

### *How to Use this Life Group Guide*

1. Review your notes from Mark's message.
2. Read Mark's blog (copied below).
3. Write out your answers to the questions that follow.
4. Discuss your answers with your Life Group.

### **Change From the Inside Out**

It was a scene that played out in the void of outer space. From a spacecraft suspended somewhere between the earth and the moon, the astronauts had just signed off from a 49-minute television broadcast with the words "This is the crew of Apollo 13 wishing everybody there a nice evening." Nine minutes later, the mission commander would utter a phrase that instantly seared our national consciousness:

"Houston, we have a problem."

When you're in a tiny space capsule some 200,000 miles from earth, and two of your oxygen tanks have just failed, I'd say that qualifies as a problem. A crisis, even. After more than a few anxious moments, the entire nation breathed a sigh of relief when the heroic team at Mission Control finally managed to guide the crew of Apollo 13 safely back home.

But most of us can relate to that phrase, right? Perhaps you've used it yourself, in the face of a personal crisis. Maybe you've found yourself at the brink of a seemingly unsolvable dilemma, and muttered it under your breath. Which begs the question – why does God allow a crisis to come into our lives, anyway? Why doesn't He just buffer us from the pain of life's difficult situations?

The answer is simple. You see, two truths are simultaneously true: *God loves you just the way you are.* And, *He loves you too much to leave you that way.* More than anything, God wants to change you. He wants you to mature. To grow. To become everything He has in mind for you ... a reflection of His character, His grace, His love, to everyone you come in contact with. And when it comes to change, most of us won't do it until we're forced to – by a crisis of some sort.

Here's the reality: We don't change when we see the warning light. We should, of course ... it would be much less painful. But we tend to ignore the signs and signals, just like we dismiss that "check engine" light on our dashboard. Eventually we'll get around to taking it in for service – but right now is not a good time.

For most of us, change comes the hard way. *We change when we feel the heat.* We change when we are *forced* to change – when the check engine light has given way to the car being stranded on the side of the road.

The Bible gives us a picture of how God changes us, from an incident in Jacob's life. (see Genesis 32:24-31) Jacob has a *crisis*, where he struggles with God. He makes a *commitment* – he won't let go until he gets what he wants. That's followed by a *confession* – the key to lasting change. Instead of "Houston, we have a problem," it's "Houston, *I am* the problem." And finally, change comes, in the form of a *conversion*. Jacob is given a new identity – complete with a new name, Israel.

The fact is, a crisis can be one of God's greatest gifts – because we rarely change until the *pain we feel* is greater than our *fear of change*.

Those warning lights on the dashboard of your life? They're just signaling the crisis that's sure to come. But don't despair. God is at work, even in the difficult times. Follow Jacob's example, and you'll find yourself working through the crisis toward true, lasting change – from the inside out.

*For Personal Reflection and Discussion with Others:*

1. When could you have uttered the words "Houston, we have a problem? What was happening?

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2. What warning signs were there, before the crisis? How did you respond to them?

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3. What did you do about the crisis? How do you think God might have wanted to use it to change you? How *did* it change you?

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4. Read Genesis 32:27 and James 4:6. How are those two verses related?

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5. Why is change so difficult?

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6. Read Genesis 32:31. What role does pain play in change?

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7. What incident in your life do you still “limp” from? What does that say to you?

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