

STUDY GUIDE

FIVE SESSIONS

TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

A 40-DAY INTERACTIVE JOURNEY TO
THINKING RIGHT SO YOU CAN LIVE RIGHT

LEVI + LUSKO

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LEVI LUSKO



W PUBLISHING GROUP

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Take Back Your Life Study Guide
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INTRODUCTION

There's a great story told in each of the Gospels about a certain event that involved Jesus, the twelve disciples, a few loaves of bread and some fish, and about 5,000 people. It had been a long day, especially for Jesus. He had awoken to the news that his cousin John the Baptist had been put to death at the hands of the mad King Herod. The news had sent him into a personal retreat. But the crowds had followed him to that remote place, and Jesus—feeling compassion for them—had ministered to them and healed their sick.

Now, as that long day was drawing to an end, the disciples were feeling a bit edgy. It was late, and the people needed to go home in time to get to the villages and buy food for dinner. It was then that Jesus gave them a little assignment: “You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16). The disciples quickly calculated “that would take more than half a year’s wages” (Mark 6:37). Andrew was able to dig up five barley loaves and two fish from a boy with a lunch, but he added, “how far will they go among so many?” (John 6:9).

Jesus replied to each of these concerns by having the disciples sit the people “in groups of about fifty each” (Luke 9:14). He took the loaves and fish, gave thanks for them, and then had the disciples start handing them out . . . and

everyone was fed. Jesus then had his disciples gather up the excess food. As a result, the disciples had twelve full baskets to take with them as they sailed through a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

In the same way, I've combed through my sermons and notes from when I was writing two previous books and gathered up the best of the leftovers for you to take on your stormy seas. Instead of being collected in twelve baskets, this journey is broken up into forty days. Why forty? Well, life supposedly begins at forty. It sure did for Moses—the guy we will discuss in our first session—who spent the first forty years of his life thinking he was somebody, the second forty years of his life finding out he was nobody, and the final forty years of his life discovering what God can do with somebody who knows he is a nobody.

The number forty comes up throughout Scripture again and again. In Noah's day, rain fell for forty days and forty nights (see Genesis 7:4). The spies sent by Moses to explore the promised land did so for forty days (see Numbers 13:25). The Israelites after the generation of the exodus wandered in the wilderness for forty years (see Numbers 32:13). Goliath taunted the Israelites for forty days before David cut him down (see 1 Samuel 17:16). Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert (see Matthew 4:2). Forty days was the period from the resurrection to the ascension (see Acts 1:3). And through these forty days I believe God is going to do something significant deep inside your soul that will mark you forever.

So, are you willing to commit to this forty-day journey? Are you, like the disciples, willing to let go of your own agenda and fears and see what God can do with your faith?

Introduction

Are you willing to wage the battle for your heart and mind? For as we will see as we launch into this journey, such a battle is taking place. And you must fight to *take back your life*.

— Levi Lusko



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *Take Back Your Life* video study is designed to be experienced in a setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small-group gathering. Each session begins with a brief welcome section and opening questions to get you thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video with Levi Lusko and engage in small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of reflection and prayer.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching for the week, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your

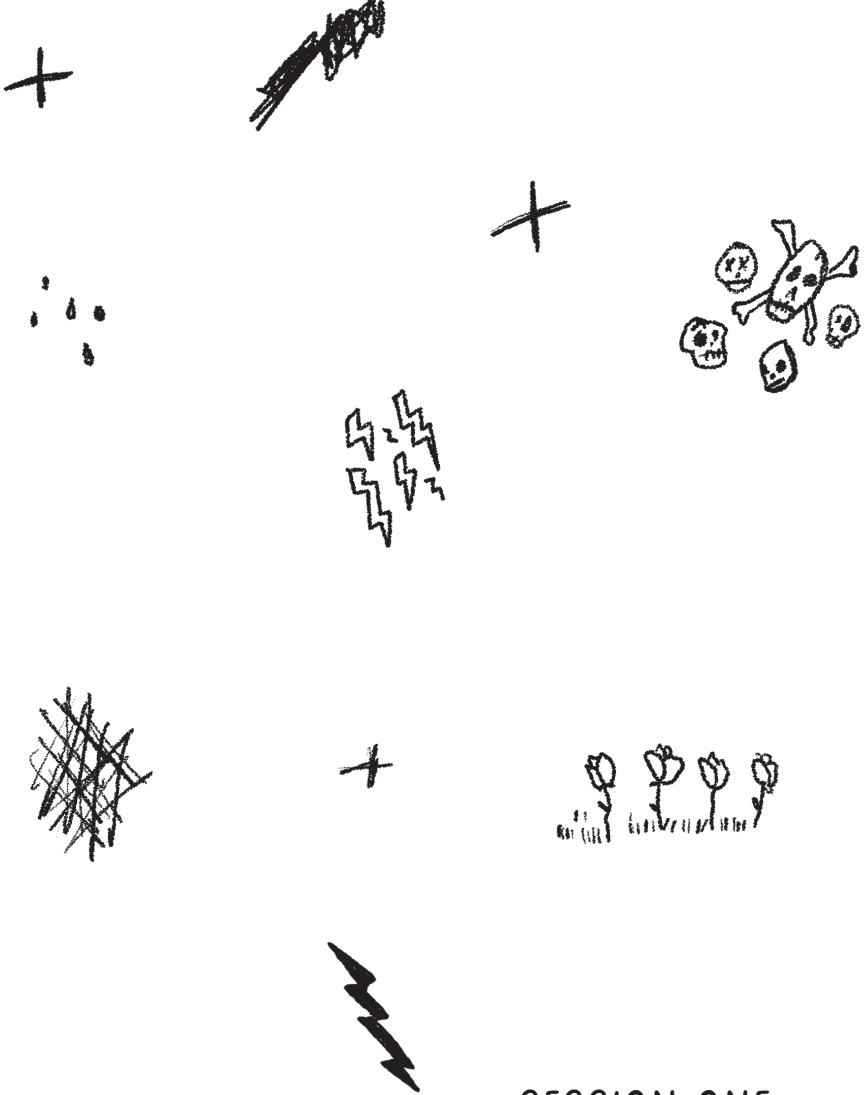
thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that is not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, you can maximize the impact of this course by completing the between-sessions activities. You can complete these personal studies all in one sitting or follow the recommended course and do one each day of the week. If you are unable to finish (or even start) these studies, still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

Keep in mind that the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As Jesus promised, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

So ask, seek, and knock . . . and then listen to what the Lord is saying to you about *taking back your life*.



SESSION ONE

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

Albert Einstein

WELCOME

Harry Houdini was one of the greatest escape artists the world has ever seen. One of the most famous tricks he loved to perform was to escape from jail cells across the world. Houdini would travel to a city and challenge the citizens to create a cell from which he could not escape. He would always free himself in record time, whether he was in handcuffs, or the cell was triple locked, or he had to scale a wall to escape.

Of course, Houdini had a lot tricks up his sleeve. He would ask to test the lock with the key and make an impression of it using a small box of wax that he kept in his palm. He would then hide the key in his hair or the heel of his slippers. Other times, he was able to have the key passed to him from a friend after reaching his hands through the bars to shake hands with the onlookers. If all else failed, he had a special lock pick made that he could hide in his belt.

However, as one story goes, there was one cell in a town in the British Isles that stumped the great illusionist. Houdini walked into the challenge with confidence. Once the jail was closed, he took off his coat and set to work with his key and lock pick. But there was something unusual about the lock. He worked for thirty minutes with no success. An hour passed, and still he was stuck behind the bars. After two hours had passed, an exhausted Houdini collapsed against the door in defeat . . . and it swung open.

The citizens of the town had played a trick on Houdini by not locking the cell in the first place! The solution was there in plain sight. It had only been locked in his mind.

Sometimes, we fall into the same trap. We fail to recognize the reality of our situation because what our eyes are telling us does not represent the whole story. We fail to see the solutions

in plain sight or are blind to what is really taking place. In particular, as we will discuss in this first session, we fail to see that we are in an invisible war . . . and that the battlefield for the struggle is located in our own hearts and minds.

SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, discuss one of the following questions:

- ✿ When is a time in your life that you failed to see the solution to a problem that ended up being right in front of you?

— or —

- ✿ When is a time in your life that you failed to see that you were walking into a crisis? What was the situation and what happened as a result?

READ

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as

your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. . . .

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:4–6, 16–18).

What is one insight that stands out to you from this passage?

What does the apostle Paul say about the two realms that exist in this world?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one. As you and your group watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

NOTES

We cannot rely on what we see because our eyes do not tell us the whole story of what is happening in this world. There is also an invisible conflict raging in the spiritual realm.

What do we see when we look into the mirror? The Bible says we should see someone who is loved by God and created in his image. But that person is being opposed by an enemy who is seeking to defeat us from the inside out.

There are four movements in the story of Moses that reveal how these two realities play out. In movement #1, *the devil works in Pharaoh's heart to destroy God's people*.

Moses is raised in the household of the person who was trying to kill him. He is brought up by Egyptians, though he is actually a Hebrew.

Satan had a plan of destroying God's people, but he had bigger plan of destroying the Messiah, who would come as the "greater Moses" to save us from our sins.

In movement #2, Moses visits his people and takes vengeance against an Egyptian.

Moses realizes that God made him for a unique purpose. He starts to realize that he is a "genius."

We all have God-given abilities that make us a genius at something. The problem is we also experience a pull from the enemy that tries to hold us back from greatness.

In movement #3, *Moses goes on the run after killing the Egyptian.*

Moses makes the mistake of doing the right thing at the wrong time and in the wrong way. He ends up as a fugitive because he operated out of God's timing.

A blessing out of season can become a burden. What we thought would bring us happiness ends up bringing us difficulty and complexity.

In movement #4, *Moses ultimately walks in God's calling for his life.*

After forty years, God appears to Moses in the desert and reissues the call on his life.

Moses, with God's power in his life, is able to tap into his inner genius and become a leader the likes of which the world has rarely seen.

As we fight through the battles we cannot see, we will be able to do everything that God has called us to do.

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts together.

1. We are all involved in a spiritual war, and often the battlefield is our own hearts and minds. What are some of the ways these struggles play out in our lives?
2. Read aloud Ephesians 6:10–13. What strategies does Paul put forward in these verses on how to win the battles taking place in your heart and mind?

3. What do the movements in Moses' story reveal about stepping into God's plan for your life? How do you respond to the idea that you also have a special calling on your life?
4. What does Moses' story reveal about doing the right thing (following God's plan) in the right way and right time? When has what was intended to be a blessing in your life turned out to be a burden because you didn't follow God's timing?
5. What are some negative thoughts that have held you back in the past from stepping to God's call on your life or using your God-given abilities?
6. What are some practical steps you need to take today to *take back your life* when it comes to winning the war that is raging in your heart and mind?

RESPOND

Briefly review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.

PRAY

Wrap up your time together by taking a few minutes to talk with God. Here are a few ideas of what you could pray about based on what you discussed in this session:

- Ask God to provide insights into ways the enemy is distorting your vision of his plan and clarity as to what God has called you to do.
- Pray for God's strength to overcome any fears that are holding you back.
- Thank God for his power to forgive sin in your life through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, and for the gifts he has given you to use for his purposes.
- Declare that you will fix your eyes on God and follow his plan going forward.





SESSION ONE

BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

You are involved in a war . . . and the battlefield is your mind. However, you are not defenseless in the fight. As Paul writes, you can “put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11). A key part of putting on this armor involves immersing yourself in God’s Word each day so his truths can reshape your thoughts. With this in mind, reflect on the material you covered this week by engaging in the following personal study. Each day offers a short reading adapted from *Take Back Your Life*, along with a few reflection questions to take you deeper into the theme of this week’s study. (You may also want to review week 1 of *Take Back Your Life* before you begin.) Be sure to read the reflection questions and make a few notes in your guide about the experience. At the start of the next session you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned. But remember, the primary goal of these questions is for your own spiritual growth and private reflection.

Day 1

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT



We walk by faith, not by sight.



2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

Looks can be deceiving. We can look at something but not see what's there. And that means we cannot trust what we see with the naked eye. This is how Paul put it: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Paul is saying that you can't trust your physical vision. You can't trust what you see and the decisions you make based on that. You need to fix your eyes—by fixing your gaze. Your gaze is broken, but when you focus on the right things, it can be fixed.

The journey that you are about to take over the next forty days will open your eyes to what is going on beyond the seen . . . beyond the obvious. You will start to see what is really there and what is really going on. And you will be empowered to change for the better.

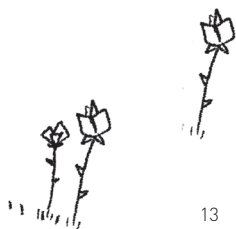
You may not be happy with your story right now. But, together we will uncover what has been hidden in plain sight. With faith as your lens, you will discover a whole new way of looking at the world. After all, when you can see the invisible, you can do the impossible.

- ✕ Think about the blind-spots you might have when it comes to understanding what is going on in the

spiritual realm. Is it easy or hard for you to believe that these unseen things are as real as what is seen in the physical world? Why?

- ✕ With faith as your lens, you can see the invisible and do the impossible. What is something you would like to do right now that seems impossible?

- ✕ How do you want to improve your story over the course of this study and really begin to take back your life?



Day 2

II

IDENTITY CRISIS



I pray that out of his glorious riches he may
strengthen you with power through his Spirit
in your inner being.



Ephesians 3:16

Before you can do the great things that God has called you to do, you have to first get things squared away on the inside. I am talking about *winning the war within*. As we have seen, this starts by recognizing a battle is taking place . . . that something is going on inside of you.

I like how the apostle Paul put it: “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15 NLT). I love that statement. Can’t you picture Paul looking in the mirror, being like, *Who are you? I don’t even know you*. He goes on to write, “I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind” (verses 22–23 NLT).

We’re all dealing with the civil war inside our souls. We are not completely sure what’s the right thing to do. We have a great need for what Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus, that they would be strengthened in the inner being, according to the riches of his glory (Ephesians 3:16).

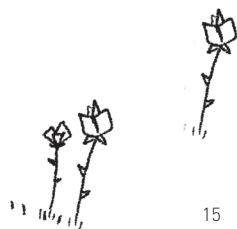
That’s my prayer for you—that at the very outset of this journey, God would strengthen you in your inner being. That he will walk with you as we get wise to these battles and take back ground from the enemy.

If this feels like the start of an identity crisis for you . . . that's good! The best kind of crisis that you can have is an identity crisis, because this begins the process of learning who you truly are. That's why I want to push you into an identity crisis. It's the only place you can truly experience the relentless love of God.

- ✕ Paul expressed to the believers in Rome that he wanted to do right, but sometimes couldn't because there was another power at war within him. Where do you most experiencing this struggle? How does it make you feel about yourself?

- ✕ What lies have you been believing about your identity? How do they contrast with who God says you truly are?

- ✕ Where do you most need God to strengthen you today in your inner being?



Day 3

||

YOU MATTER MORE THAN YOU KNOW



God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.



Genesis 1:27

I don't know what you see when you look in the mirror, but if you are like me, there is a list of things you wish you could change. Regardless of what you see looking back at you when you brush your teeth, I can tell you that to God, there is nothing ordinary about you. The following are three critical truths that can help you see yourself as God sees you.

Truth #1: You are made in the image of God. The Bible said that God made you. He fearfully and wonderfully knit you together inside your mother. You're no accident. Out of all creation, God made you to be like him (see Genesis 1:27; 5:2; Psalm 139:13–14).

Truth #2: You are immortal. The question is not *whether* you will live forever but *where* you will live forever. Four hundred years from now—and four thousand years after that—you will still be alive, and you will still be you (see Luke 20:36; John 8:51; 1 Corinthians 15).

Truth #3. You are valuable. The value of something comes from what someone is willing to pay for it. The Bible says that

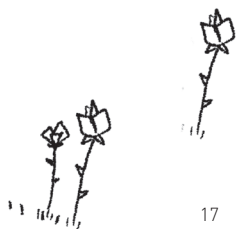
while you were dead in your sins, God demonstrated his love for you by sending his Son to die for you (see Romans 5:8).

I hope you're starting to get a sense of how wildly unordinary you are. You were put on this earth to make waves, disrupt the status quo, and kick over some stinking applecarts.

- ✕ Which of these three truths is hardest for you to embrace? Why?

- ✕ In what ways would remembering you are made in God's image, are immortal, and are valuable change your approach the struggles of today?

- ✕ You were put on this earth to make waves and disrupt the status quo. Based on your unique story and interests, where can you begin doing this?



Day 4

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TORTURED GENIUS



We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
for good works, which God prepared beforehand,
that we should walk in them.



Ephesians 2:10 ESV

I have some good news for you. *You are a genius.* Yes, *you.* You were created by a Creator to create. You were put on this earth by a creative God to be creative and to dream things into existence.

God has tucked this genius within you. You're like an X-man. You're awesome. Now, like a great cosmic scavenger hunt, he wants you to figure out the nuanced way he has put this creative spark into your heart. As you do this, you will be able to execute one-of-a kind acts of genius that will fill your heart with passion and serve the people in your world.

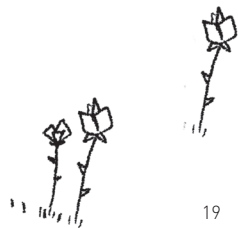
Okay, now that I've given you the good news, I have some bad news. *You are a genius.* It's bad news because works of genius often come through great pain. You have to go through agony to birth something into the world that wasn't there before. It will cost you to create. There is conflict in every calling and angst inherent to the creative process.

But stay with it. Success isn't the immediate goal. Obedience is. And that begins with knowing who you are and doing what God calls you to do.

- ✕ How do you respond to the idea that you are a genius? Have you ever considered yourself that way? Why or why not?

- ✕ If you embraced the truth that God created you with the genes of his genius, how would that impact your pursuit of what you love to do?

- ✕ How have you experienced the cost for your creativity?



Day 5

III

IF YOU SAY SO



The LORD . . . brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.



Genesis 2:19

The first job God gave humans back in the Garden of Eden was to speak a word over something that he made. Whatever Adam called the animal, as the Bible states, “that was its name.” Adam’s job was to speak . . . and what he spoke *stuck*.

You have the same job. God brings a day to you, and your job is to give it a name and declare something over it. Whatever you call it will stick. This begins with what you say to the person each morning when you look into the mirror. Do you name the person you see *beautiful* or *ugly*? *Valuable* or *not worthy of love*? *Ready* for a tremendous day or already *behind*?

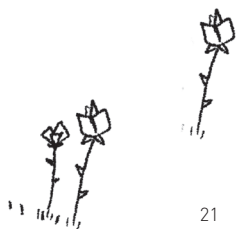
Whatever you say over what you see . . . that is what it’s called. The reality that is your words can unlock a life you love or a life you loathe. It is up to you whether the self-fulfilling prophecies you articulate become a delight or a dungeon.

So, as you start taking back your life, one of the first jobs you have is to speak life over yourself, just as Adam did. You can alter how you feel by changing what you say. As you do this, when you look in the mirror, you’ll begin to see you as you were meant to be.

- ✕ Why do you think God gives our words so much power?

- ✕ What words or phrases do you tend to speak over yourself? How do you think that impacts your day?

- ✕ Have you gotten so good at listening to yourself that you've forgotten you can speak to yourself? What words do you most need to say to yourself to take back your life?



Day 6

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MASK OFF

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience,



that we behaved in the world with simplicity
and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom
but by the grace of God.



2 Corinthians 1:12 ESV

Think for a moment about the image you portray to others. Is that image that you're showing people really you? Or it is a little disguised? A little distorted? A little . . . masklike?

If so, you're not alone. God tells us in the Bible who we really are—valuable, important, powerful in him—but when the crises of life come our way, it can be so easy for us to forget. It's tempting in moments of pain or uncertainty to just slap on a mask as a defense. We want to hide the fears that we aren't pretty enough, rich enough, strong enough, or smart enough.

It's ironic that when we put on these masks in the hopes of finding love and acceptance, it prevents people from seeing the truth. After all, you can't love someone you don't know. What people are falling in love with isn't the real *you*. It's your mask, a superficial version of yourself, a costume you've carefully curated.

In the end, what you put on to obtain you must continue to wear to retain. If you got the job with the mask, you have to wear the mask every day at work. If you got the relationship with the mask, you have to wear the mask whenever you're

with that person. But the kicker is that when you put on a mask, you are masking yourself from God's blessing.

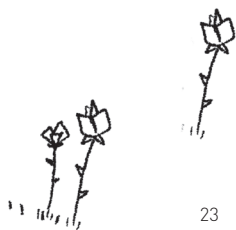
The cure for insecurity is understanding your true identity. Don't miss this! You are unique. You are a beautiful work of art. You are God's masterpiece. You are what he thinks . . . not what you think. When you know who you really are, it doesn't matter what you are not.

You might have worn your mask for so long you no longer know what life looks like without it. But let me tell you . . . it looks like freedom.

- ✕ In what situations are you most likely to put on a mask? When you do, what are you usually trying to hide?

- ✕ When you fake it to make it, you have to keep faking it to make it. When has this happened to you? What was the outcome?

- ✕ What would it look like to always embrace your identity and stop wearing masks?



Day 7

III II

PERMISSION SLIP



God gave us a spirit not of fear but of
power and love and self-control.



2 Timothy 1:7 ESV

It takes bravery to take off your mask and be vulnerable—whether that is with yourself, others, or even with God. It's not easy, and you will undoubtedly experience fear. You will want to put the mask back on and hide once more.

But in every area of life, the only way to get to victory is by going through vulnerability. I will give it to you straight. When you choose against vulnerability, what you are really choosing is *cowardice* and *fear*.

Now, I know this about you, without even knowing you: fear is not a good look for you. It doesn't fit you. It wasn't given to you. Paul said as much when he wrote about this to Timothy. He knew his younger protégé was feeling afraid as he pastored the church at Ephesus. This is why Paul reminded him, "God didn't give you that spirit of fear."

Back in school, teachers would send home permission slips if you wanted to go on a class field trip. Well, today I am sending you with a permission slip to go on a different kind of trip . . . a trip that leads to empowerment. This is your permission slip to let everything go that isn't from God, and he didn't give you a spirit of fear. So you can let it drop.

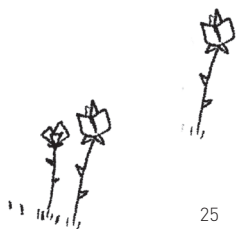
Remember, if God didn't give it to you, you don't have to keep it.

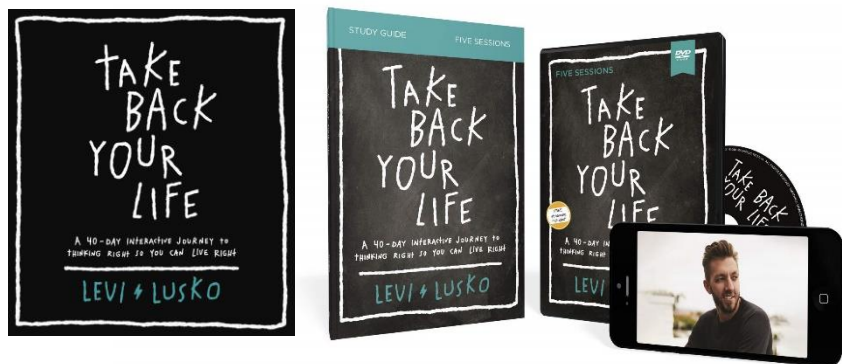
- ✕ What are some of the obstacles that make vulnerability difficult for you?

- ✕ When you don't choose vulnerability, you choose fear. What has the impact of that been in your life?

- ✕ You have permission to let go of anything that isn't from God. What is the first thing you will release?

For Next Week: Use the space below and on the following page to write any insights or questions that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. In preparation for next week, review week 2 in *Take Back Your Life*.





TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

by Levi Lusko

A forty-day interactive journey that will help you identify and fight your internal battles—so you can take back your life.

Every person has a mission and a God-given potential to impact the world, whether they recognize it or not. But life presents challenges and traps us in a helpless, hopeless loop of anxiety and fear.

In *Take Back Your Life*, a blend of bestselling books *Through the Eyes of a Lion* and *I Declare War*, join Levi Lusko on an interactive journey to take back your life. With biblical truth and perspective, this step-by-step experience will help you:

- get out of your own way by learning to think right so you can live right,
- find purpose by discovering that God will do great things with your imperfect progress, and
- learn that your pain is not an obstacle to being used by God but an opportunity to be used like never before.

This is more than a study; it's an intimate self-analysis process that will help you recognize what's weighing you down or holding you back, and equip you to embrace it head-on as you become the best version of yourself. Start thinking right, so you can live right.

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