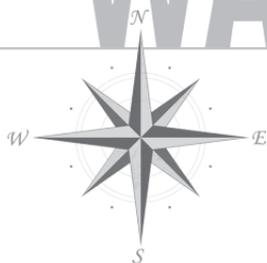


# FINDING

5 Awakenings  
to Your New Life

# YOUR

# WAY BACK



# TO GOD

DAVE FERGUSON &  
JON FERGUSON



MULTNOMAH  
BOOKS

**SESSION 1**

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FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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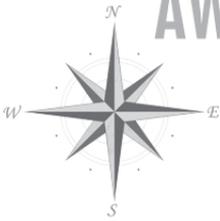
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## Session 1



# AWAKENING TO LONGING

**“There’s got to be more.”**

## Session 1 Big Idea:

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We all have a longing to love and be loved in return, to find purpose for our days, and to make sense out of life when life doesn't seem to make any sense. That longing is from God, and when you allow that strong desire for more to draw you nearer to him, he will fulfill your longings. God knows your needs and desires even better than you do, and he has a life of meaning and purpose in mind for you. The “more” you need most can only be found as you continually bring your life back to your heavenly Father. Let your longings for more—no matter how intense—draw you closer to him instead of pushing you away from him.

If possible, please read chapters 1–6 of *Finding Your Way Back to God* before participating in session 1.

## OPTIONAL ICEBREAKER

Answer this question: What is one wild or rebellious act you committed as a teen or young adult that you now realize was foolish? (It doesn't have to be anything *too* embarrassing!)

## OPENING THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever felt like you “lost” God somewhere along the course of your life (or perhaps never found him in the first place)? If so, describe the sense of separation you have felt and why you continue to want to find him.

2. What is your greatest longing? In other words, when you think of something you wish you had in your life but don't, or wish you understood about your life but can't, what is it?

### VIDEO DISCUSSION

Watch video 1 on the *Finding Your Way Back to God* DVD, then discuss the following questions.

3. Think about Jake, Melissa, and Jeremy, the three people in the video who told their stories of being far from God. Which one can you relate to the most, and why?

4. How do you feel about the wager that Jon Ferguson talks about in the video? Are you at a point in your life where you are prepared to pray, “God, if you are real, make yourself real to me”?

## BIBLE DISCUSSION

Read Luke 15:11–32, the story of the lost son—the story we will be focusing on throughout this study.

<sup>11</sup>There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup>After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who

sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.” <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup>The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

<sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup>“Your brother has come,” he replied,

“and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

<sup>28</sup>The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”

<sup>31</sup>“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

5. Who do you think the three key figures in the story—the father and the two sons—represent?

6. When the younger son decided to ask for his inheritance and leave home, what do you think he was longing for?

### LIFE APPLICATION DISCUSSION

7. *Finding Your Way Back to God* says that all of us have the feeling that “there’s got to be more” to life. Specifically, there are at least three areas of life where all of us have legitimate longings: (a) to find love, (b) to find a purpose for life, and (c) to find meaning in our suffering. Describe a way in which you have a longing or desire in one of those three areas.

8. Have you ever had one of your major desires fulfilled but then found that the fulfillment wasn't enough—you were left with more longing and dissatisfaction? If so, describe the experience.

9. In what ways are your dissatisfactions and desires pushing you away from God? In what ways are they motivating you to seek God?

### **OPTIONAL PERSONAL DECISION TIME**

Think back to the area of your life where you have the most acute sense of longing (identified in question 2). The next time you're feeling sad or dissatisfied about this lack in your life, use

that emotion as a reminder to pray to God. Write down what, specifically, you want to say to God when you feel a sense of unsatisfied desire. Close your eyes now and pray the prayer. After you go home, begin to develop the habit of praying in response to your own feelings of dissatisfaction.

### EXPANDED BIBLE DISCUSSION

Read John 4:4–26, the story of an encounter between Jesus and a woman at a well.

<sup>4</sup>[Jesus] had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup>When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

<sup>11</sup>“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

<sup>15</sup>The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

<sup>16</sup>He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

<sup>17</sup>“I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup>The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

<sup>19</sup>“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

<sup>21</sup>“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

<sup>25</sup>The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

<sup>26</sup>Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

1. What longings do you think the woman had? How were these longings similar to the physical need for a drink to quench your thirst?

2. What is “living water”? How does it give permanent satisfaction?

Read Psalm 63:1–8, a poetic expression of David’s great longing for, and confidence in, his God.

<sup>1</sup>You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.

<sup>2</sup>I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.

<sup>3</sup>Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.

<sup>4</sup>I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

<sup>5</sup>I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

<sup>6</sup>On my bed I remember you;

I think of you through the watches of the night.

<sup>7</sup>Because you are my help,

I sing in the shadow of your wings.

<sup>8</sup>I cling to you;

your right hand upholds me.

3. What images does David use to express his longing for God? Which one interests you the most, and why?

4. What indications do you see that God was able to satisfy David's longings?

## AFTER THE SESSION

Sometime after participating in session 1, find some quiet time to spend alone in a peaceful place with Scripture, your own thoughts, and prayer.

Read the following Scripture passage (Psalm 42:1–5):

<sup>1</sup>As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.

<sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

<sup>3</sup>My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

<sup>4</sup>These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go to the house of God  
under the protection of the Mighty One  
with shouts of joy and praise  
among the festive throng.

<sup>5</sup>Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.

Underline one or more lines in the above passage that mean the most to you.

Think about these questions: *Lately, what have I been longing for? Is it possible that a longing for God is really at the root of all my other longings? Where is all this leading me?*

Pray the following prayer:

**God, if you are real,  
make yourself real to me.  
Awaken in me the ability to see  
that you are what's missing from my life.** 

Then go on to pray to God in your own words about your feeling that “there’s got to be more.”

## Session 1

# Awakening to Longing

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*Objective:* To help participants discover that their longings are from God and that, when they allow those strong desires to draw them nearer to him, he will fulfill their longings.

What you need for this session:

- At least one copy of the book *Finding Your Way Back to God* to refer to if needed
- The *Finding Your Way Back to God* DVD
- A DVD player and a screen on which the whole group can watch video 1
- Bibles for yourself and the other participants
- (optional) Index cards or slips of paper
- (optional) Pens or pencils

## OPTIONAL ICEBREAKER

Welcome the members of the group to the first session. You may choose to set a friendly tone by getting the group members discussing the icebreaker question.

## OPENING THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

*Questions 1 and 2:* These questions are rather personal, so don't push any of the group members to respond to them verbally. Instead, ask for one or two volunteers to share their responses to each question. If the other group members only want to think about their answers on their own, that's fine.

## VIDEO DISCUSSION

*Questions 3 and 4:* After playing the video, use these questions to help group members react to what they saw.

## BIBLE DISCUSSION

*Questions 5 and 6:* Use these questions first to give the group members an overview of the parable of the lost son and then to focus on how the younger son had misguided longings that led him to "a distant country."

## LIFE APPLICATION DISCUSSION

*Questions 7 to 9:* If some group members are hesitant to say too much about the unfulfilled longings in their life, that's okay. If some express bitterness or sorrow, that's okay too. Let people be real about their feelings. Yet to the extent that you can, help the others begin to see what it looks like in the lives of everyday people when they start turning to God for the love, purpose, and meaning they lack in life. If you have a large group, you may want to split it into two or more smaller groups so that everyone who has a desire to speak up about his or her own story can do so.

## OPTIONAL PERSONAL DECISION TIME

Use this as a concluding activity if you have time and want the group members to make a personal response to the discussion you've been having.

Hand out index cards or slips of paper, plus pens or pencils, to the group members. You might want to invite the group members to scatter to different spots in your meeting area for quiet, individual reflection while they decide what to write. After a few minutes, gather them again and ask for a volunteer or two to share what they wrote down.

## EXPANDED BIBLE DISCUSSION

If you have time in the session to discuss more of the Bible, use one or both of the passages in this expanded material. (You may wish to insert these questions following the discussion of Luke 15:11–32 in questions five and six above.)

*Expanded questions 1 and 2:* Make sure the group members recognize that the story of the woman at the well shows how a person's longing for love can help to draw her or him toward God's love. The same is true for other kinds of longings.

*Expanded questions 3 and 4:* Some of the group members may share David's intense yearning for God. Others might wish they did but in reality aren't there yet. Either way, that's okay. At this point, just help them all to get a glimpse of what longing for God can look like.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lead in prayer, asking God to help everyone in the group convert his or her longings for "more" into a pursuit of his greater presence in their life.

## PREVIEW OF THE NEXT SESSION

Whet the group members' appetites for the next session by telling them that it has the encouraging message that *everyone* can start over again!