

THE THING BENEATH

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What's Hidden Inside (and What God Helps Us Do About It)

S T E V E C A R T E R

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

The Thing Beneath the Thing

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WHY DO I DO THOSE THINGS I DO?

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. As you were reading, did any triggers come to mind? Jot those down.
2. What feelings or concerns are stirred up as you prepare to begin this journey?
3. Take a few moments to reflect on the first couple of lines of “The Welcome Prayer,” and invite God to walk with you as you begin to dive deep into your story. “Welcome, welcome, welcome. I welcome everything that comes to me in this moment because I know it is for my healing.”

POTHOLES, TRIGGERS, AND RESPONSES

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. What are some of your personal triggers?
2. Can you name the pothole (painful story) that is at the root of what triggers you?
3. If all we control is our response (remember $E + R = O$), what has been your typical response in health and unhealth when you get triggered?
4. What pothole is God, in his kindness, relentlessly going after right now in your life?

WHERE WE GO TO HIDE

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. One of the first places we go when we are triggered is to a specific hideout where we co-opt good to escape the pain of our stories. Where do you find yourself running to when you get triggered?
2. What good thing have you recently used to escape discomfort or make you feel better about your circumstances?
3. Immediately after you run to this hideout to escape the pain, how do you feel? How do you feel an hour later? The morning after?
4. David saw a woman he desired, then told himself that he deserved her and demanded she come to his palace. Desire + Deserve + Demand. In what area of brokenness are you susceptible to following in David's footsteps?

WHEN IDENTITY BECOMES INSECURITY

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. When we get triggered, one of the places we quickly run to is insecurity, and from there we begin telling ourselves a false story. What insecure stories have you told yourself recently?
2. What are your top three go-to masks that you put on?
3. Can you name the pothole (painful story from your past) that has played a huge part in your mask wearing?
4. Are you more likely to power down (think you're less than) or power up (think you're better than) when you get triggered?
5. Do you fear condescension? What potholes might have caused you to feel you're not as good as those you're trying to keep up with? Play out the scenario: Would you really be ostracized if you presented your truest self?

FROM INSECURITY TO ENVY

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. When someone gets close to our potholes and we get triggered, envy often rushes in as a result of our insecurity. Where are you struggling with scarcity (the theory of limited good) in your life right now?
2. Who do you envy and why?
3. Do you ever wrestle with the thought that God is holding back on blessing you? In what areas of your life do you wrestle with this?
4. What good has God brought forth into your life that you need to thank him for?
5. What would it feel like for you to take Solomon's wisdom seriously in your own life this week? What are some practical ways you can lean into your insecurities and learn to release them rather than react to them with fear?

BIASES THAT DRIVE NARRATIVES

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. When someone gets close to your pothole and you get triggered, often one of the first places we go is to create false narratives about other people. When have you unfairly created a false story about another person or people group?
2. Who in your life do you feel is less than (Judea)?
3. Who in your life is someone that you just can't stand? (Samaria + Ohio State)
4. Who in your life is someone that you have no desire to understand? (Ends of the earth)
5. How are you currently missing out on more of the Holy Spirit's power and preparing your heart and mind for our eternal homeland? (New Jerusalem)

Personal biases are such an important and timely topic that I think we need to spend a little more time digging down even deeper to discover our own preconceived notions. These often carry shame, but don't let that trip you up. They come with being human. And if recognized and dealt with properly, they can be powerful change agents in your life and in the world around you.

6. Think back to the last story in this chapter of the bird-watcher in Central Park. Have you ever witnessed such racial injustice? Do you remember how it caused you to feel, think, and respond?
7. What are the taboo topics for you? Syria? Immigration? Abortion? Racism? The death penalty? Access to guns? LGBTQ+ issues?

Will you go on this far-flung journey with God? Will you boldly carry the good news alongside the Creator of all? That's the question we each have to wrestle with. Will you stay safe within your familiar comfort zone or be obedient and accept the Spirit of God's invitation into greater levels of trust and dependency on him?

Writing about these emotions and experiences in a journal is a fool-proof way to gain perspective and notice patterns of thought we may otherwise be oblivious to. I always begin with that. Sometimes I surprise myself with what I discover as I let myself freely write for a few minutes. Then I take time to pray about what comes up, inviting God to reveal areas in need of work and redirection.

I have to come to this practice with humility because it is hard to hear where I'm wrong. In my flesh, I would prefer the easier route, skipping this part—this deeper work. My tendency is to want to simply move ahead in life without ever really questioning why I feel certain things about a person. But it's important work. You need it, but our world also needs you to do this.

LET GRACE FIND YOU

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. Take a moment and get really honest by filling in these blanks:

When I'm triggered by _____
 _____, I choose (hideouts, insecurities, narratives, grace)
 _____, because
 (what led to this) _____
 and become (what happens inside you and through you) _____
 _____.

If you had to sum up what you think grace is, how would you answer?

2. Living into the fullness of who God made us to be begs some questions from us:

- Why do we do what we do?
 - What is our motivation?
 - Is it to earn grace or favor or accolades? Or is it to open ourselves up to be more of who God made us to be?
3. One of the reasons we often push away grace is that we fear it will get worse before it gets better. In what area in your life are you pushing health and wholeness away because it might get worse before it gets better?

BE STRONG IN GRACE

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. What do you need to let go of today so you can step into more grace and peace?
2. What are you grasping hold of that seems to be creating more potholes and collateral damage rather than peace and wholeness?
3. What could it look like if you were to replace what you've been clinging to with the immense patience that comes from the super-beyond-increasing abundance called grace?
4. Do you ever struggle with adding another word instead of grace to the end of "be strong in" like I do? These words often are oriented around control, fear, failure, losing, or shame, and come out in defensiveness, frustration, anger, powering up, trying to escape, and hiding.
5. What could your life look like if it were truly anchored in Jesus and you had nothing to prove, nothing to lose, and nothing to hide?

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. What or who are your commanding officers? Why not take a minute to jot down a list that you can reflect on this week? To be difference makers, we need to be sure we're following the right commander.
2. Who or what is the loudest voice in your life?
3. What is your go-to playbook?
4. What have you been trying to harvest in your life?
5. What do you want others to say about you at your funeral? What harvest do you want to reap today and at the end of your life?

THE POWER OF CONNECTION

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

1. Where have you experienced God's pruning recently in your life?
2. When you are in a season of waiting or trusting the process, how does that make you feel?
3. Which of God's promises are you needing to remember?
4. Who are the redwoods in your life that are helping you get after the thing beneath the thing?
5. Look at the "one anothers" in the New Testament and ask God which three of these you do really well and which three you need to work on in this coming season.