



# *Renewing Me*

GOD REWRITES OUR STORIES

**Reflection Journal**

November 2019

# Contents

Thursday 7 <sup>th</sup> November	
7:30PM – 7:55PM	<b>Teaching:</b> Introduction & God is Close to Us When We Suffer
7:55PM – 8:05PM	<b>Exercise:</b> Distilling Your Story
8:10PM – 9:30PM	<b>Group Time:</b> Sharing Your Story (10 mins to share; further time for others to respond and ask questions; time for some to share next week)
Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> November	
7:30PM – 7:55PM	<b>Teaching:</b> God, When Will the Suffering Let Up?
7:55PM – 9:30PM	<b>Group Time:</b> Sharing Your Story (Continued); Responding to Teaching: When your story's not going the way you expect, what do you do?
Thursday 21 <sup>th</sup> November	
7:30PM – 7:55PM	<b>Teaching:</b> At Our Worst, God Gives His Best
7:55PM – 9:30PM	<b>Group Time:</b> Responding to Teaching: What's the worst moment in your story? What does it mean to you that God has provided forgiveness for that moment?
Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> November	
7:30PM – 7:55PM	<b>Teaching:</b> A Fresh Start Free from Sin and Shame
7:55PM – 8:05PM	<b>Exercise:</b> Time to Complete Your Psalm
8:10PM – 9:30PM	<b>Group Time:</b> Sharing Your Psalm; Responding to Teaching: How has shame limited your potential? How does God's work of renewal speak to your sin and shame?

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# Redemption (The Book) and Renewing Me

Here's a suggested way of working through Mike Wilkerson's *Redemption* book that will overlap content with *Renewing Me*.

## **Session 1: Introduction & God is Close to Us When We Suffer**

- Introduction
- Chapter 1—When You Suffer, God is Near

## **Session 2: Session 2: God, When Will the Suffering Let Up?**

- Chapter 2—Bricks Without Straw: How Long, Oh Lord?

## **Session 3: At Our Worst, God Gives His Best**

- Chapter 3—The Passover: At Your Worst, God Gives His Best

## **Session 4: A Fresh Start Free from Sin and Shame**

- Chapter 4—Crossing the Red Sea: Into a New Life Free from Shame

*This is a four week abridged version of *Renewing Me*. But you will be able to listen to the talks for Sessions 5 & 6 (using the access code: TJT-RN-2019 at [thejoshuatree.com.au/renewing-me-talks](http://thejoshuatree.com.au/renewing-me-talks)); take notes in this journal and continue the book.*

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## **Session 5: When Desires Rule and Enslave**

- Chapter 5—Demanding Manna: The Subtle Significance of Everyday Desires
- Chapter 6—The Golden Calf: Volunteering for Slavery

## **Session 6: God is Our Only Lasting Hope**

- Chapter 7—The Covenant-keeping God: Our Only Lasting Hope for Change
- Chapter 8—Is God Your Promised Land?
- Epilogue: The Redeemer's Mission

Redemption can be purchased in the following formats:

- Hard copy book at Reformer's bookstore: <http://bit.ly/redemption-the-book>
- Kindle format: <http://bit.ly/redemption-kindle>
- Audiobook at Christian Audio: <http://bit.ly/redemption-audio>

# Group Time

## Confidentiality

- We've agreed that's what shared in the group stays in the group. Let's honour that commitment.

## How Deep Do I Go?

- Each group facilitator will share first to give you a bit of a model for sharing your story; they take the plunge in making themselves vulnerable before you do!
- Be guided by their vulnerability as to what you might share.
- There's no pressure for the focus to be on your deepest, darkest experiences; be guided by what you feel comfortable and safe to share.

## Interacting With Others' Stories

- Express helpful reactions to what was shared — e.g. Where could you feel the weight of what was shared (what was painful/hard/good)?
- It can be helpful to share what resonates with your own story — common areas where you've felt stuck or found things hard BUT be careful not to take the spotlight off another person's story onto you; i.e. We each get a turn where our story is the focus; responding to someone else's story is an opportunity to understand them better, identify with their story and encourage them — not to make it about us.
- Ask questions where things where you'd like more clarity — e.g. You shared \_\_\_\_\_, but what was that like for you?
- Encourage others by the good desires you can see in them. All of us bear the image of God. But in the hardship of life and the face of our own failure sometimes it's only what's negative that looms large. Your comments can help restore some balance.

# Continuing Group Interaction

- As we get to know each other's stories and apply the teaching to our lives there'll be extended time for group discussion. Be mindful of sharing the opportunity to speak.
- Sharing 'airtime' will mean some will need to bite their tongues at some point — e.g. "I know I can say too much. I'll hold back to give quieter members of the group opportunity to speak."
- Extended group times will require patience. We respect and honour each other by preferencing their story and experience over our own.
- For others sharing 'airtime' will mean having the courage to speak up and speak what's on their heart when it would be easier to stay quiet — e.g. "The discussion feels a bit stuck. I can see \_\_\_\_\_ but it feels too hard to get a word in. But I'll speak up for the good of others. I might be bringing a helpful perspective that others haven't seen."
- Group facilitators will help with this dynamic asking questions of those who might be finding it harder to speak up.

# Sharing Your Story

## Tips

- 10 mins isn't enough to unpack all that's happened in the past. So focus on *where you're at right now*.
- Is there anywhere you're feeling stuck?
- What will help other group members understand what's on your heart today? Start there and work backwards to give some of the back story.
- You might have a range of themes you could pick to give us a sense of your story. Just pick one or two.
- Here are some questions which may get you thinking:
  - Where do you hurt deeply?
  - What do you want to get out of life?
  - Who are the people in your life that you must please? Whose opinion do you live for?
  - When do you feel really down?
  - What makes you feel alive?

## Your Story: Notes

Is there anywhere you're feeling stuck?

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What will help other group members understand what's on your heart today?

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What are one or two key themes to your story?

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# Session 1: For Reflection<sup>1</sup>

Read Exodus 1-3. Is there anything that stands out to you?

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1. Write down some of the “big details” that stand out in your life. Look for details that seem significant to you even if you don’t understand their significance yet. Consider key relationships, memorable events (good or bad), illness and injuries, times where you may have been harmed, notable sins and patterns of sin, dreams and aspirations.

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<sup>1</sup>All reflection questions have been taken from *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds that We Carry* by Mike Wilkerson. (Adapted in some instances.)

2. Are there any stories you’ve told to make sense of some of these details— or your whole life in general—that may need to be reconsidered in light of God’s story?

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3. Where in your life do you feel enslaved?

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4. What do you expect to get out of this group experience?

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5. If you could walk up to a few of the Israelites and ask them where they think God is in the midst of their suffering in Egypt, what responses do you think you'd hear?

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6. If you were in the Israelites' situation, what do you think you would say? What would you ask of God? How would you be feeling as you cried out?

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7. When we suffer, we are tempted. We are tempted to respond sinfully, and we are tempted to believe lies. Review the following and note any of these lies you've heard or temptations you've faced:

- God is nowhere to be found. He has abandoned me in my suffering.
- God doesn't understand.
- If God were present and watching, he would act now to save me, but he hasn't. So I will take matters into my own hands and bring justice on my terms.
- My pain and suffering are pointless. There's no reason to talk about them.
- *Victim* defines me.

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# **Session 2: God, When Will the Suffering Let Up?**

**Teaching Time: Notes**

**Teaching Time: Key Questions & Your Responses**

# Session 2: For Reflection

1. Put yourself in the place of the Israelites when they first heard that God was about to deliver them (Ex. 4:30). How do you think you might have felt in that moment? What thoughts or questions might have come to your mind?

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2. What picture of redemption have you painted for God to follow?

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3. What in your life have you become cynical about (pessimistic, deeply distrustful)?

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4. Where in your life do you sometimes experience despair (utter loss of hope)?

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5. When you feel like giving up, what specific behaviours do you tend toward?

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6. God heard his people 's cry for help (Ex. 2:93). When Pharaoh retaliated they cried out to Pharaoh (5:15). In anger and desperation, they cried out against Moses and Aaron (5:21). Then Moses cried out to God (5:22-23) What do your cries sound like, and to whom do you cry out?

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## **Session 3: At Our Worst, God Gives His Best**

### **Teaching Time: Notes**

# Session 3: For Reflection

Read Exodus 11-13 & Romans 5:6-11.

1. What makes it hard for you to receive God's forgiveness?

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2. What have you not confessed for fear you've "gone too far" in your sin? Have you believed the lie that God won't forgive you for it?

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## Teaching Time: Key Questions & Your Responses

4. What sin in your life do you tolerate, excuse, or minimise? One way to know is to consider the times you find yourself using the following phrases:

- "Yeah. I have sin. but nobody's perfect" (dismissing sin),
- "Sure. it's sin. but at least I didn't ..." (minimising by comparison).

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5. Where in your life do you find yourself "working off your debt" to God? Consider some of these and add your own:

- Church-going
- Bible study
- Mere confession of sin, without true repentance
- Punishing yourself with harsh words or actions.

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## Writing Your Own Psalm

The Psalms are a gift from God to us. We can often find they give words to our experience, our pain, brokenness and joy. Our desperation for God's forgiveness. The sense that we need him to come through for us because we know there's nothing else to lean on. The Psalms teach us how to respond to hardship with faith, how to go to God for comfort and safety in the face of fear, and how to earnestly turn from sin.

Writing your own psalm is a great way of personalising what you're coming to learn through Renewing Me. This exercise encourages you to engage with a few Psalms to help shape your relating with God along the same lines of the psalmists who've walked before us.

Here's some guidance for this exercise:

1. Pick a few Psalms to dwell on. Here are some suggestions:
  - Psalm 51: responding humbly in light of our sin
  - Psalm 77: expressing pain and questions to God in the face of suffering and reminding ourselves of his past actions
  - Psalm 103: trains us in speaking God's goodness to ourselves
  - Psalm 131: learning to be still before God in the face of restlessness
  - Psalm 55: the experience of being betrayed by someone who should have been able to trust
2. Write your own Psalm expressing whatever's most important to you right now. Be specific about what your facing whether your thinking about hardship, your own sin and failure, or praise for ways you've experienced God's goodness.
3. Be ready to share your psalm with the rest of the group next week (if you're comfortable). It's a rich experience to distill what's going on for us and to be able to share it with others.



## Session 4: For Reflection

Read Exodus 14-15 & 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

1. When do you feel shame?

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2. What sin do you hide in shame?

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3. What abuse, damage, or beliefs do you keep as shameful secrets?

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### Teaching Time: Key Questions & Your Responses

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4. How do you act around others when you are ashamed?

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5. How does shame affect your relationship with God?

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7. When are you most likely to doubt that you are an adopted child of God?

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8. When you imagine being completely renewed in the new heavens and new earth, what specific part of your life do you most look forward to being healed?

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9. What evidence do you see in your life that the healing has already begun?

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## **Session 5: When Desires Rule and Enslave**

### **Teaching Time: Notes**

## Session 5: For Reflection

Read Exodus 16–17:7, 32 & James 1:12-18.

1. What do you want badly? Resist the urge to generalise—comfort, control. Instead, be as specific as the Israelites desire: “I want to be sure I’ll have bread to eat for every meal, every day.”

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2. What have you grumbled about? What does it reveal about your heart toward God?

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### Teaching Time: Key Questions & Your Responses

3. Who around you bears the brunt of your grumbling like the Israelites put upon Moses and Aaron?

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4. Though the people grumbled against Moses, their anger was against God. What has your grumbling against another person revealed about your heart toward God?

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5. How have you questioned God's motives toward you when you haven't received a blessing you expected? How about when you faced a trial that you weren't expecting?

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6. To what temptations have you given a "guest key" to come and go as they please?

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7. When struggling with a habitual sin that you hate, it can be confusing to understand—since you hate it—why you keep returning to it. It can be helpful to observe that the sin probably has some sort of payoff for you—some comfort, relief, power, reassurance, control, or something else. While you may find yourself hating the sin and broken over the side effects, your heart may be hooked by the payoff. So, in your situation, what's the payoff?

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# Session 6: God is Our Only Lasting Hope

## Teaching Time: Notes

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8. What would specific repentance look like in this struggle?

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# Session 6: For Reflection

Read Exodus 33-34, Ezekiel 36:22-27 & Hebrews 4:14-16.

1. When are you tempted to feel hopeless about change?

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2. What false hopes for change have you relied upon: morbid introspection? Mere accountability? Expecting to hit rock bottom? Changing lite seasons (e.g., "When I am married...")? Others?

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## Teaching Time: Key Questions & Your Responses

3. When you face your most desperate need for mercy and forgiveness because of your sin, how do you feel about approaching God? (See Hebrews 4:16.)

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4. To what refuges do you run when you are hurting? Afraid of something threatening? Anxious about an uncertain future? Bored? Tired and wanting some relief?

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5. Describe a time when you can recall strongly sensing the presence of God.

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6. Is there some sin that you've made peace with that robs your enjoyment of God's presence?

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7. What "promised land" are you tempted to get whether God is there not?

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