

A Well-Tended Soul
Staying Beautiful for the Rest
of Your Life
By Valerie Bell

*Suggested Study / Discussion
Questions*

By Trish Foor

*Chapter 1: How Did Mother Get
Into My Mirror?*

- 1. As the name of our study indicates, we are on a journey of soul-improvement. Read*

Matthew 16:26 and 1 Peter 2:11.

Based on these verses and the first chapter of our book, what do you believe the word "soul" refers to?

Matthew 16:26 (NTV): "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" 1 Peter 2:11: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

Purpose: To establish a foundation for the study — an examination of our very core.

2. On page 15, we read about two kinds of fears — one being the reaction to an actual stress (fear of what has happened), and the other being anxiety (fear of what might happen). List the five greatest causes of anxiety in your life:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Purpose: To recognize the areas in our lives that cause us anxiety and to begin to establish honest and transparent interaction among group members.

3. According to *Philippians 4:6-7* and *John 14:27*, what anecdote for anxiety do we have?

Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." *John 14:27*: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world

gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Purpose: To create an awareness of the only true source of peace in our lives.

4. On page 23, Valerie states, “The true measure of how we are doing is not our reflection in the mirror, but rather the reflection of our souls.” Take a moment to ponder this statement then list a few of the images your “soul mirror” reflects back

to you – both images you like to see and those you do not.

Purpose: To cause group members to examine their innermost thoughts and motives.

5. Romans 1:28-31 lists some dangers of having an untended soul. What are they?

Romans 1:28-31: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind,

to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”

Purpose: To realize the importance of tending your soul and why it is a must for every Christian.

6. *What do you think the Bible means when it says the Proverbs 31 woman can “laugh at the days to come”? What would it be like if that phrase were true in your own life?*

Purpose: To establish an understanding of what the results of soul tending can be in a woman's life.

Chapter 2: Soul Mirrors: Having
Your True Colors Done by Trevor the
Terrible

1. Valerie states (pg. 27) that "soul mirrors are everywhere, but often where we least expect them." Describe a recent situation in which a mirror was held up to your soul. What were the circumstances? Did you like your reflection? Why or why not?

Purpose: To recognize and promote discussion about experiences that have caused us to realize we are not necessarily the people we appear to be.

2. In Philippians 4:8, the Bible gives us a checklist for a well-tended soul's thought life. List the characteristics below:

Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is

*admirable – if anything is excellent or
praiseworthy – think about such things.”*

*Purpose: To draw attention to the difference
between a Godly thought life and a “fleshly”
one.*

*3. Valerie states that the most likely result
of an untended soul is not overt anger
toward others, but an ever-widening gap
between what we appear to be externally*

and really are internally. What does
Corinthians 13:1-3 say about this?

Corinthians 13:1-3: "If I speak in the tongues
of men and of angels, but have not love, I am
only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If
I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all
mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a
faith that can move mountains, but have not
love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the
poor and surrender my body to the flames, but
have not love, I gain nothing."

Purpose: To highlight the fact that it does not matter how wonderful our outward appearances may be if our souls are not right with God.

4. According to Galatians 5:22-23, is love for others something God expects us to achieve on our own? Why or why not?

Galatians 5:22-26: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step

with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

Purpose: To emphasize that, in and of ourselves, we are unable to love as God commands and that it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can.

5. *In Matthew 23:25-26, what do you think Jesus means by “cup polishing”?*

Matthew 23:25-26: “Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You

clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish and then the outside also will be clean.”

Purpose: To point out our natural tendency to care more about what others see than what God knows is in our hearts.

- 6. Let's take an honest inventory of our time. Think about your typical 16-hour day. How many hours do you spend “cup*

*polishing” (on hair, makeup, exercise,
clothing, home improvement, etc.)?*

*Mark that number on the line below with
a circle. How many hours do you
generally spend on soul tending (prayer,
meditation, reading, personal growth,
etc.)? Mark that number with a star.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16

Purpose: To recognize the discrepancy between the time we spend on the temporal/external vs. the lasting/internal.

7. *One danger of an untended soul is harboring anger. According to Ephesians*

4:26-27, what does anger do? On page 41, Valerie discusses how in an attempt to callus the unresolved pain in our lives, we often turn our grief into anger. She says, "Anger made me feel more in charge, less vulnerable, less passive. Anger felt so much better than pain." Are there hurts in your life that you've allowed to callus over with anger? Begin today by asking God to reveal any such

areas to you and to soften the calluses so that He can touch the true source of pain.

Ephesians 4:26-27: “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Purpose: To create an awareness of and opportunity to deal with unresolved pain in our lives and to relinquish healing to God.

Chapter 3: Soul Goals

1. Read Proverbs 16:9. In Chapter 3, Valerie describes the life she had chosen for herself versus the life God chose for her. What are some of the things in your life that have not turned out the way you had planned? In retrospect, can you see God's hand in altering your plans? If so, how?

Proverbs 16:9: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."

Purpose: To create an awareness of the difference between our perspective and God's when it comes to our purpose in life.

2. What does Jeremiah 10:23 say about man's plans? What does Jeremiah 28:11 say about God's plans?

Jeremiah 10:23: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for him to

direct his steps.” Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Purpose: To emphasize that God's plans are higher, more important than man's.

3. *In Psalm 90:12 and 17, what request did Moses make of God with respect to his life plans on earth?*

Psalm 90:12 and 17: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom... May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands."

Purpose: To indicate our need to ask God to enable us to see our time on earth appropriately.

4. On pages 48-49, Valerie lists her earlier, temporal life goals. What does Matthew 6:19-21 say about our goals or values?

Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where

thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Purpose: To increase awareness of the temporal nature of most of our values.

5. *When Valerie revised her dream list (pg. 53-54), she asked herself, “What 25 things do I want to have impacted because I lived?” rather than “What 25 things do I want to experience before I die?”*
Now it's your turn. With a focus on

“dreams that will travel well with your soul into eternity”, list at least three dreams big enough for your soul:

1.

2.

3.

Purpose: To encourage appropriate, Godly goal setting.

6. Throughout our book, Valerie compares our souls to a garden, using verbs like “weeding”. In what ways do you see your soul as a garden? Read Psalm 1:1-3.

Psalm 1:1-3: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit at the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose

leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

Purpose: To realize our souls are living and growing and require nurturing and care.

Chapter 4: Faux Soul

- 1. What are some examples of “faux spirituality” that you see in today’s*

culture? What are the dangers of this kind of spirituality?

Purpose: To create discernment of faux vs. true spirituality.

2. On page 63, Valerie states, "Friendship with God, connectedness to God, is the goal of classic soul work." Imagine a true, intimate friendship with God. What are its characteristics?

Purpose: To provoke thought about what a truly close relationship with God would be like.

3. List below Valerie's 12 steps toward deep connection with God. Which of these steps do you currently engage in on a regular basis? Mark those with a circle. Which do you need to make a part of your life? Mark those with a star. Next to each step, write a brief phrase describing the possible outcome of practicing it in your life.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

Purpose: To emphasize and encourage taking concrete steps toward intimacy with God.

4. *Read 1 John 4:7-8. What is the litmus test of friendship with God?*

1 John 4:7-8: *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows*

God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

Purpose: To highlight what we can test our love for God by – our love for each other.

5. In Chapter 2, we looked at Galatians 5:22-23 which states, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” The Greek word for “love” here is *agape*, a love that is

impossible to achieve apart from God.
We are incapable of loving the unlovable,
our enemies and those who hurt us;
however, agape is God's love manifested
by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. List the
characteristics of what love (agape) is.
List what it is not:

Love (agape) is:

Love

(agape) is not:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Purpose: To draw attention to the characteristics of God's love and what real love for others looks like.

Chapter 5: Color Me Patient, Color Me Kind

- 1. The title of this chapter is "Color Me Patient, Color Me Kind". Read Colossians 3:15-17. How does this verse tell us to treat our fellow man?*

1 Peter 3:8-12: “Finally, all of you live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

Purpose: To acknowledge what God expects in our human interactions.

2. What do you see as the difference between “small graces” and “soul graces” (pg. 79-81)? Describe a time in your life when you’ve been the recipient of a small grace (an “it’s okay baby”). Now, describe receiving a soul grace. Which had the greater impact on you? Why?

Purpose: To realize the important difference between real, significant human connections and more superficial ones.

3. *Compare Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9. According to these verses, is God's love passive or demonstrative? How so?*

Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." 1 John 3:16: "This is

how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." 1 John 4:9: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."

Purpose: To recognize that God did not simply tell us about His love; He proved it in the most sacrificial way possible.

4. Read 1 John 3:11-20. Does God expect our love to be passive or demonstrative? List how.

1 John 3:11-20: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone

who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For

God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

Purpose: To outline God’s standard for our relationships.

- 5. Read Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 4:23-24. How are we able to have patience with those who irritate, want the best for those who don’t like us and show kindness in the face of rudeness?*

Philippians 2:13: "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Ephesians 4:23-24: "...to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Purpose: To understand our inability to fulfill God's commandment to love others in our own strength and resources and to create reliance upon the Holy Spirit at work within us.

6. *We may not have been born great lovers (pg. 93), but there is hope for each of us. Think for a moment of someone in your life who is difficult to love. Now, imagine aligning your will with God, rather than depending on your feelings. How might you show this person patient loving care? What could the result of such actions be for you? For the recipient?*

Purpose: To submit specific relationships to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work through us.

Chapter 6: It's Not Easy Being Green

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Valerie relays a conversation she had with a young woman whose girlhood self-esteem was not based on her leadership or academic abilities, but on whether or not boys asked her to skate at the neighborhood rink.

How about you? Do you have a measuring stick for your personal success? Is it a friend? A talent you possess? How you compare to someone else? The approval of others? What might be the danger in hanging on to your measuring stick?

Purpose: To recognize the ways in which we look for validation outside of God and their inherent risks.

2. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 then rewrite these verses below in your own words:

1 Timothy 6:6-10: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people,

eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Purpose: To assume personal responsibility for God's instructions regarding envy.

3. *On pages 100-101, Valerie describes a number of the dangers of envy. List them below:*

Purpose: To realize that envy is not a benign emotion, but a very dangerous sin.

4. Now for the fun part, let's take a look in our soul mirror and see if anything green is staring back at us. At the top of page 102, Valerie poses the following questions. Take a deep breath and ask the Holy Spirit's help in honestly examining your heart:

• Is there another woman who keeps coming up derogatorily in conversations with a friend?

- *Do you seem always to talk about a particular woman?*
- *Do you feel an unexplained distance between yourself and another woman?*
- *Do you feel delight when another woman fails or struggles?*

• Would you like to see the score evened out in the life of someone whom you perceive as living with

some advantage?

• Are you glad when another is sad, unhappy when she is happy?

Purpose: To examine our own lives for areas where we have allowed envy to take root.

5. Regardless of your answers above, hope abounds because envy has an anecdote.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. When

are we to be thankful? Why?

According to Hebrews 13:5, what is the cornerstone of our contentment?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Hebrews 13:5: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Purpose: To understand that contentment is the result of a properly focused mind – one that is thankful in all situations and for the one thing it can never lose (relationship with God).

6. *On page 106, Valerie challenges us to learn to appreciate what we cannot lose.*

Write a prayer to God in the space below listing and thanking Him for all the things in your life you cannot lose.

Purpose: To focus our thoughts on what we have in Christ – our eternal treasures.

7. In Daily Strength for Daily Needs (by E.B. Pusey, compiled by Mary W. Tileston), there is a section that reads:

“If we wish to gain contentment we might try these rules:

- Allow ourselves to complain of nothing, not even the weather.*

- *Never picture ourselves in any circumstances in which we are not.*
- *Never compare our lot with that of another.*
- *Never allow ourselves to wish that this or that had been otherwise.*
- *Never dwell on the morrow; remember that is God's and not ours."*

Which of these is the greatest challenge for you? Why? What might you do to make practicing this easier?

Purpose: To examine and begin to employ practical attitude-changing steps toward contentment.

*Chapter 7: Red Hot Mamas I've
Known and Been*

1. *When was the last time you were in the presence of a bonafide "Red Hot Mama"? Describe the situation. How did it make you feel?*

Purpose: To recognize how the self-centered behavior of others wounds our souls.

2. *When was the last time you caught yourself being a "Red Hot Mama"? Describe the situation. How did it make you feel?*

Purpose: To identify and take responsibility for when our self-centered actions have hurt others and how these actions have ultimately made us feel.

3. *Despite the fact that our Red Hot Mama tendencies are cloaked in pride and boasting, what does Valerie believe is at the heart of these behaviors (pg. 115)?*

Purpose: To recognize the underlying cause of self-centered behavior.

4. *Look back at your responses to questions 1 and 2 above. How could a desperate need to connect have been at the root of the Red Hot Mama you describe in question 1? How could it explain your own behavior in question 2?*

Purpose: To examine the pain that underlies the self-centered behavior of others and ourselves.

To create empathy in future interactions with self-centered persons and to satisfy our own need to connect in positive, appropriate ways.

5. *What is the great life connector that saves our souls from the isolation of narcissism? Read Philippians 2:1-3. What should be at the root of our entire relational behavior?*

Philippians 2:1-3: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my job complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and

purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”

Purpose: To understand that our relationships require soul tending – we must seek to be humble and tender in all our interactions with others.

6. Let's take Valerie's challenge (pg. 118). For 24 hours, do not talk about yourself, your family, your accomplishments or even your acquaintances. Now describe

what this experience was like. Did you see any positive results?

Purpose: To actively pursue the inter-relational qualities outlined in Philippians 2:1-3 above.

Chapter 8: Club Snob

- 1. Has there ever been a time when you felt excluded from a group of some kind (i.e.,*

NTK – Not Their Kind)? Describe the circumstances and how you felt.

Purpose: To encourage empathy for those who are outside our “groups”.

2. Think about your closest group of friends. Now look at this group through an outsider’s eyes. What might appear to be the inclusionary requirements of your group?

*Purpose: To examine the narrowness of our circle
of acquaintances.*

3. According to Luke 6:32-36, does Christ call us to be exclusive "club" members? Why or why not? What message does Valerie say practicing exclusivity gives to Christ (pg. 131)?

Luke 6:32-36: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment,

what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Purpose: To realize that Christ has called us to seek out and extend love to those who do not return our caring or share our values.

4. *What mistake did the Pharisee make in Luke 18:9-14?*

Luke 18:9-14: *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector*

stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

Purpose: To understand we must not judge others and ever think ourselves in better standing – Christ died for all and it is when we believe we are at our "best" that we have most greatly missed the mark.

5. Read Galatians 3:26-29. In Christ, are there any NOKs?

Galatians 3:26-28: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Purpose: To emphasize the error in drawing circles around our various groups.

6. *How might you enlarge your soul and thereby enlarge your circle of intimacy? What could the benefits be?*

Purpose: To actively seek ways to reach out to people we might not normally associate with.

Chapter 9: A Tree Grows in Wheaton

1. On pages 136-137, Valerie states, "Our strength, our healing, our health, our very survival, not to mention whether we age successfully, is dependent on the depth and breadth and development of our soul in God's soil." In what ways are you currently rooting your soul in God's soil?

Purpose: To take an honest inventory of the disciplines we currently employ in soul development.

2. *If our souls must be challenged in order to grow, what are some soul-expanding practices you could incorporate into your life (pg. 137-143)?*

Purpose: To determine if we are merely comforting our souls, and thereby remaining stagnant, or expanding them and growing.

3. *Read Matthew 13:3-8. How does Jesus' parable relate to Chapter 9?*

Matthew 13:3-8: "Then he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where

it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’”

Purpose: To determine if we are giving God's word every opportunity to take root and grow in our lives or if we are allowing other things to choke it out.

4. Let's answer Valerie's opening question in this chapter (p. 133), "Have you ever sustained a wound to your soul so painful it threatened to become your emotional

focal point for years.?” What promise does Genesis 50:20 hold for these wounds?

Genesis 50:20: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Purpose: To realize if we are still letting a soul wound define us and to acknowledge that God uses the hurts wrought by others for our ultimate blessing.

5. *Looking at your answers to Question 4 above and other past and present hurts, where would you rank yourself in the area of grudge holding?*

The form consists of four horizontal lines, each with four vertical tick marks. The tick marks are positioned at approximately the 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, and full-length positions of each line. The lines are arranged in a staggered pattern, with each line starting further to the right than the one above it.

*Let go of hurts In the process
Tend to hold onto,
easily. of forgiving.
nurture soul wounds.*

Purpose: To determine if we are nurturing old wounds or practicing forgiveness.

6, According to Matthew 6:14-15, what is the greatest harm our unforgiveness does?

Matthew 6:14-15: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Purpose: To realize that forgiveness is not an option for followers of Christ – it is a commandment and God's promise to forgive us depends upon it.

7. Read Matthew 18:23-35. Because we are forgiven all our sins through Christ,

whose behavior do we emulate when we keep account of the wrongdoings of others?

Matthew 18:23-35: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me', he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity

on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in,

'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to jailers to be tortured, until he could pay back all he owed."

Purpose: To understand that our grudge-holding, on any level, makes us no different than the ungrateful servant and shows a complete disrespect for God's forgiveness of us.

Chapter 10: Younging

1. *As the number of candles on your birthday cake increases, what images does it conjure in your mind of becoming an older woman?*

Purpose: To identify negative, stereotypical images we have about aging.

2. *According to Psalm 92:12-15, do our negative views about aging necessarily have to become a reality?*

Psalm 92:12-15: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon, planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the course of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, ‘The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.’”

Purpose: To recognize that our souls do not age and that we are renewed and sustained by right relationship with God.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Ephesians 4:11-17. How do you explain the fact that spiritual maturity actually causes us to young? (See also pg. 160).

2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." Ephesians 4:11-17: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be

pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Purpose: To see the dichotomy between the world's idea of aging and God's – to God spiritual maturity is the very basis for our ability to remain vibrant and healthy.

4. *What promise do we have in Psalm 103:5?*

Psalms 103:5: "...who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles."

Purpose: To understand that, as Christians, aging should not cause fear because our satisfaction and strength come from God.

Chapter 11: Changes and Becomings

1. In this chapter, Valerie describes the “Point Bs” of life that we all experience – small deaths and changes that involve personal loss or a redefinition of who we are. You may be at an important life transition right now; but even if it has been a while since you were required to bend, you doubtless remember the

experience. What have been some of your most significant Point Bs? Did these situations necessitate that you let go of some part of your identity? If so, describe the loss.

Purpose: To examine our history of life losses in order to better prepare for future changes.

2. Can you in some way relate to Sheila Walsh's story of redefining her identity (pg. 170-172)? If you were to answer the question, "Who are you?", what would your most natural response be? Now, place a check mark next to each thing you listed that is temporal, i.e., dependent upon a relationship, position, job, image or status of some kind.

Purpose: To begin to redefine ourselves – not by what we do, who we know, etc., but by who we are internally as well as externally.

- 3. Valerie states (pg. 172), “We are so much more than our labels. We are more than our health; we are more than our beauty or our life’s achievements. We are more than any defining relationship or our mental health. We are more than our image or what we are perceived to be. We can lose every drop of perceived*

specialness and still, soul – that deep, intrinsic, individual identifying specialness – remains.” Now let’s re-answer the question, “Who are you?” from a soul perspective.

Purpose: To recognize the difference between what we do and who we are. To shift our focus to a concentration on the qualities of our souls, not the qualities of our jobs or relationships.

4. *What hope does Romans 8:8 give us regarding the Point Bs in life?*

Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Purpose: To show that, even in the midst of bending almost to the point of breaking or of losing all we think defines us, God is at work for our very best.

5. According to Romans 12:12, what should our response to difficult life changes be? How would it be possible for you to have hope and peace during your next Point B?

Romans 12:12: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Purpose: To shift our focus from the negative aspects of life changes and losses to a hopeful assurance based on God's promises.

Chapter 12: Transcendence

1. *How does our culture generally define a winner? Read Hebrews 11:32-40.*

Did each of these lives have the same level of earthly success? Who are the “winners”? The “losers”? How do you believe God defines winning?

Hebrews 11:32-40: "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced

jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Purpose: To show how godly men of great faith did not necessarily lead lives filled with earthy triumphs. In fact, just the opposite was true for many because they were in search of a greater treasure – a soul that reflects God.

2. *On page 182, C. S. Lewis is quoted as having said that death is “our supreme disgrace and our only hope”. What do you think this statement means?*

Purpose: To highlight the irony of death for the Christian.

3. What assurance does Christ give us in John 10:27-29?

John 10:27-29: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

Purpose: To emphasize that this earthy life is not our calling, but that Christ has promised eternal life to all who believe in Him.

4. On page 183, Valerie states, "The tended feminine soul is careful not to contribute to an evil agenda on any level, no matter how small. The soul can claim daily moral victory, even before heaven's final word." Commit to keeping a record of daily moral victories for the next three

days. List them below and briefly describe the circumstances:

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Purpose: To recognize opportunities we have each day to tend our souls by simple acts of obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading – not watching a

certain TV show, not participating in gossip, extending patience to a rude driver, etc.

5. *There are two ways to view this final question – that we are at the end of our study (whew, one more thing we can check off our to-do list) – or that we are standing at the threshold of the greatest, most significant journey we will ever take this side of heaven. We've read the words; we've talked the talk. Now, let's lace up our hiking boots and walk the*

walk. Let's commit every day that lies ahead to examining and nurturing the one thing we can truly offer this world and can take with us into the next – our souls! May God bless every step of your journey. Read Paul's charge to Timothy, and us, in 1 Timothy 6:11-12. Now rewrite these words as a prayer of commitment to God.

1 Timothy 6:11-12: "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness,

godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.
Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of
the eternal life to which you were called when
you made your good confession in the presence of
many witnesses.”

Purpose: To see this not as the end of the study
but as the beginning of our commitment toward
soul-improvement.