secure, that those around us are reliable, that those people who say they love us can be counted on to act lovingly.⁶

When this longing is satisfied, it produces a sense of stability in our lives and the freedom to enjoy, explore, and experiment in life without fear. When this need is met, we have a feeling that says, “I’m secure.” Both men and women have the need to be protected and provided for emotionally, physically, and financially. If these are not present, it may feel like instability is the air that you breathe.

I think our longing for the assurance of safety is an ache for the Garden, where God provided for every human need (see Genesis 2). However, when our human ancestors fell into sin their fall introduced into their lives every kind of insecurity. It brought fear—“I was afraid.” It engendered shame—“Because I was naked.” It produced alienation—“So I hid” (Genesis 3:10). Even so, God provided the means for our needs to be met—first and foremost, in him as our Protector (Psalm 46:1) and Provider (Matthew 6:26).

We can find assurance in the simple truth that God exists and

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that he is our Creator and Sustainer. He has given us a longing for the assurance of safety and security that finds fulfillment in our relationship with him, the ultimate Father and Friend, Deliverer and Defender. As we live in relationship with him, living out the truths of his word that are rooted in his nature and character, we can know that we are provided for and protected by someone who is good and wants the best for us.

God has also designed us to long for and receive the assurance of safety in our human relationships, especially in childhood. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that the early church in Jerusalem was instrumental in meeting this need, as “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:44–47). This passage depicts the early Christians’ need for material and emotional security being met through their relationships with other followers of Jesus Christ. It is also a depiction of the way God intends for you to live—a state in which you feel safe, protected, and provided for emotionally, physically, and financially, and free to enjoy, explore, and experiment in life without fear.

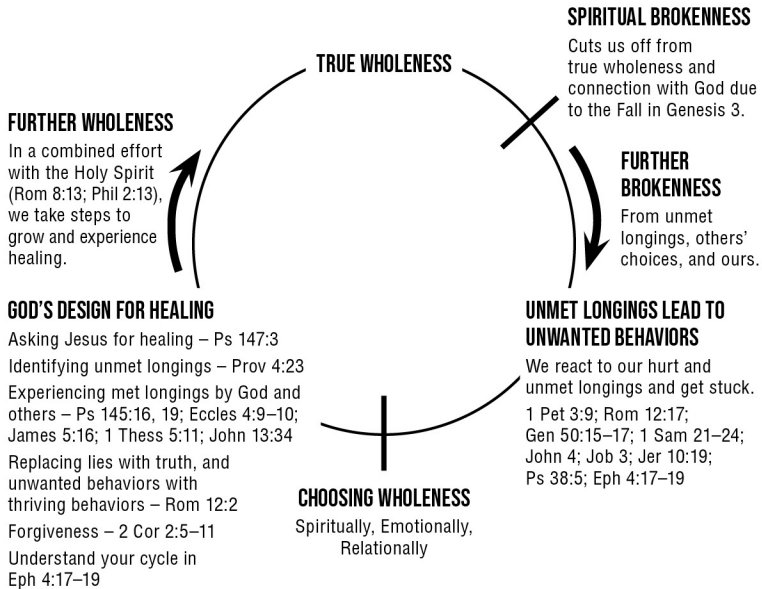
The Wholeness Apologetic

When we experience our Seven Longings being met in healthy ways with God and others, we experience “true wholeness.” This forms the basis of what we call the Wholeness Apologetic model pictured on the next page. Throughout this book we will explore each aspect of the model, occasionally referring back to the diagram. We’ll explain why we struggle to experience this life of true wholeness we were intended to live and how we can reclaim that divine design.

YOUR SEVEN LONGINGS

THE WHOLENESS APOLOGETIC

Supporting God's design for human flourishing in all areas of life.
We experience this primarily through the fulfillment of our
Seven Longings with God, self, and others.



God's Design

The first crisis in human history occurred after God created Adam and surrounded him with every possible resource he might need, except for one: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Genesis 2:18).

Human aloneness was a crisis, an undesirable situation that God took extreme measures to correct. Adam had all he could want in that pristine garden, including the presence of God himself. But God is a relational God who made us for relationship, not only with him but also with other human beings (Genesis 1:26).

One of the world's longest studies ever done was begun in 1938 by Harvard University.⁷ The objective was to discover the key to happiness and health. After eighty years of study, researchers concluded:

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“The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,” said Robert Waldinger, director of the study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. “Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation.”

In other words, “It is not good for humans to be alone.” We all have needs that can be met only through our relationships with God and other people. A flourishing life can happen only in connection with God and others. If all of the Seven Longings are met in healthy ways, you will feel valued, capable, lovable, important, understood, embraced, and secure. You’ll experience a life of wholeness. Doesn’t this sound like the thriving life we all long to experience? This is possible, but only in the context of a relationship with God and others. Isolated thriving is an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp or old news. Isolation leads to loneliness, a state in which our longings cannot be fully met. As Dr. Waldinger concluded from the Harvard study, “Loneliness kills. It’s as powerful as smoking or alcoholism.”⁸ And when the Seven Longings we’ve explored go unmet, our sense of loneliness deepens and results in hurt, hardship, and unhealthy behaviors. What does that look like? This is the focus of the next chapter.

Questions for Reflection

1. What longings were met in healthy ways before your teenage years?
2. Who were the people who met your longings in healthy ways?
3. What longing are you most thankful was met growing up?
4. If you could have one longing met today, what would it be and why?