

## THE DEEPLY FORMED LIFE | Session 2: Deep Interior Examination

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** The practice of interior examination helps us address and understand our emotions and motivations so that we can become more like Jesus.

**Head Change:** To know that God is aware of what’s going on inside us and loves us still.

**Heart Change:** To feel confident that God knows us, loves us, and will help us grow in emotional health.

**Life Change:** To examine our interior life by asking ourselves probing questions, answering them honestly, and seeking God’s help to address them.

### **OPEN**

**How often do you wake up in a bad mood for no apparent reason? Why do you think that happens?**

Humans are complex creatures. We experience highs and lows, joys and sorrows, excitement and melancholy, sometimes all within an hour. And we don’t always know what to do with our complicated emotions. We sometimes leave them unexplored and unexamined for long periods of time, which can sap our emotional health and negatively affect our behavior and relationships. But there is a better way.

In this session, Rich will explore the importance of deep interior examination and give us some of the tools we need to take the journey inward.

### **VIEW**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Rich Villodas’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What does image management do to our lives?**

**What book of the Bible helps us take the journey inward?**

**What four questions help us practice interior examination?**

Watch *Session 2: Deep Interior Examination* (15 minutes).

### **REVIEW**

Rich opened this session by stating that “there is nothing quite so terrifying as vulnerability.” He said we work hard to hide ourselves from others and God, shielding our vulnerabilities from them. **Do you agree with Rich’s statement? Why do you think we are so terrified by vulnerability? To what lengths do you tend to go to hide yourself from others? From God?**

Rich mentioned that when we try to hide ourselves from God or others—image management, he called it—we fragment our lives. **By this definition, do you live a fragmented life? In what ways have you felt you needed to behave differently depending on who you are around?**

Rich discussed our tendency to bifurcate our lives into “on the surface” and “beneath the surface” realms. On the surface, for instance, our life may look very well put together, while beneath the surface we may be experiencing deep pain and chaos. **What would you say are the negative consequences of feeling like you need to present yourself as “doing well”?**

What is “beneath the surface” often goes unexplored. Whether we’re afraid to explore or simply unaware of our need to do so, when the “stuff” that’s down there goes unaddressed it can affect our lives in any number of ways. As a remedy, Rich argued that we need to go on a journey inward. **What does he mean when he uses the language of an “interior journey”? Have you ever practiced what Rich described? What was the result?**

While it may be foreign to us, the interior journey is a practice we find in the pages of Scripture, especially in the Psalms. Rich called the book of Psalms “the prayer book for the people of God” and “a collection of songs . . . that capture the emotional spectrum in the life of every human being.” **In what ways might the Psalms help us examine our interior lives and give voice to the emotions we experience? How could you work to introduce the reading of the Psalms into your regular routine? How might this practice improve your emotional health?**

God knows everything about us, inside and out. He knows our “sadness and joy, fears and lusts, our hopes and dreams,” as Rich pointed out. The good, the bad, and the ugly. And still, he pours out his love on us. **In what ways does it encourage (or discourage) you that God knows everything about you? Does it make you more willing or less willing to practice interior examination? Why?**

One observation Rich makes is that while God knows everything about us, we don’t know everything about ourselves. We need God to give us insight into our interior world so that we can grow more emotionally healthy. **When has God given you insight into your emotions, behavior, or motivations? What difference did that insight make for your life?**

Rich pointed out three common reasons why we don’t make the effort to look within and address what’s going on: our pace of life, issues passed down from our family, and/or fear. **Which of these do you resonate with most? What steps could you take to overcome your reluctance to doing the hard but necessary interior work Rich describes?**

Rich spent the most time addressing our issue with fear. If we’re honest, looking within can often be scary—what are we going to find in there? But he reminded us that we don’t have to be afraid because we don’t do this work alone. Jesus is aware of what’s inside us, and he goes with us again and again into those dark places. **Does it embolden you to know that Jesus is with you as you engage in deep examination? In what ways? What can you do to remind yourself that God is always with you as you do this work?**

Rich shared a practice that he uses with church members called “exploring the iceberg.” It’s a practice that involves asking four simple questions. Spend some time asking and answering the following questions and prompts:

**What are you mad about? Where do you have anger rising up inside of you? Name that and offer it to the Lord.**

**What are you sad about? What are you grieving? Are there any losses in your life that you need to address and deal with? Name that and offer it to the Lord.**

**What are you anxious about? What's giving you a sense of worry or fear? Name it and lift it to God in prayer.**

**What are you glad about? Where is joy arising in your life? Where do you see the gifts of God that you want to offer thanksgiving and gratitude for? Name that and give thanks to God.**

In closing, Rich reminded us that looking within is difficult. But what's more difficult and dangerous in the long run is not looking within ourselves. **What blessings do we forfeit by not looking within and examining our internal lives? How can we keep ourselves from neglecting this hard but necessary work?**

**Who could you invite to join you in making internal examination a regular practice?**

### **BIBLE EXPLORATION**

Rich spent a lot of time in Psalm 139 examining David's prayer and using him as an example of what it looks like to practice interior examination. Read Psalm 139:1–4, 7–13, 17, 23–24.

In this session, Rich said that Psalm 139 shows “the heart of a person who is a model of interior examination and emotional health.” Yet in verses 1–4, David's words have little to do with his self-knowledge. Instead, they recognize God's ability to see and know David inside and out. **How do verses 1–4 show that David is emotionally healthy and astute? When it comes to interior examination and emotional health, why is David right to begin with God and not himself?**

For many, the realization that God has “searched us and known us” may be frightening. But it wasn't for David—it caused him to worship. **How do you react to the realization that God has searched you and known you? What thoughts and emotions do you experience? What could you do to react like David—with worship—instead of with fear or discomfort?**

To emphasize his point, David writes that God knows and understands his thoughts (v. 2) and knows his words even before he speaks them (v. 4). **Are there any thoughts or unspoken words you're trying to hide from God? Instead of trying to hide them from God, what do you think we should do with them instead? How could you become more adept at bringing these thoughts and words to God instead of hiding them?**

David goes on in verses 7–13 to illustrate the futility of trying to hide from God, both physically and emotionally. **When you read these passages, what emotions do you experience? Why do you think you react that way?**

It is impossible to hide from God. As the psalmist writes, whether we run to the heavens or the depths, the east or the west, or the dark or the light, we will not “escape his Spirit” or “flee from [his] presence.” And as Rich mentioned in this session, God is with us even as we take the journey inward. **In what ways have you tried to hide yourself and your thoughts from God? Why? How should it comfort us that God is always present with us?**

Instead of recoiling at the fact that God knows him through and through, David, in effect, says, “I want to know what you think because I love what you think.” **Do you want to hear God's thoughts about you? Why, or why not? What do you think God would have to say about you? How do you think you'd respond to God's thoughts about you?**

Finally, in verses 23–24, David invites God to search his heart, to “test” him and “see if there is any offensive way” in him, and to “lead him in the everlasting way.” **When was the last time you asked God to search your heart and see if there was anything offensive in you? In testing your heart, what would God find there? What offensive ways are in you that God might highlight?**

David acknowledges his vulnerability before God and, with humility, invites God to peer into his heart and go to work on it. He recognizes that the journey inward, as Rich called it, is a journey we humbly and safely take with God. **How can we make sure that our interior journey is a journey we go on with God? Why do we need God with us as we go on the journey inward? Who else could you take with you as you do this work of interior examination?**

Interior examination is hard work. Harder still is the realization that all the difficult things we discover are already known by God. But this is not bad or troubling news—it’s good news. Because he sees all that’s down there, and he loves us still. **Where is a quiet place where you can spend time doing interior examination with minimal distractions? When in your week can you build a habit of examining your interior life?**

### **LAST WORD**

We’ve mentioned this already, but it bears repeating: humans are complex. Our thoughts, compulsions, emotions, words, life circumstances and events, peers, and families of origin all make an indelible mark on us in both good and challenging ways. To achieve emotional health, we must develop a healthy way of untangling what’s going on inside us.

In this session, Rich argued that interior examination—“the journey inward”—is a habit we can practice that will cultivate and maintain our emotional health, helping us address what’s going on beneath the surface of our lives. And the good news? We don’t have to take that journey alone. God promises to go with us.

### **DEEPER WALK**

**Silence:** The pace and noise of modern life can make it difficult to take the journey inward. One way to combat that is to spend some time in silence. At the beginning and end of the day, take five or ten minutes to sit in silence. Quiet yourself and your environment. Ask God to help you sit still and simply be quiet before him.

**Practice:** Make it your ambition to practice “exploring the iceberg.” Ask yourself the four questions he walked us through and answer them at least weekly.

**Read:** For a deeper dive into the practice of interior examination, read chapters 5–6 of Rich’s book *The Deeply Formed Life*.