

## **Book Club / Small Group Discussion Guide**

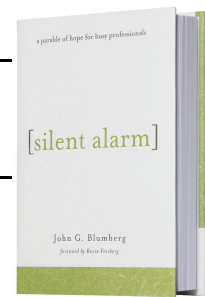
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*Silent Alarm* was written to provide each reader their own meaningful wake-up call. I am often asked, “What is the bottom-line” take-away from *Silent Alarm*?” That’s a hard question to answer, because the real mission was to get each reader *thinking* ... and in their thinking, they would discover their own bottom-line. They would begin to hear the silence of the alarms ringing in their own life. I am also convinced the combined thinking of one reader with the thinking of another reader provides a wake-up call ringing at a whole new level of thinking!

This *Silent Alarm Discussion Guide* has been designed simply to encourage just that ... to guide the conversation to an increasingly deeper awareness of the subtle lessons of our lives. My hope is that this discussion guide will let you hear the silence and enhance your experience in discussing *Silent Alarm* within a book club or small group.

# Silent Alarm

## Book Club / Small Group Discussion Guide



### Foreword: *Waking up*

1. Where were you on Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001?
2. How did 9/11 change you?
3. Where in your life have you been needing what you want vs. wanting what you need?
4. In each set of words, pick which one most describes your life right now
  - a. Intentional vs. reactive
  - b. Meaningful vs. on a treadmill just trying to keep up
  - c. Vocal on important issues vs. just going about my own issues
  - d. Looking at what needs to change vs. how I need to change
5. Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, said “All change is preceded by crisis? Share a time in your life where a crisis brought a change within you.

### Chapter 1: *Train wreck*

1. What abnormal routine in your life has become your “normal?”
2. Describe a time where you were blind-sided by life ... you were carefully looking in one direction, only to be slammed by a “train” coming the other direction.
3. Are there any “trains” that you hear in the distance? What might you be ignoring right now?

### Chapter 2: *When news changes everything ... instantly*

1. Think of a time where you have received “alarming” news that impacted your family or friends. What was that like? Describe what was going through your mind and how that made you feel?
2. Describe a time where you had a friend face a significant challenge where you “showed-up” for them ... but quickly let you life just get back to “normal.”

### Chapter 3: *Susan’s visit with Jack*

1. Think about a time when you visited someone in the hospital at a critical time. What was that like for you? What thoughts crossed your mind as you were in their midst?
2. Think of someone that you know that is seriously ill. Share a wonderful memory that you experienced with this individual.

#### **Chapter 4: *A moment with Mike ... that's what friends are for.***

1. Think about one of your best friends from high school or college. What was most meaningful about that relationship?
2. How well do you keep in-touch with those people who were some of the most meaningful friendships in various seasons of your life?
3. Think of one key individual whom you have lost touch with over the years? Could you find them again? What would that reunion be like?

#### **Chapter 5: *Life is a roller-coaster.***

1. Carl reminded Susan of a childhood trip to Disney ... and their experience on the Space Mountain ride. On a roller coaster in-the-dark, you don't know what is going to happen. It all feels beyond our control. Often times, the circumstances in our life feel beyond our control ... but how we respond is not. We always choose our response. Think of a time where you were in a circumstance beyond your control and how you decided to take control of your response in a positive way.
2. When things feel out of control for you ... who do you trust?

#### **Chapter 6 – 7: *Monica reports for duty.***

1. Think of someone you have met ... where you knew as soon as you met them that you could tell they were "special" in the work they did? Share a specific example of a special experience with this person.
2. Think of a time where you feel you have personally shown-up in a very special way in your own work. Share what that was like for you.

#### **Chapter 8: *Chip sees the newspaper. Susan's mom is by his side.***

1. Think of a time where you felt a sense of hopelessness ... where it all seemed so overwhelming. What was that like for you?
2. Was someone there to comfort you? If so, what did they do? If not, how could that have been helpful for you?

#### **Chapter 9 - 10: *The gift of Monica***

1. It had been a long time since Monica had taken a real vacation. Share an example of a time when an incredible getaway (weekend or longer vacation) truly refreshed you.
2. Share with the group a gift (or an ongoing tradition of giving a certain gift) which you have truly enjoyed giving.
3. Think of a time when you received a gift where its value had no correlation to its cost. It was simply priceless.

### **Chapter 11 - 13: *The miracle of the unexpected***

1. The doctors thought Jack would likely never speak again. Monica witnessed the evidence to understand this wasn't to be true. Share with the group a time where you had the opportunity to witness an unexpected miracle (an everyday simple miracle or one that changes the course of a life).
2. Share with the group of a time where you had a realization that you needed to look at a situation, a relationship, or a set of your own circumstances ... and then realized you needed to look again! In other words you needed to "wake-up" to something you had not seen before. What did you see differently ... what unexpected observation surfaced for you?

### **Chapter 14 - 16: *Waking-up ... slowly***

1. Is your life in a "rush" each day? Describe the nature of your schedule.
2. How do you feel about "red lights" (meaning literally stopping at red traffic lights)? Do you speed-up to rush through yellow lights or slow down to take the time to stop?
3. Do you drive the posted speed limit? (If you average more than 3 mph over the posted limit ... answer no!)
4. Jack's angel wants to wake him up. Name one "real" thing that you are missing in life because of the pace of your race?
5. Think of a tragedy you have experienced in your life or seen another experience in their life ... where, in the end, the tragedy was truly a gift.
6. Think of someone you see rushing through life. How do you see it impacting their relationships, their influence and what they are experiencing in life?

### **Chapter 17: *Overwhelmed***

1. Jack thought of all that was going on in the world from government conflicts, to business failures, to the disappointing choices of spiritual leaders. Jack felt overwhelmed in his own recovery, but also in the circumstances of the current times. What seems overwhelming to you?
2. How do you respond when you are overwhelmed ... especially when life is moving fast for you?
3. Jack's angel suggested that he think more about the questions before rushing to create the answers. Where in your life do you feel you are trying to rush to answers rather than contemplate if you even have the right questions?

## **Chapter 18: Our lives are designed to be interwoven**

1. Jack was resting his eyes and enjoying the conversation of his family in his hospital room. They thought he was asleep. Their conversation made him wonder what he was missing as he was “sleeping” through his rushed world. Think of a time where you have “overheard” a conversation or received a card that opened your eyes to something you were missing.
2. We cherish freedom in our country. Yet our choices are systemic. They can impact many others ... just as Jack’s choice impacted a train conductor named Tim. Think of a time where you or someone you know made a bad choice that had a systemic impact on their family, friends or coworkers.

## **Chapter 19: Perfection is the roadblock to forgiveness**

1. How easy does forgiveness come for you ... in forgiving yourself? In forgiving others?
2. Jack’s eyes were opened to the relationship between choice and consequence. But he also began to see that bad choices are just as wrong when there is no consequence (e.g. a drunk driver who safely makes it home vs. one who causes an accident). Think of an example where two people made a similar bad choice ... where one suffered the consequence and has not been able to forgive themselves ... and the other paid no consequence and continues through life unscathed.
3. How does the apparent “perfection” of others block you from forgiving yourself?

## **Chapter 20-21: Addictions**

1. What addictions do you see ... that likely were originally incubated in the purest of motives?
2. Name a simple everyday little addiction you would have a hard time letting go of?
3. Jack asked Mike if he could give up “what he had.” Mike honestly answered with “I don’t know.” What if Jack asked you the same question regarding your material possessions? To what extent are you using your possessions or your possessions using you?
4. Have you ever asked yourself the question ... when is enough, enough? If so, what thoughts came to mind? If not, what would that answer look like for you?

## **Chapter 22: Symptoms of Success**

1. Jack dreamed of a presentation to those who had risen to leadership positions. He confronted them with their biggest obstacle ... their own success. Discuss how success can become an obstacle for you.
2. Many corporate leaders today face the pressure of the short-term ... the next month or the next quarter. While the bottom-line is always important to the continued life of an organization ... what does focus on the short-term have on the operations of an organization?

## **Chapter 23: Technology Tension**

1. Discuss how technology has enhanced your life.
2. What challenges or obstacles have been created by technology that poses in threat to your quality of life?

## **Chapter 24-27: Below the Surface**

1. Think of a time where a situation or experience was not what it appeared to be on the surface. How was it different that what it appeared to be?
2. Think of a time where you tried to “Band-aid” a situation rather than dig to the root of the real problem. What was the result?
3. Share with the group a time where you were willing to endure short-term pain for long-term gain.

## **Chapter 28: Surprise**

1. Tell the group of a time where you had a surprise party. What was it like?
2. Share an experience where a group of people showed up for you (or you showed up for someone) in a surprising way ... in a way love shined through.

## **Chapter 29: Patience**

1. Share something you just couldn't wait for when you were a child. Think of a specific year when waiting was very difficult ... share that experience.
2. How effective are you with patience as an adult? What is one area where you could demonstrate more patience?

## **Chapter 30 - 33: Card #1 – God is in Control**

1. How did this first card strike you? Do you struggle with trying to take control from God?
2. What does it mean to you that God is control, but fully expects you to take responsibility for your life?
3. How do you most commonly see others trying to “take control” from God in their life?
4. What would “letting God be in control” look like in your life? Name one area that might look differently?

### **Chapter 34: Card #2 – Upside Down Living**

1. Jack learns that life is not all it appears to be on the surface. Think of a time when you discovered that the truth in a situation was not what it had appeared to be “on the surface.”
2. Break into pairs and see if you can brainstorm a “paradox” ... and statement that is opposite within itself. Chip made his list: Less is more. Silence speaks volumes. You must let go to hold-on. Try to think of a couple of these flip-flops and share with the group.
3. What can these flip-flops teach us about how we live our life?

### **Chapter 35: Card #3 – Grabbing some “porch”**

1. Describe the most beautiful front porch you have ever seen ... or one you would dream of having!
2. Jack knew that his third card was not referring to a specific place, but a state of mind ... a place to let your mind wander and wonder. A place to ponder life below the surface. How often do you sit on the “front porch” of your life?
3. Break into groups of 2 or 3 and brainstorm what might be some “front porch” activities for you (e.g. reading, running, listening to music).
4. What is one “front porch” activity that you could begin this very week?

### **Chapter 36: Card #4 – The fear of losing can cost you everything**

1. Jack learns that life can be more difficult when you have too much to lose. What things do you have that would be difficult to lose?
2. Share an example of someone where you have seen that life became more difficult for because they had a lot to lose.
3. How might Card #4’s principle apply to your life?
4. How do you see failure in your own life? What do you think when you see other people fail? How do you see failure in your own life?
5. Share an example of a personal failure that, in retrospect, you view was a growing experience and a gift in your life?

### **Chapter 37 - 38: Card #5 – The value of values**

1. Do you have a set of values ... written down (now or ever before)?
2. One might have to wonder what it means to be a values-based person if you can't concretely articulate which values! What advantages would you see to working through the exercise of writing down your core values? Any disadvantages?
3. The angel share with Jack ... *the fewer wants you chase, the more resources you have to get what you need.* What does this mean to you?
4. Start with a 3-minute exercise and write down words that describe your various core values. Share your list with the group ... listening to what they also have to say (as potential additions or triggers for additions to your list).
5. In the next 10-days, take 1-hour of quiet time to complete this exercise. Then place your list of values in a place where you can frequently review them and continue to refine your thinking around them.

### **Chapter 39 - 40: Card #6 – Dreaming of WHO you want to be**

1. How does thinking about WHO you want to be differ from WHAT you want to do?
2. If we first focused on WHO we want to be ... how might that impact the effectiveness of what we do?
3. How might focusing on WHO we want to be, have an impact on the culture of organizations?
4. Share how you think knowing your core values impacts your ability to see WHO you want to be.
5. Share an example of an individual who seems to have accomplished knowing WHO he/she wanted to be and by doing so accomplished significant "WHATS" in their life.

### **Chapter 41 - 42: Card #7 – You get what you measure**

1. Jack discovered it was not only important to make a plan, but to also write it down (i.e. use his journal). What benefits do you see to committing your plans to writing? What challenges do you see in writing it down?
2. Before getting to the detail roles of his life, Jack's angel first challenged him to write an overall statement of who he wanted to become based on his core values. As you think about all of your roles in life, what would be 3 or 4 adjectives you would use to describe who you wanted to be in all those roles?

### **Chapter 43: Card #8 – Sustaining change**

1. Think of a significant change you have experienced. What were some of the challenges? What helped you sustain?
2. As you think of making self-improvement changes to your life ... what do you see as the biggest challenges to you sustaining?

*Note: As a more detailed discussion on Cards #7 and #8, a sample design for an “action plan” has been included. This plan has a “simple” design ... but don’t mistake it for being “easy” to do! It is provided as a template for sustaining change by measuring the habits of who you want to be. Instructions are provided with the template. Your group may want to consider individually working on a personal plan over the next week and bringing it back to discuss during the next meeting.*

### **Chapter 44: Card #9 – The gift of relationships**

1. Share an example of a relationship in your life that has surprisingly turned out to be a real gift to you. What made it so?
2. Jack is reminded that “Love is what matters.” How have you seen this in your own life? How have you possibly fallen short in making love matter from time to time in your life?

### **Chapter 45: Card #10 – Balancing freedom and responsibility**

1. What might “freedom without responsibility” or “responsibility without freedom” look like? What does the concept of balancing freedom and responsibility mean to you?
2. In what ways do you see this in-balance or out-of-balance where you work and live?

*Note: Victor Frankl dreamed of a “Statue of Responsibility” on the west coast of the United States to be a symbol of balance to offset the “State of Liberty” on the east coast. The “Statue of Responsibility” Foundation was established to bring this dream to life. You can see further details and make a contribution at <http://www.sorfoundation.org>. The Statue of Responsibility Foundation's motto of “Liberty + Responsibility = Our Freedom™” “is truly a wake-up call for America.*

### **Chapter 46: Card #11 – The joy of stewardship**

1. Stewardship is often seen as being a good “steward” of your resources ... or possibly leaving something behind better than you originally found it. What does stewardship mean to you?
2. Share an example of good stewardship you have seen practiced by someone in your life.

### **Chapter 47: A final review with Monica**

1. As Monica stopped in to say goodbye, she and Jack took the opportunity to slowly review each of the first eleven cards. Which one of the cards spoke most directly to you? In what way?

### **Chapter 48: The paradox of letting go in order to hold-on**

1. In a spontaneous moment, Jack gifted his angel to Pete, his company's CEO. How do you think giving his angel away allowed him to hold-on?
2. Share with the group something you have that would be hard to give away?
3. How might giving something valuable away make it even more valuable to you?

### **Chapter 49-50: Card #12 – Willing to start alone**

1. It is easier just to hit "the snooze" and continuing to live our life in the way we have come to know it. Most will do just that. Jack's final card basically asked the hardest question ... are you willing to do what most others are not. What might "starting" look like for you?

## Appendix A: Action Planning (expanded follow-up to Chapter 41-43)

This simple framework (see next page) is designed to help you think about an action plan for each of the key roles in your life. You get what you measure ... and measurable plans help you sustain change! This plan should be helpful in being intentional and building accountability and integrity into your plan.

Don't be confused by its simple nature. Many people fail because they never master the complexity of simplicity! Simple is hard to do ... consistently! And this plan is harder than it looks. So, take it slowly ... and build it over time. It is about transformation ... not about an immediate overhaul!

A good place to start is by trying to write a draft version of your overall life vision ... of WHO you want to be throughout every role in your life. Remember this is about who you want to be ... not what! Then make a list of all your roles. Add one role to the template each month. Write the vision of WHO you want to be in that role ... and then commit to two or three specific and measurable actions that will get you there. The actions should be measurable on a monthly basis. These measurements are most likely measurable in terms of number of times you will do something within a month or in the amount of time you will spend doing something in a month. It is important not to be vague. For instance, if the role was "friend" ... a vague action would be "I will be a better friend" ... a measurable action would be "I will take the time to reach out to one friend a week." See the difference. Be careful not to load-up on too many actions! Just pick a critical few for each role ... usually 2 to 4 actions. You may simply want to start with just one or two. You can always add-on later! Integrity is defined as DWYSYWD ... **doing what you say you will do!** This template is a tool to assist you in building your own personal sense of integrity.

Once completed, review your plan each month ... not to feel guilty when you fall short, but simply to serve as your "silent alarm" to bring you back into focus in understanding if you are doing what you said you were going to do!! Here the catch ... the reason you want to make your actions measurable on a monthly basis is because every month all your "counters" go back to zero. You start fresh each and every month. You are never behind and never ahead. You are simply living your actions month-to-month ... building habits that help you sustain change.

# My Action Plan.



Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.

*Maryann Williamson and Nelson Mandela*

***Developing a plan to get me started!***

**The Vision of WHO I want to be...**

**Role:**

**Vision for this role:**

- Action – \_\_\_\_\_
- Action – \_\_\_\_\_
- Action – \_\_\_\_\_

**Role:**

**Vision for this role:**

- Action – \_\_\_\_\_
- Action – \_\_\_\_\_
- Action – \_\_\_\_\_

**Role:**

**Vision for this role:**

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**Role:**

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**Role:**

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