

# EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

TOOLS TO HELP MEN GROW TODAY



## LIFE-ON-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

TAKE RISKS, LOVE WELL,  
SPEAK TRUTH



*Want to Make Disciples* page 3  
*Next Generation Ministry* page 7  
*A Letter to Our Donors* page 30  
*Daily Devotions* page 15

**MAKE**  
Disciples  
Issue



A component of CSB Ministries

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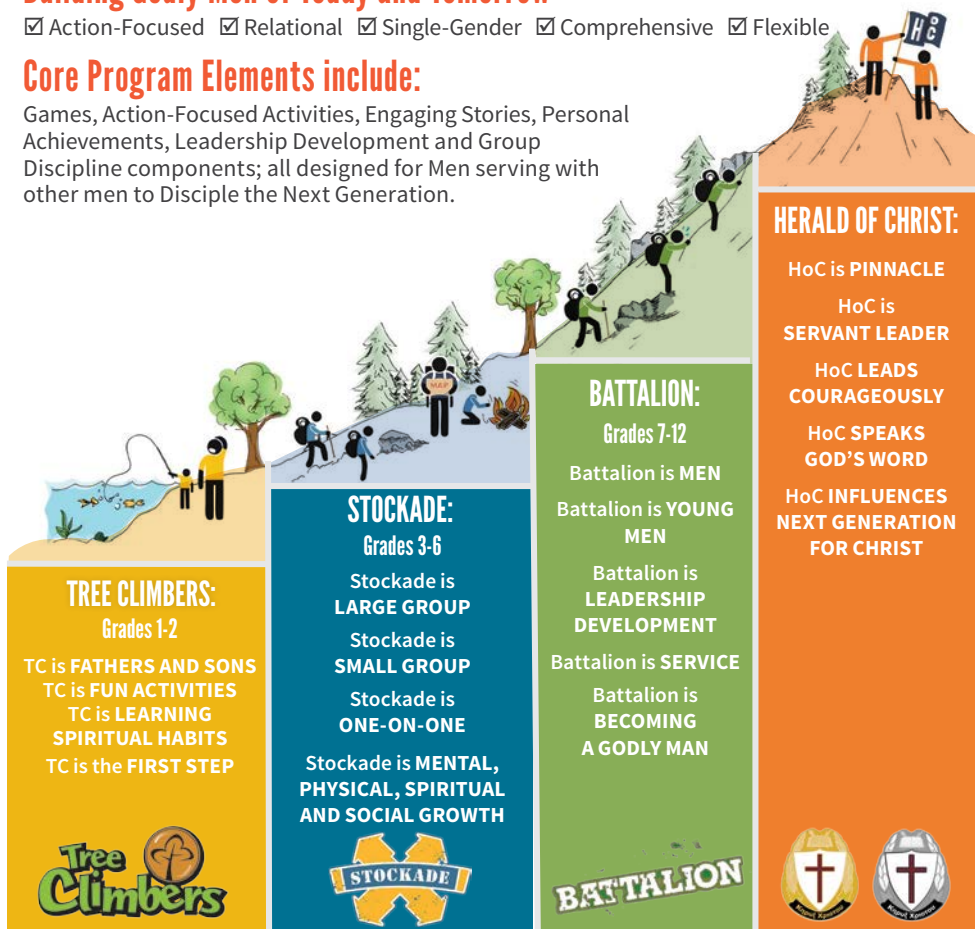
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# EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

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Follow the One-Year Bible reading plan by reading the daily Scripture at the end of each devotion. To see the complete reading plan, go to [oneyearbibleonline.com](http://oneyearbibleonline.com).



Check out Man in the Mirror's new donation website—[mimdonate.org](http://mimdonate.org).

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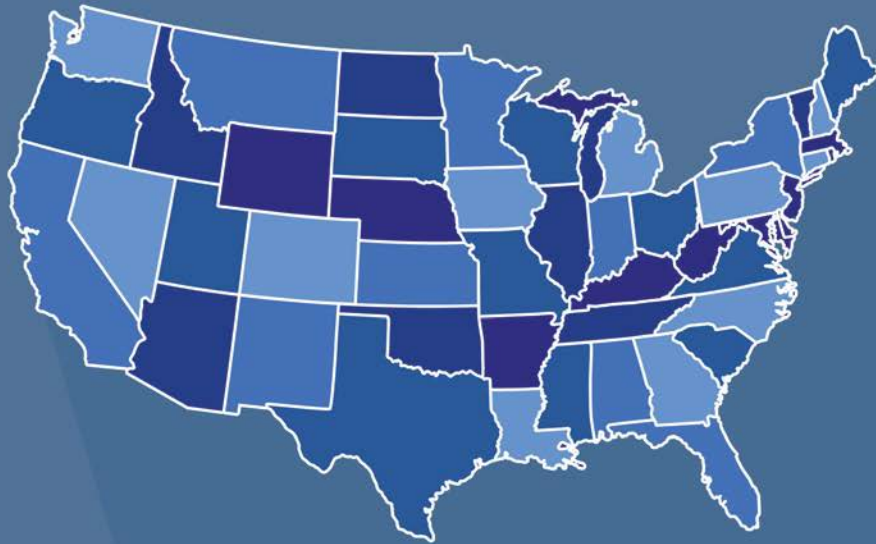
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## WANT TO MAKE DISCIPLES? READ THIS FIRST

by Patrick Morley,  
Executive Chairman, Man in the Mirror

**All men everywhere are the same. They are cautious. They are slow to reveal what's really going on. They don't think people really care about them (because in many cases they don't).**

Most men are not in touch with their emotions. They don't know how to express and process their feelings very well, if at all.

Men generally don't ask for help. But when they do want help, they don't know how to ask for it. And if they do ask for help, they rarely tell you everything.

Men keep secrets. Not because they are evil, but because they are ashamed. They don't realize that every other man is also struggling with something.

After talking personally with thousands of men over 40 years, here is my conclusion: No man is completely happy with himself, and every man has some pain or long-term struggle

that he would be embarrassed for others to know about.

This means that every man needs a friend. Every man needs to be loved. Every man needs to be set free by the gospel of Jesus. Every man needs to know that he is not alone.

It's worth a reminder: Every man you meet needs ministry, even if he is the most spiritual man you have ever met.

And if you let a man know that you care – really care – it will still take many visits before he will feel comfortable sharing the secrets

of his heart, whether joys or sorrows. And then only if you are willing to listen without giving an overly quick reply.

Until we reach every man...





# LIFE-ON-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP

Brent Clemmer

**The mission of Man in the Mirror is to help churches create an environment where the Holy Spirit inspires men to engage in life-on-life discipleship.**

Each of these words and phrases is carefully chosen. You nod your head as you read it – churches...environment... Holy-Spirit-inspired.

But at the end... “life-on-life discipleship.” The phrase sounds good, but what does it actually mean? What does it *look* like?

Let me tell you what it doesn’t look like: I was in a small group once with my wife and several other couples. The youth pastor was leading it, and we held it at one of our deacon’s houses. The deacon had kids a couple years older than ours, had been married for a little longer than we had, and was a leader in the church. He was a man I wanted to be around.

We prayed and studied the Bible together as we met each week. We saw each other on Sundays and talked in the lobby, sometimes sitting together in church. But we weren’t in life-on-life discipleship. And here’s how I know. The whole time we were in the small group, this deacon was cheating on his wife. A few months into the group he left her to “think things over” and he never came back.

How can this happen? We were in a group, doing spiritual things, answering questions about what the Bible says, but we weren’t in a real relationship. We were just buddies.

John 11 gives us an opportunity to see life-on-life discipleship in the context of real life. We all know the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This miracle helps illustrate Jesus’ power over death, verifying his deity. But the circumstances leading up to it offer some amazing lessons in discipleship. First, a recap...

## We Might As Well All Die Together

The disciples are at least a day’s journey away from Bethany when Jesus gets word that his friend Lazarus is seriously ill. Lazarus is Mary and Martha’s brother. Bethany is just outside of Jerusalem. Jesus waits two days and then tells his disciples they need to go. They argue with him. The last time he was there they tried to kill him (see John 10).

Jesus is not deterred. After some typical bantering (John often shows the disciples as being clueless until Jesus explains things

to them) Jesus says, “Look, he’s dead. And I’m glad I wasn’t there to heal him, so you can really see something that will amaze you. So stop arguing and let’s go.” (My paraphrase.)

Realizing that Jesus is committed to going, Thomas says, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (v 16). Doesn’t really sound like “doubting Thomas,” does he? With that, they head back into Judea to be with their friends and, we know now, to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Thomas shows us the first attribute of life-on-life discipleship. Because Jesus was so invested in the lives of the twelve, when he says he’s going to Bethany no matter what, their response is to step into the danger with him. Their relationship is so deep that they are willing to take the risk, enter dangerous territory, just to be with Jesus and their friends.

When men are engaged in life-on-life discipleship, they are willing to take risks for each other. They’ll go into dangerous territory together.

## Jesus Weeps

When they get there, the sisters take turns telling Jesus he’s partly responsible for Lazarus’ death. It sounds harsh but it’s actually based on their faith in him. They each say that if Jesus had been there, he wouldn’t have died (Martha in verse 21 and Mary in verse 32), presumably because he would have healed him.

Jesus, seeing the anguish that Martha, Mary and their friends are experiencing is “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.” Soon, he is weeping along with them. Have you ever wondered *why* Jesus wept? He can’t be weeping for Lazarus. He knows that he’s about to raise him from

the dead. Jesus is weeping because he loves his friends. He knows that Lazarus’ death is causing them anguish. He’s experiencing their sadness as a true friend.

So he joins with them in their sorrow and grief, acknowledging their pain. While Mary and Martha aren’t two of the twelve, they are certainly his disciples in a modern sense. They follow, love and believe in him. And he returns their love.

When a man is engaged in life-on-life discipleship, he loves well and deeply. He feels real anguish and real joy. He’s not an impassive observer. He is invested emotionally, and he’s not afraid to show it.

## A Sermon in a Prayer

Jesus tells them to roll away the stone, over Martha’s practical (as usual) objections about the odor of a four-day-old corpse. Then he prays, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, *that you may believe that you sent me.*” (Emphasis mine.) Then, he raises Lazarus from the dead.

This prayer is fascinating. He does not pray for Lazarus. That issue is settled. Instead, he prays for the specific purpose of helping people believe that Jesus is who he said he is, *to preach the gospel.*

Apparently, Jesus felt that the miracle he was about to perform wasn’t enough. He needed to proclaim the truth, not just give an example of it. Though many there already believed, he still reminded them.

Men engaged in life-on-life discipleship remind each other of the gospel. They don’t just let their actions speak. They *tell* each other as opportunities arise.

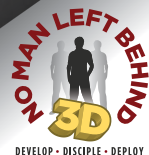
**Life-on-Life Discipleship** continues on page 60 ►



# CREATE A **THRIVING** MINISTRY TO **MEN**

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## MINISTRY TO MILLENNIALS, YOUNG MEN, AND THE **NEXT GENERATION**

by David Gregg

After two decades of experience in intergenerational ministry I'm convinced that discipling young men puts to use adult men's most natural drives and skills.

Because of this it should be an exciting area of ministry for every man, especially fathers, and yet intergenerational discipleship often can feel daunting. Shaping boys into men does take a lot of faith, but when our faith is placed in *God* who changes hearts and not in the ability of a boy to change, ministry to boys and young men can become one of the most fulfilling tasks to which God calls us. If you are a father then discipling your son is not even negotiable, but every man should have a deep concern for preparing the next generation of men before they cross that threshold. Below are a few key considerations to help you as you minister in this vital area of discipleship.

### How do we initiate?

One of the biggest challenges in discipling young men is how to begin. There are a lot of hurdles to establishing these healthy relationships. I have found that one of the best ways to start is by creating contexts in which multiple generations are doing things together. A simple way could simply

be inviting young men to your men's ministry events *and being intentional about including them while they are there*. Or it could be as simple as inviting your son out to play catch or out to breakfast with a few questions to start a little conversation.

### Treating them like what they are: future men

I asked a 13 year old young man once why he chose to listen to me. He responded without needing to think, "You don't talk to me like I'm a child." Young men, especially around puberty, want to feel that they are being recognized as making the transition from boy to man, a transition that is woefully foggy in our current culture. Show him that you see him where he will be, not where he is today.

### Masculinity comes in many shapes and sizes

The diversity that God has designed into the fabric of His creation extends into the fabric of masculinity as well. Masculinity,

**Next Generation Ministry** continues on page 58 ►





# MAKE A DIFFERENCE DISCIPLE YOUNG MEN

by Patrick Morley

**A former business colleague is discipling a college student and asked me which of my books I would recommend he use.**

Without blinking I wrote back, *How God Makes Men*. And then I included the following book excerpt, which explains why...

By now, I'm sure you're not surprised that God sends men in much the same way He has been sending them down through the centuries. Once you've been enlisted in God's army and learned how to clean and shoot your weapon, you're going to be deployed. Sending is simply going wherever God wants you to go to do whatever God wants you to do. Of course, making disciples is not the only thing God sends us to do. But in this chapter we're focusing on the Great Commission, or "making disciples," part of sending. Let's consider the priorities of making disciples.

First, making disciples starts at home. Your most important ministry is to your wife (if you have one). A friend of mine was having marriage problems. He came to one of our conferences and got inspired to disciple men. Since that brought him joy,

and home brought him distress, he started putting more and more time into discipling men and spending less and less time with his wife. When he asked me about it, I said, "I don't want you doing ministry to men until you get your ministry to your wife right." To his credit, he went back and put his own marriage in order. Today, he has a flourishing ministry to men.

One of the greatest needs in our day is to disciple younger men.

Second, after your wife, your most important ministry is to your children (if you have any). A man's number one discipleship group must be his family. No amount

of success anywhere else can compensate for failure here. God has ordained you to disciple your children. If they don't get disciplined, that one's on you. You are God's designated way to release the power of the gospel to your children.

Finally, once you have your own house in order, then you can have a disciple-making ministry to others. All kinds of people need discipleship. But let me make a special plea. You see, one of the greatest needs in our

day is to disciple younger men. An incident from the animal kingdom illustrates this.

When elephants overcrowded South Africa's Kruger National Park, the government authorized killing adult elephants and relocating their offspring to other parks. As the orphaned male elephants became teenagers, they were clueless about what normal elephant behavior looked like. When their testosterone levels spiked, the orphaned bulls turned aggressive. In one park they savagely killed thirty-nine rhinos. A park ranger watched as a young bull elephant intentionally knocked over a rhino and trampled it. The situation was out of control.

Then rangers brought several adult bull elephants into one of the parks. Just by being themselves, these animals "mentored" the younger bulls, demonstrating to them what normal male elephant behavior looked like. No more rhinos were killed after the mature bulls arrived.

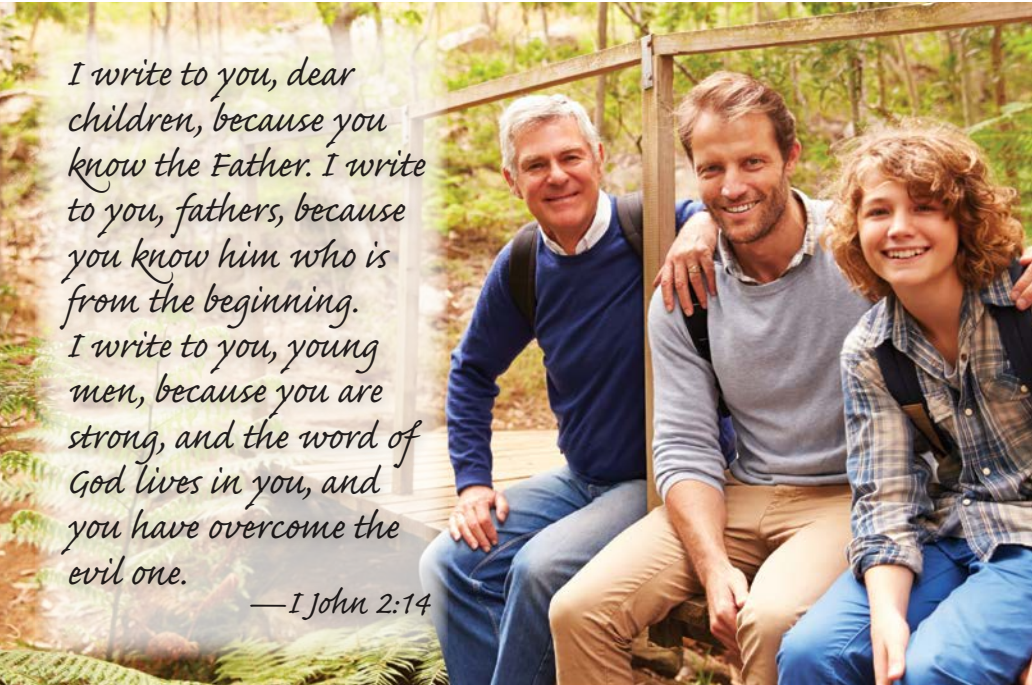
It's not easy to become a man. Many young men today have grown up as

"practical" orphans. They've been left to guess at what normal male behavior looks like. The faith of young men is under severe attack. That's where the battle is raging. And frankly, mature Christian men are just not getting the discipleship job done. Consider these challenging words:

If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.

So consider discipling some younger men. That's a place where you can really make a difference.

—Taken from *Weekly Briefing* 536. For more weekly briefings go to [maninthemirror.org](http://maninthemirror.org) and search the articles tab.



*I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

—1 John 2:14



# CELEBRATE EASTER

*“Outside of the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no hope in this world. That cross and resurrection at the core of the Gospel is the only hope for humanity. Wherever you go, ask God for wisdom on how to get that Gospel in, even in the toughest situations of life.”*

—Ravi Zacharias

*“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”*

—Luke 24:46–47

*“God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, ‘I love you.’”*

—Billy Graham

*“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”*

—Philippians 3:10–11

*“Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.”*

—Martin Luther

*“We live and die; Christ died and lived!”*

—John Stott

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”*

—John 11:25–26

*“Christ the Lord is risen today, Sons of men and angels say. Raise your joys and triumphs high; Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply.”*

—Charles Wesley

*“Our identity as Christians is strengthened as we stand in the lengthening shadows of saints down through the centuries, who have always answered back in antiphonal voice: ‘He is risen, indeed!’”*

—Charles Swindoll

*“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

—Romans 10:9–10



## EQUIPPING YOUR MEN'S SMALL GROUP

What Your Men Can Accomplish

### Get all your men engaged in the regular study of God's Word

by using this magazine as a small group tool. At the end of each week's devotions, you'll see a box containing discussion questions and exercises. These can form the basis of your time together. These pages supplement those questions with additional steps. If you use this magazine with your men this quarter you will have:

- { } Summarized your own specific mission statements.
- { } Discussed what forgiveness actually entails.
- { } Described how loving boundaries encourage those we mentor.
- { } Prayed with each other regarding our godly influence in the lives of those under our guidance.
- { } Encouraged each other to “run with perseverance,” even in difficult times.
- { } Discussed finding a balance between liberty and license.
- { } Recognized the difference between mentoring for short-term compliance vs. future fulfillment.
- { } Encouraged one another to pursue habits that help believers cling to Christ's teachings.
- { } Expressed your need to have a strong relationship with God.
- { } Prayed for one another regarding the temptation to futilely pursue satisfaction through accumulation.
- { } Passed on a life lesson from your father to a younger man
- { } Thanked a specific person who has helped define your life.
- { } Committed to pray for ways to work on gaining a quality of a leader.





# EQUIPPING YOUR MEN'S SMALL GROUP

## Suggested Applications Steps

### April 1-9

From these devotionals **you will learn about identifying God's overarching plan for your life.** **SAS:** Prayerfully consider the plan God is revealing to you regarding His purpose for your life. Summarize that in a mission statement. During the week, watch for at least one opportunity to fulfill that purpose. Come prepared to share that experience next week.

### April 10-16

This week **you will focus on events that culminated in Jesus' death and resurrection.** **SAS:** Read aloud the devotional from April 13 titled "The Debt Is Paid." Discuss what forgiveness entails. Describe some ways you can thank God for His gift of forgiveness.

### April 17-23

This week's focus gives **advice for godly fathering.** **SAS:** Ask your group to read aloud Colossians 3:21: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." Obviously, that addresses a parenting relationship. Discuss other relationships where this Scripture might apply. Describe how loving boundaries protect those we mentor from discouragement.

### April 24-30

This week continues **the influence of a godly dad.** **SAS:** The devotionals give several suggestions for influencing children to pursue God and His purposes. Divide into pairs and discuss which of those suggestions is most difficult for you. Spend a few moments praying for one another.

### May 1-7

In reading these devotionals, your group members will encounter **the reality that mature Christians face difficult situations that may tempt them to turn away from their faith.** **SAS:** Read aloud the devotional titled "Run with Perseverance" (page 33). How can your group members encourage each other to identify the course Christ has marked for them, and then run that course even in difficult times?

### May 8-14

This week we look at **principles of mentoring and parenting.** **SAS:** Ask your group to describe the difference between license vs. legalism. List some suggestions for finding a good balance in how we offer structure and discipline to those under our authority.

### May 15-21

This week we focus on **the goals and motivations of a mentoring relationship.** **SAS:** Describe a scenario you faced this week with someone you mentor or supervise. How did you handle that situation? Does your response show that you focused on short-term compliance, or future fulfillment? How would you handle this situation differently if you could do it again?

### May 22-28

In these devotionals, **we're reminded of choices and habits that help us make a significant contribution to God's kingdom.** **SAS:** Based on John 8:31-32, explain the importance of abiding in Christ's teachings. Ask your group to describe some habits they've acquired that help them abide in Christ's teachings on a daily basis.

### May 29-June 4

The theme for this week addresses **man's basic need for relationship with God.** **SAS:** The Psalmist describes his thirst for God as a deer panting for water (see Psalm 42:1-2a). How would you describe your desire for God? How do you satisfy your desire?

### June 5-11

These devotionals address **the lure of wealth.** **SAS:** Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-13. How does this passage challenge our cultural expectation? How does it challenge you personally? Spend some time praying for each other as it relates to this temptation.

### June 12-18

The focus of these devotionals is **the major principles of fatherhood.** **SAS:** Ask each man to share something that they learned from their father that has helped them in their adult life. Over the next two weeks, find an opportunity to pass that lesson along to a younger man. Come back in two weeks and share that experience with the group.

### June 19-25

This week we will learn about **the impact our lives have on others.** **SAS:** Think of three people who have greatly impacted your life. Share with the group the ways those people made a difference in what you do or who you have become. Take time to spend time with one of those people and use the opportunity to thank them for helping to define your life.

### June 26-30

Our theme this week is **the meaning of true leadership.** **SAS:** On a white board or large piece of paper, list the differences between a good leader and a poor leader. Think of examples of both kinds of leaders. What steps can you take to become a better leader? Commit to praying about and looking for ways to work on that quality. Share with the group your experience from two weeks ago.



# DAILY DEVOTIONS

April • May • June 2017

To make the most of Equipping the Man in the Mirror, we suggest you take the 5-minute, 10-minute or 15-minute devotional route each day:

- 5-minute:** Read the Scripture verse and daily devotional.  
**10-minute:** Read the Scripture verse, daily devotional and reflect on the daily question(s).  
**15-minute:** Read the Scripture verse, daily devotional, reflect on the daily question(s) and read the daily Bible reading. If you read those daily Bible readings, you can read the complete Bible in one year.

**Scripture Verse**

**Daily Devotional**

**Daily Question**

**Daily Bible Reading**

**Monday—April 3 • Utterly Convinced**

*Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us... (Psalm 40:4-5)*

Many years ago I was struck by a story about St. Francis of Assisi. Apparently he was out hoeing a row of beans one morning when a passerby asked, “if you knew that you were going to die this afternoon, how would you spend the rest of your earthly life?” Without hesitation, St. Francis replied, “I’d finish hoeing this row of beans.”

I really don’t think his answer was anchored in his excitement about gardening. Nor was it about comfort, for I suspect this was dirty, sweaty work. I’m guessing he got blisters on his hand and his clothes got dirty. At the end of the day, I’ll bet he had sore muscles. What would possess Assisi, Francis of Assisi to say “I’d finish hoeing this row of beans?”

I believe he was totally confident that he was engaged in the purpose that God intended. I want that same certainty. I want to be so utterly convinced that I’m doing God’s will that I wouldn’t change a thing. *MIMBS 1*

On a scale of 0–5, with 0 indicating that you have no interest and 5 indicating an extreme interest, how would you rate your desire to be so utterly convinced that you’re doing God’s will? Explain your answer.

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 23:1–25:19, Luke 10:13–37, Psalm 75:1–10, Proverbs 12:12–14

At the end of many of the devotionals you will find an abbreviation for a resource that expands on the devotional material. For more information about the Man in the Mirror Bible Study (MIMBS) go to [maninthemirror.org/archives/categories](http://maninthemirror.org/archives/categories).

- ☐ MIMBS 1—God’s Plan for Your Life
  - ☐ MIMBS 2—AlwaysDad
  - ☐ MIMBS 3—The Temptation to Turn Back
  - ☐ MIMBS 4—Heart Of Discipline
  - ☐ MIMBS 5—Do Something Great
  - ☐ MIMBS 6—My Soul Feels Dry
  - ☐ MIMBS 7—Abundant Life
  - ☐ MIMBS 8—Character Building Struggle
  - ☐ MIMBS 9—Honor at Home
  - ☐ MIMBS 10—Footsteps of Jesus
- Easter—Brett Clemmer

*Bartimaeus...was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:46b–48)*

The story of Bartimaeus is well-known. A blind man hears Jesus walking down the road and calls out to him for help. The “proper” people around Jesus don’t want Bartimaeus to bother the rabbi. He’s a beggar; probably dirty, stinky and, obviously, a little too loud. But he won’t be deterred. He just shouts louder.

Jesus asks a monumental question: “What do you want me to do for you?”

Stop. Think about this for a minute. If Jesus stopped in front of you and asked you this question, what would you say? Just stop and think about it for a minute.

Did you come up with a list of things? I did. Bartimaeus’ request was remarkable for two reasons: First, it was just one thing, the most important thing in his life. And second, it was ridiculously big. “I want to see.” If this request were granted, there could only be one conclusion: Jesus was the Son of God with supernatural power to heal a blind man. So He did it, as the Scriptures say, “immediately.”

What is the one thing you need more than anything else? Something so big that only God could do it. Rescue your marriage? Save your wayward child? Help you find a job?

Pray with me: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And listen for Him to answer, “What do you want me to do for you?” —Brett Clemmer

*What do you need Jesus to do for you? Think of the biggest issue in your life and ask God for His divine intervention.*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 18:1–22:30, Luke 9:28–10:12, Psalm 73:1–74:23, Proverbs 12:10–11



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*Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. (Psalm 40:4-5)*

Many years ago I was struck by a story about St. Francis of Assisi. Apparently he was out hoeing a row of beans one morning when a passerby asked, “If you knew that you were going to die this afternoon, how would you spend the rest of your earthly life?” Without hesitation, St. Francis replied, “I’d finish hoeing this row of beans.”

I really don’t think his answer was anchored in his excitement about gardening. Nor was it about comfort, for I suspect this was dirty, sweaty work. I’m guessing he got blisters on his hand and his clothes got dirty. At the end of the day, I’ll bet he had sore muscles. What would possess Assisi, Francis of Assisi to say “I’d finish hoeing this row of beans”?


I believe he was totally confident that he was engaged in the purpose that God intended. I want that same certainty. I want to be so utterly convinced that I’m doing God’s will that I wouldn’t change a thing.  MIMBS 1

*On a scale of 0–5, with 0 indicating that you have no interest and 5 indicating an extreme interest, how would you rate your desire to be so utterly convinced that you’re doing God’s will? Explain your answer.*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 23:1–25:19, Luke 10:13–37, Psalm 75:1–10, Proverbs 12:12–14

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. (Psalm 118:1)*

As I’ve related with my little dog, I’ve learned about God’s feelings toward us. I attend to that dog out of love. By comparison, I’m convinced that God is absolutely crazy about each one of us. He knew the consequences we would bear from choosing our own way rather than His. I suspect you are aware that we’ve all sinned, and we deserved to die. But Jesus bore the consequences on our behalf and “set [us] free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1–3).

We can build courage for God’s plan when we remind ourselves that we really did deserve to be erased off the face of the planet. But God loved us so much, He called on someone else to pay the price to re-establish our relationship with Him. All we have to do is accept His gift. Do you want to be motivated to pursue God? Dwell on His greatness and thank Him for the rich gift He’s offered you. Let your gratitude become a turbine engine that constantly hums in the background, giving you power.  MIMBS 1

*List five things God has done specifically for you, and write a prayer, thanking Him for those blessings.*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 28:1–68, Luke 11:14–36, Psalm 77:1–20, Proverbs 12:18

## Tuesday—April 4 • Good Works, Prepared in Advance for Us

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8–10)*

Scripture indicates that God has a specific plan for each individual—works he has planned for each of us to accomplish. It also gives multiple examples of people who chose to pursue God’s plan, even in the face of difficulty.

- What if Moses said, “Man, this burning bush thing is really impressive, but, I’m sorry—you’re going to have to get somebody else. I’m not going back to a place where there’s a price on my head.”
- What if Abraham said, “Are you kidding me? I’m not leaving this nice place to settle in some region that you haven’t even identified yet. Forget that.”
- What if Joseph said, “When you sold me off into slavery, my brothers, you meant to harm me. Now I’m going to get my revenge.”
- What if David said, “Man, that giant is really big. I think I’ll head for home, because my dad really needs my help.”

Pursuing God’s plan isn’t necessarily easy. Courage in the face of difficulty comes from seeking God’s will and being confident that you are walking in His plan.  MIMBS 1


*Can you summarize God’s specific plan for you in the terms of a mission statement? If you can, write it out. If you can’t, ask God to show you how to do that.*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 26:1–27:26, Luke 10:38–11:13, Psalm 76:1–12, Proverbs 12:15–17

## Thursday—April 6 • Watch for Opportunities

*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)*

A first step toward pursuing God’s plan is to figure out how He has already prepared you. The Bible says He’s given all believers spiritual gifts, intending for us to use those resources in harmony with other believers to fulfill His plan. Lots of materials are available to help you discover your gifts. Then, watch for opportunities. For instance, suppose you pull into a gas station, and you can’t get the pump to work. Your first inclination might be to get frustrated. But then, suppose an employee comes out to help you. Watch for the opportunity to use your gift.

How can you encourage this person? A “thank you” might be a great start. But, what if the employee mentions that a lot of people get angry in that situation? You have a wide-open door to explain why you are reacting differently than he expected. If you’re not intentionally watching for that kind of opportunity, you might totally miss the chance to “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”  MIMBS 1


*How can you become more intentional about watching for opportunities to be “the light of the world”?*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20, Luke 11:37–12:7, Psalm 78:1–31, Proverbs 12:19–20



*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

Today's passage tells us that, as we trust God and submit to Him, He will make our paths straight. Yet the basic reality is that paths were made for walking, not for standing still. Frankly, forward movement can be intimidating. It can produce anxiety. It requires courage. C.S. Lewis explained, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the point of testing." I challenge you to step out in faith, have courage, trust God.

I believe the Bible outlines four primary things that God wants me to do: love Him, love others, build His kingdom, and tend the culture. We all need to be intentional, looking for ways to do those four things throughout the day. And we have to accept the reality that we're fallible. We're not mathematical formulas or machines. We're human, and we're flawed. God knows our weaknesses and our faults, and still He pursues relationship with us and wants to engage us in His plan. He would prefer for you and me to be imperfect in *actuality*, more than perfect in *potentiality*. He wants us to walk in faith, accepting His calling and trusting that He can work in us and through us, even in our fallibility, to build His kingdom.  MIMBS 1

*Where do you need to step out in faith? What is holding you back? How will you move forward?*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 31:1-33:29, Luke 12:8-13:21, Psalm 78:32-72, Proverbs 12:21-25

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)*

The devotions this week focus on the events leading up to Easter. In addition to the suggested readings, you may want to read a chapter of Mark each day this week, starting today with chapter 11.

In that famous scene from the movie *Titanic*, Leonardo DiCaprio's character stands on the railing at the bow of the ocean liner exulting in its power. "I'm the King of the World!" he proclaims. A great movie moment. Of course, the ship his feet are so firmly planted on eventually sinks.

We often do a version of this ourselves. Standing at the bow of our own success, we lean forward and proclaim, "I'm the King of my world!" Yet too often, what we rely on to make us feel good about ourselves is just one iceberg, one bad decision or one economic collapse away from sinking.

There is one King. He rode into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago on a donkey. That day He started a chain of events that seemed like it would destroy Him. But in this movie, everything gets turned upside down. Jesus is the iceberg, and sin is the ship. —Brett Clemmer

*Are you the King of your world, or is God? What areas of your life are you relying on for your feelings of success? Repent and offer those to God in prayer.*

**Daily Reading:** Deuteronomy 34:1-Joshua 2:24, Luke 13:22-14:6, Psalm 79:1-13, Proverbs 12:26

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



### April 1-9

Can you express a personal mission statement?

- How do your talents and gifts help you find and achieve the purpose God has for you?

*"Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe'—safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:9-11)*

When I was a young businessman, I remember going through the process of looking for a church. I was keen on making good business contacts and I saw church as a place to do that. So I took my wife to several new churches and, unbeknownst to her, did "The BMW Test." You guessed it: I was evaluating a church based on the value of the cars in the parking lot.

God thwarted that effort, thankfully, without sending anyone with a whip. The money changers in the temple courts were not so fortunate. As Jesus "taught them," according to Mark 11, He cited the passage above. But we shouldn't think He was talking only about the money changers actions. He was talking about our hearts as well.

The church is God's people, but it is also God's house. When we gather together each week, it is a time to examine our hearts, to make sure we don't "follow other gods... and then come and stand before" God and act like nothing is wrong. Our Father expects more from us than that. —Brett Clemmer

*What purposes does church serve for you other than worshipping God? Are they more important to you than He is? Pray that God would truly be first in your life.*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 3:1-4:24, Luke 14:7-35, Psalm 80:1-19, Proverbs 12:27-28

But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same. (Mark 14:31)

Betrayal is a tough pill to swallow. Relationships often never recover when a friend or spouse is found to have violated trust.

Peter and the other disciples swore their fealty to Jesus at the Last Supper. They would defend him to the death. We often focus on Peter denying his relationship with Jesus three times. But his betrayal wasn’t the first that evening. All the disciples abandoned Jesus when He was arrested. Peter at least grabbed a sword and *tried* to protect Jesus, then followed right up into the courtyard outside of Jesus’ “trial” at Caiaphas’ house.

All too often, I betray Jesus too. I deny His impact on my life when I downplay my faith to avoid a tough discussion, or laugh along at someone mocking Christians, or participate in conversations or behavior that does not honor Him. I have great intentions, but I am as guilty as Peter. —Brett Clemmer

*Do you ever “deny” Jesus? Would your family, your co-workers or your Facebook friends say, “He is a Christian, for sure!” Ask God to give you strength to be a faithful follower and friend of Jesus.*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 5:1–7:15, Luke 15:1–32, Psalm 81:1–16, Proverbs 13:1

## Thursday—April 13 • The Debt Is Paid

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

In *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller shares an incredible insight about forgiveness. In order for me to forgive someone, I have to suffer the consequences of their action, instead of them suffering it for themselves. For instance, if I “forgive” a debt, I am agreeing that I will be without the money I am owed, instead of the debtor being without that money.

I think that’s what makes forgiveness so hard. When we agree to forgive someone, it’s not that we’re saying, “Let’s just forget this and it will go away.” The consequences still exist. I am choosing self-sacrifice over justice.

That’s exactly the choice that Jesus made on our behalf. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” He used the Greek word, *tetelestai*. That word was used when a merchant and customer finished a transaction. It means, “The debt is paid.” With Jesus’ dying breath, He paid your and my debt to a holy and just God, and He suffered their consequences on our behalf. Thank you Jesus for your love and sacrifice! —Brett Clemmer

*Take some time today to pray and thank Jesus for His willingness to pay the penalty for your sin. Who in your life needs to be offered forgiveness? Pray for them and ask God for the strength to forgive them.*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 7:16–9:2, Luke 16:1–18, Psalm 82:1–8, Proverbs 13:2–3

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.” (Mark 16:6)

There are several times in my life when I can remember being surprised by God’s providence. Standing in our first home, I got the call that I had gotten a job I really wanted and that would provide better financial stability for my bride and I.

A year or so later, my wife mysteriously refused to get on any of the rides at a theme park. She finally confided that she might be pregnant. After a late night visit to a store, we nervously watched the color change on the pregnancy test kit. We danced around the bathroom with excitement.

Can you imagine how Jesus’ followers must have felt when they realized Jesus was alive? Mary Magdalene got so excited that Jesus finally told her to let Him go. Peter and John sprinted to the tomb to check it out for themselves. Of course, not everyone reacted that way. The disciples, at first, locked themselves in a room racked with fear and doubt. When Jesus did show up, Thomas wasn’t there and said he’d believe when he saw it for himself. Jesus loved him enough to come back and visit him personally.

We shouldn’t get too upset with people who have trouble accepting the fact of Jesus’ death and resurrection. There were many people who witnessed it personally and still had a hard time believing it. Jesus has grace for them. And His strategy was simple—eyewitness testimony.

Jesus told the disciples and us to be His witnesses and gave us a strategy in Acts 1:8. Start with those immediately around us, then our neighborhoods, and then to the world.

On the weekend when we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead—His victory over sin and death on our behalf—it’s good to reflect on Christ’s impact on our lives. How do you know that He’s alive, that He loves you, that He’s changed your life? We need to be able to articulate that and tell people about Him. —Brett Clemmer

*How do you know that Jesus is alive? Think of some times when you have seen God’s hand in your life. Who needs to hear about this?*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 9:3–14:15, Luke 16:19–18:17, Psalm 83:1–85:13, Proverbs 13:4–8

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

### April 10–16

As we approach Easter, tell about a time when you recognized Jesus’ resurrection power because of something He did in your life.


- Who needs to hear about that event?





*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

Tony's in his mid-thirties. He's been addicted and incarcerated off-and-on since age 15. He was in the final week of studying our book *Man Alive* at his recovery house. Tony shared, "I used to be the biggest piece of trash in town. People either hated me or feared me. Last week, something made me realize I'm a different man."

Tony's ex-wife was expecting a child with Tony's best friend. In his ex-wife's hour of need, the man abandoned her. Tony drove to his friend's house, intending to kill him. Tony explained, "As I pulled into his drive, ... my rage disappeared, and I felt the need to pray for him." Tony drove to his ex-wife's house. "I pledged to support her and my kids, even her unborn son." He added, "I feel a love for my children and ex-wife that I can't explain. And God gave me an amazing blessing. My four-year-old daughter looked sad when I was leaving. I asked her, 'What's wrong?' She said, 'I want my daddy - my new daddy.' Even she saw how much I've changed."  MIMBS 2


*Are you a new creation in Christ? Explain your answer.*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 15:1-63, Luke 18:18-43, Psalm 86:1-17, Proverbs 13:9-10

## Tuesday—April 18 • Generation to Generation

*One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)*

I've been alive long enough to witness the "passing of the torch" from generation to generation. Our culture creates a wide divide between generations, with each group seeming to complain about the others. Yet Scripture tells us generational separation was not God's intention. God designated fathers and mothers as the key to solving problems faced by each new generation.


Parents pass on the knowledge they've gained. Churches are important. Even government is important. But the primary responsibility for raising godly children rests with fathers and mothers. We begin to understand that mission when we accept Jesus' priorities. Scripture notes that a teacher of the law once asked Jesus to define the priorities of Scripture. Jesus responded that "the most important one" is to love God, and the second is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (see Mark 12:29-31). The goal of helping our children love God and love others is the first step toward raising up another generation of disciples for Jesus.  MIMBS 2

*Look back on your personal history. Who helped you prepare for the challenges of adulthood? What's the most important lesson you learned in that process?*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 16:1-18:28, Luke 19:1-27, Psalm 87:1-7, Proverbs 13:11

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-8)*

Today's passage summarizes the responsibility of a godly father. It sets a priority on loving God, noting that our relationship with Him should etch His principles and His commandments on our hearts. This passage doesn't really say anything about performance. God isn't talking about commandments as a check-off list of rules. Rather, He's calling us to a change of heart or perspective. God wants to put something deep within us, enabling us to respond to His commands from a perspective of love rather than duty.

In that context, God also defines the primary responsibility of a godly parent. He says, "Impress them (His commandments) on your children." He goes on to say, "Talk about them when you sit...and when you walk...and when you lie down...and when you get up." In essence, this passage implies that our relationship with God impacts all of our activities. And beyond that, a committed parent, pursuing God's plan for passing on His principles to coming generations, will intentionally seek instructional opportunities in all of life.  MIMBS 2


*Describe a time outside of a church setting where someone taught you an important life lesson that has helped you live out your faith. How does that reflect the advice given in Deuteronomy 6:4-9?*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 19:1-20:9, Luke 19:28-48, Psalm 88:1-18, Proverbs 13:12-14

## Thursday—April 20 • Performance Oriented Fathers

*My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. (Psalm 78:1-4)*

Scripture repeatedly describes a process whereby disciples make disciples, starting in the home. God wants His principles to be passed on relationally across generations. Specifically, this passage calls those who are mature in the faith not to hide their knowledge from their descendants. Fathers who focus on performance can obstruct a true view of God.


Let me explain. Kids learn early that the world will accept or reject them based on certain levels of performance. Children who aren't very athletic don't get picked for playground kickball games. Children who don't get good grades can't participate in certain programs. Children who can't afford the "right" labels of clothing, or whose appearance doesn't match those around them, can be excluded from "the in crowd." Kids learn quickly that performance is a basic value of the culture around us. Dads who offer unconditional love provide a Christian solution to that cultural problem. Too often, though, dads contribute to the problem by creating structures that reinforce what the world is teaching, rather than creating an environment that invites children to receive unconditional love and acceptance.  MIMBS 2

*Can you think of a specific time when you received unconditional love and acceptance? How did its presence or absence affect your relationship with God?*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 21:1-22:20, Luke 20:1-26, Psalm 89:1-13, Proverbs 13:15-16

*Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21)*

God knows our children live in the same performance-based culture that molded many of us. He also knows our tendency to mirror cultural expectations in our parenting. We want our kids to behave in specific ways. Many of those expectations are for our children's benefit. However, dads reinforce our culture's performance mentality when we communicate to our children that their personal value is anchored in their ability to live up to those expectations. When we succumb to that cultural norm, rather than modeling unconditional love, we discourage our children.


The opposite of discouraging our children, of course, is to encourage them. If we want to make that our goal, we have to first understand that the word encourage literally means to inspire courage. And the dictionary defines courage as "the ability or state of mind or spirit to face hardship of disaster with confidence and resolution." How do you encourage a child who is facing the challenge of not bringing home a stellar report card, or who doesn't make the varsity team, or who is running with the wrong crowd? The world tells your children their value is based on their performance. The only dependable place for that child to gain encouragement and avoid discouragement is at home. God says to dads, "Don't contribute to the problem. Be the solution."  MIMBS 2

*When our children were young, my wife and I attended a seminar led by Christian counselor Larry Crabb. He stated, "Our children need to know, 'yes, I love you, and no, you can't have your own way.'" In your own words, describe how that balance encourages children and gives them security to make positive choices.*

**Daily Reading:** Joshua 22:21–24:33, Judges 1:1–2:9, Luke 20:27–22:13 Psalm 89:14–91:16, Proverbs 13:17–25

*But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)*

Today's passage gives general instruction for Christian relationships, but it communicates a lot for parenting as well. The reality is, encouragement is food for the heart, and every heart is hungry. In a performance-oriented culture, every child hungers for encouragement. God calls dads not to father for performance, but to father their children's hearts.

Fathering for performance is getting our children to do the right things. Fathering the heart means we help our children choose the right things for the right reasons. Suppose your 13-year-old son wants to see an R-rated movie with his friends. Fathering for performance would mean you simply say no. Fathering the heart may mean you ask your son to describe the movie to you and then help him understand why the movie is not appropriate for him. Fathering the heart sets boundaries, but it also enables a child to leave the discussion with an understanding that will help him make wise choices in the future. In the words of today's passage, it prepares him so he won't be "hardened by sin's deceitfulness."  MIMBS 2

*Pick a scenario other than an R-rated movie, and describe how you would father a child's heart in that situation.*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 2:10–3:31, Luke 22:14–34, Psalm 92:1–93:5, Proverbs 14:1–2

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

April 17-23


Describe someone who taught you a life lesson that has helped you live out your faith.

- How can you model that for others?

## Tuesday—April 25 • Pay Your Kids to Read the Bible?

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)*

Scripture provides a moral compass that can't be duplicated anywhere else. It's "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." It teaches life lessons that will help our children avoid the consequences of negative decisions. And it communicates all of that in the context of God's unconditional love. But a person must engage with Scripture for it to have its full effect.

Every truly Christian father wants his children to love God and to express that vertical relationship in a way that honors God in relating to people. One of the strongest ways to mentor your kids toward a God-honoring lifestyle is to model a love for the Bible and to encourage them to read and study it. Kids are motivated by money. When my kids were growing up, I paid them to read Scripture. That might seem like bribery, but the reality is, my kids read the Bible, and most of their friends didn't. As your children engage with Scripture, its principles can take root in their hearts, transforming them and equipping them for life's challenges.  MIMBS 2


*What motivates you to read and study your Bible? How can you apply that to encourage your children to engage with Scripture?*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 4:1–5:31, Luke 22:35–53, Psalm 94:1–23, Proverbs 14:3–4



*Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. (Proverbs 1:8)*

Early in my ministry, I would spend 10 to 15 hours each week preparing for our Friday morning men's Bible study, but I wasn't doing anything similar with my kids.

One day it hit me that I was neglecting my responsibility with my family. I devised a little way for three or four days each week, for 15 minutes before my children had to leave for school. We set a timer so they wouldn't be late. Then we chose a topic from the newspaper, or something that was going on at school or in the neighborhood. I found a Scripture verse that applied to that situation, and we read it together. Then we prayed together. We didn't make it a law. If someone was running late, we learned to bend. And we didn't do it in the summer, when sleep schedules were different. You don't have to do devotions exactly like we did. Find a formula that works for you and your family. But recognize family devotions are at the heart of disciples making disciples, starting in the home.  MIMBS 2


*Prayerfully consider a scenario that would enable you to lead family devotions. Now put it into practice.*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 6:1–40, Luke 22:54–23:12, Psalm 95:1–96:13, Proverbs 14:5–6

## Thursday—April 27 • Make Your Children Responsible for Church

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24–25)*

Pre-teen and early teen children usually will attend church with you willingly. When they become teenagers, they often begin to express independence. They don't want to go to church. You can fight with them about it, or you can put the responsibility on them. My wife came up with an ingenious idea that's worth sharing with you. When our teenagers resisted going to church, she said, "That's fine if you don't want to go to church today, but just so you know, that means you can't go out Saturday night."

How many times do you think they missed church? Just once. They wanted to test their mother to see if she meant what she said. After that, they never missed church again. Going out was important to them. My wife gave them a choice, but she also described the consequences. In so doing, she transferred the responsibility for their actions to them.  MIMBS 2


*As your children grow up, how will you help them learn to accept responsibility for their own choices?*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 7:1–8:17, Luke 23:13–43, Psalm 97:1–98:9, Proverbs 14:7–8

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16–17)*

When Jesus experienced baptism, His Father's voice came from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." In essence, this statement models what every child needs to hear: "I love you, and I'm proud of you."

My mom and dad came to one of my son's basketball games. I was telling them how proud I was of my son, and my mom said to no one in particular, "I don't think we told our children often enough that we were proud of them." Immediately in my mind I responded, "Why didn't you do that? I'm still trying to prove myself. I'm still driven, still trying to figure out how to make you proud of me." I can remember the exact site where that internal conversation happened. I was 47-years-old then, and I realized, "It's not too late."

So later, when I took my father to lunch for his birthday, I wrote in his card, "I sure hope you're proud of me." He read it, and without even looking up, he said, "Well, you know, I am." That filled the void for me. Encouraging words, anchored in unconditional love, can have an incredible effect on your children. Follow God's example, and let them know that you love them, and you're proud of them.  MIMBS 2

*As a child, did you know that your parents loved you and were proud of you? How does that experience, or the lack of it, shape you now?*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 8:18–12:15, Luke 23:44–24:53, John 1:1–28, Psalm 99:1–101:8, Proverbs 14:9–14

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

### April 24–30


Read this quote aloud: "Encouragement is food for the heart, and every heart is hungry."

- Describe someone who encouraged you.
- What can you learn from that, so you can apply it to your relationships?



*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:66–69)*

At some point, almost all of us are tempted to turn away from Christ. One of my most gruesome experiences came toward the end of a seven-year business crisis. I had to deal with a difficult person who desired to ruin me. My crisis was not the result of any type of moral lapse on my part. It just happened. About five years into this situation, I felt totally exhausted. To be honest, I felt like God had abandoned me.


I remember calling my lawyer and saying, “I can’t take this anymore. I give up. Call them and say they can have whatever they want, even if I have to go under.” My lawyer responded, “Pat, why don’t you just let me handle this for a while?” I felt such incredible relief. In addition, I had this strong sense that Christ was still with me. Even when I was trying to turn away, Christ held me. He honored His biblical promise that He would never forsake me.  MIMBS 3

*In a group, share a time when your faith has been tested. Did you turn away, or did you stand firm? If you stood firm, what helped you to do that?*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 13:1–14:20, John 1:29–51, Psalm 102:1–28, Proverbs 14:15–16

*Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:4–7a)*

He just showed up. When they didn’t notice His presence, He got their attention, and He revealed His identity by demonstrating His power over their labor. Picture it—no fish on the left side of the boat, but a huge number on the right. The disciples clearly did not have the power to catch fish on their own, even though it was their area of expertise. But Jesus showed them how to catch a huge number, simply by moving the net to the other side of the boat.

After Jesus revealed His presence and His identity, He invited the disciples to fellowship with Him. “When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread” (John 21:9). Jesus didn’t rebuke His disciples for a lack of faith. He simply served them breakfast and, in the process, He erased the feeling of abandonment by assuring them of His loving commitment to them.  MIMBS 3

*In what area of your life do you need Jesus to show up? Where do you need Him to reveal Himself and His power? Write a short prayer inviting Him to do that.*


**Daily Reading:** Judges 17:1–18:31, John 3:1–21, Psalm 104:1–23, Proverbs 14:20–21

## Tuesday—May 2 • Fishing for Men or Fish?

*Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. (John 21:2–3)*

Early in the Gospels, we learn that Peter and some of the other disciples were fishermen. When Jesus called them, He said, “I’ll teach you how to fish for men.” Yet here, at the end of the book of John, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter and some of his friends went back to try fishing for fish.

If you figure out the timeline, you’ll see it had been several weeks since they saw Jesus. I believe they were a little at a loss, perhaps feeling abandoned. They knew they were supposed to fish for men, but they weren’t sure how to do that in the absence of their Teacher. So they went back to what they knew: fishing for fish.

It seems like they gave up on Jesus, but He didn’t give up on them. When you read the next verse (John 21:4), you find He was standing on the shore waiting for them. And when they didn’t recognize Him, He called out to get their attention.  MIMBS 3


*Have you been struggling to figure out what you’re supposed to do next to follow God’s call on your life? Pray for Jesus to show Himself to you and help you get on track.*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 15:1–16:31, John 2:1–25, Psalm 103:1–22, Proverbs 14:17–19

## Thursday—May 4 • Reinstating the Calling

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” (John 21:15)*

Jesus helps us through our feelings of abandonment by revealing His presence and His identity, and by inviting us to fellowship. When we have allowed our feelings of abandonment to lead us away from the tasks to which He has called us, Jesus also reinstates our calling and restores our sense of purpose. In this passage, Jesus repeats Peter’s calling three times. He renews Peter’s sense of acceptance by reinstating his understanding of his purpose.

We all struggle with feelings of abandonment sometimes, especially if we’ve grown up in families that disintegrated. Yet the entirety of Scripture reveals a God who will not forsake or abandon His children. In times of discouragement, it’s important to stay alert to Jesus’ presence, trust His identity, stay in His fellowship, and trust His calling. We can choose that we will not abandon the very One who has not abandoned us.  MIMBS 3

*Why is it comforting to know that, when we are tempted to turn away from our faith, Jesus is willing to reinstate our fellowship with Him, and also to renew our purpose?*

**Daily Reading:** Judges 19:1–20:48, John 3:22–4:3, Psalm 104:24–35, Proverbs 14:22–24





# A LETTER TO OUR DONORS

Grow, Make, Build, and Join!

As I look around most churches, I see many men with their families going through the motions. They are caught up in the calendar and customs of the church.

But two critical things are missing: they are not growing spiritually; and they are not helping others grow. In other words, **men are not becoming disciples or making disciples.** This is, by definition, cultural Christianity.

Recognizing this dilemma, the knee jerk reaction from some has been, “Cancel all the programs! We’ll just shift our focus to small groups only. We’ll make church simple.” But that’s not the answer.

The real answers come from Jesus: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus modeled and then taught the art of disciple-making.

Jesus modeled and then taught the art of disciple-making.

## 4 Ways to Reach Men

Man in the Mirror is dedicated to making disciples who make disciples. Specifically, we help men:

**GROW** as a disciple. Through our weekly online *Bible study* which reaches thousands of men across the globe and through the *Equipping the Man in the Mirror* magazine, we provide opportunities for men to personally grow deeper in Christ.

**MAKE** new disciples. Through our *Books! by The Box* program and the various men’s events we offer, we provide disciples the opportunity to disciple new disciples.

**BUILD** a ministry to men in their church. Through our *No Man Left Behind Training* and *The Journey to Biblical Manhood*, we are able to assist churches in developing a system to cast a church-wide disciple making net.

**JOIN** our team and equip churches to disciple men. Some men are so passionate about disciple-making, their vision goes beyond their small group or local church. For these men, we provide training to join



our **Field Team**, empowering them to become the disciple-making expert in their community.

## Magnifying the Value of an Investment

Consider this: no program at Man in the Mirror is 100% donor funded. Donors and leaders share the cost of our resources, magnifying the impact of our contributors’ investments while maintaining high quality, low cost materials for disciples and disciplinmakers. Donors help us make every resource affordable and accessible to leaders. It’s a “win-win.”

Whether it’s filming, editing and web-hosting the Bible study; producing, printing, and mailing the magazine; or developing and delivering high-quality leadership training; we are only able to accomplish this affordably through the generosity of our donors. Over the years

God has faithfully sent kindhearted individuals like you to help us provide these disciple making opportunities to men all over the world.

God recently provided us expanded space in a **new headquarters** for our ministry to grow, well-sit-

uated in a prime location, at a cost nearly identical to our historic lease payments. Our vision is to pay the mortgage off as quickly as possible to reduce our operational expenses even further.

## Our Gratitude

We’re grateful for donors like you who see Man in the Mirror as a wise investment in the Kingdom. Thank you for your prayers and contributions. If you want to learn more about special projects that can magnify your impact further, email [SteveHutton@maninthemirror.org](mailto:SteveHutton@maninthemirror.org) today.

Standing with you to help men grow, make, build and join,

Brett Clemmer  
President



# IT STARTS WITH THE HEART

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The word “transformed” in the New Testament is the Greek word *metamorphoo*, from which we get metamorphosis. It’s what God envisioned when Paul wrote,

*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.* (Romans 12:2)

Christianity is *heart transformation*, not *behavior modification*. The reason that 90 percent of men lead lukewarm, often defeated lives is really quite simple. They’re trying to solve the wrong problem. Most of us have the idea that Christianity is about behavior modification—using determination to change our behavior and be more spiritual. We think that if we can just get the right information, if we can just have more willpower and “man up,” then we will do the right things and everything will be okay.


But everything is not okay. In fact, the harder we try, the more frustrated and confused we become. A man can only will himself to act and perform like a Christian for so long. One man who abandoned his faith said, “I served in the

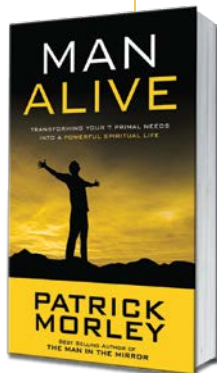
church for twenty years and I got worn out. I decided to try something else.” Determination, we all learn eventually, is not a strategy.

How does heart transformation happen in practice? Our hearts are transformed when we stopped trying to go it alone and dig into God’s Word with a group of guys who accept us “as is.” We don’t really do anything. We simply present ourselves to God as flawed vessels, looking intently into God’s Word in the company of a few men who care about each other, and God changes the way we think.

That really is the story of transformation. It happens from the inside out as we work out our faith with each other. Everything starts with the heart. Jesus put it this way:

*The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.* (Luke 6:45, NIV)


Authentic faith really is about the heart. Of course, Christianity is also about behavior, but it’s behavior that overflows from changing what we believe in our hearts. Belief determines behavior. 



*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* (Hebrews 12:1)

Several years ago, I talked to a man who had been involved in evangelizing and discipling other men. He was facing a difficult choice. He found his current work to be very satisfying, but he had an opportunity to move to a job that provided significantly more money and also offered greater prestige. He would need to work more hours and that would limit the time available for ministry. He sought prayer and counsel. He told me later about two conversations that helped clarify his decision.

First, this man is known for being quite frugal, and one of his friends asked, “Is it really worth adding 20 hours of work each week, just so you can drive a car that’s one year newer than the used car you have now?” Then his wife pointed out that currently he was able to come home for lunch. In the new job, he wouldn’t be home until after dark. His wife asked, “What is it worth to you to be able to come home for lunch almost every day?”

Those two questions helped my friend gain perspective, to look at this decision not just from the viewpoint of what he would gain, but also what he would lose if he changed jobs. He realized he was being tempted to trade his life of purpose for something that, in the end, would not really satisfy. In the words of today’s Scripture, he chose to run with perseverance the race that had been marked out for him.  MIMBS 3

*What difficult choices are you facing right now? Ask some other men how they would suggest you identify the course that Jesus has marked for you.*

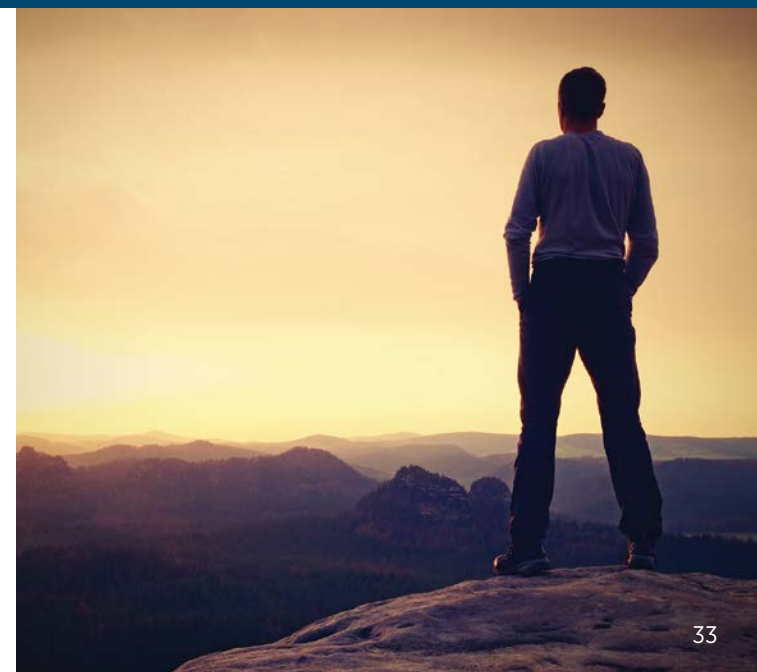
**Daily Reading:** Judges 21:1–Ruth 4:22, 1 Samuel 1:1–2:21, John 4:4–5:23, Psalm 105:1–45, Proverbs 14:25–29

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

May 1–7

How has your faith been tested?


- In that situation, did you turn away, or did you stand firm?
- What did you learn from that event that you can apply in your life now?





*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:13–14)*

The term “cookie cutter” refers to things that seem to be identical. Scripture clearly rules out the possibility of “cookie cutter kids.” God fashions each child with unique traits. Family members may strongly resemble one another physically, and even in their personalities. They may even appear to be identical, but as you get to know them, you’ll discover their individual characteristics. I’ve seen this in my own children.


My daughter was outwardly willful when she was growing up. I call her the unstoppable force of our family. My son was stubborn, and when I disciplined him, he would withdraw. I had to pursue him. I call him the immovable object. I learned from experience that you cannot discipline an unstoppable force in the same way that you discipline an immovable object, because they aren’t motivated by the same things. Certainly, you can learn general discipline principles. But because there are no “cookie cutter kids,” if you want to discipline your children in an effective way, you have to learn how to apply those principles to their specific personalities.  MIMBS 4

*If you have children, how would you describe their personalities?  
If you don’t have children, think of your nieces and nephews, or some  
other people with whom you have a mentoring relationship.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 2:22–4:22, John 5:24–47, Psalm 106:1–12, Proverbs 14:30–31

*Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Hebrews 12:12–13)*

It may seem strange, but today’s passage follows verses about discipline. When I was about four years old, I learned that godly discipline can bring strength and healing. I wanted to find out if I could throw a rock and hit a moving vehicle. I was jubilant when I succeeded—until a young man stopped the car and yelled at me. I was devastated. It hadn’t occurred to me that I might damage anything.


A few minutes after the young man drove away, my mom called me into the house, and she sat me up on the counter. “Is there something you’d like to tell me?” I became sullen, and Mom said, “If you tell me what happened, you’ll feel better.” So I told her. She already knew what I had done. She knew I had endured the natural consequences when the guy yelled at me. But Mom confronted me in a way that claimed me as her own, thus giving me a sense of identity, and her response healed my heart and brought peace to my mind.  MIMBS 4

*Describe a similar experience in your own life, where discipline brought strength and/or healing, and perhaps even peace.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 8:1–9:27, John 6:22–42, Psalm 106:32–48, Proverbs 14:34–35

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. (Hebrews 12:7–8)*

Today’s passage compares the discipline God offers to His children to the discipline of a loving earthly father. It clearly states that a father who neglects to discipline his child is identifying that child as illegitimate. He’s basically saying, “I don’t care enough about you, because you don’t really belong to me. You might live in my house, but you’re not mine.” And so, God’s discipline actually reflects His overwhelming love for us. It identifies us as belonging to Him.


Similarly, when earthly fathers provide loving guidance and discipline, they help establish their children’s sense of identity. If you read a little further in that passage, you’ll find that it says that, while discipline can be painful in the moment, “Later on...it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). God knows the consequences of poor choices, and He loves us enough to discipline us, so we don’t destroy ourselves. Parental discipline can yield similar results as children avoid negative consequences and enjoy positive results of godly choices.  MIMBS 4

*In your own words, describe how love and discipline go hand in hand.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 5:1–7:17, John 6:1–21, Psalm 106:13–31, Proverbs 14:32–33

*Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death. (Proverbs 19:18)*

Some parents don’t set boundaries for their children. Maybe they think their kids will be stronger if they “figure things out for themselves.” Or maybe they say, “My dad yelled all the time, and I’m not going to be like that.” So their households take on an atmosphere of license, as kids do whatever they want, with limited or no discipline offered by parents.


Today’s passage provides a seemingly harsh assessment for that kind of household. But the reality is, license allows natural consequences to be a child’s only teacher. That’s dangerous for two reasons: 1) Natural consequences often aren’t strong enough to penetrate the heart in a way that prepares children to make daily moral decisions in the present and into the future. 2) On the other hand, some natural consequences are extremely painful, for the child but also for others impacted by the child’s actions. Today’s Scripture states that failure to discipline can actually contribute to a child’s death. A little bit of proactive discipline can provide a healthy dose of preventive medicine against the pain of natural consequences.  MIMBS 4

*Re-read Proverbs 19:18, written above. Do you believe it exaggerates the results of a lack of discipline, or do you agree with the passage? Explain your answer.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 10:1–11:15, John 6:43–71, Psalm 107:1–43, Proverbs 15:1–3

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)*

We've talked previously about some parents who provide no structure or discipline for their households. They follow a format that allows great license. On the other side of the issue, some dads are overly strict. They build an intense structure of behavioral expectations for their household, and they allow little or no flexibility. This gives children no ability to learn from simple mistakes.

When kids have no opportunity to “color outside the lines,” they can be tempted to react in either passive or active anger, becoming robotic in their obedience, or rebelling against authority. My dad experienced that. His father, a cross-cultural missionary in Asia, was quite strict, and eventually my dad rebelled against the legalism of his household. Later in life, my grandfather apologized, and they were able to mend their relationship. That is a legacy in itself. But the reality is, both my dad and my grandfather suffered relational pain as the result of an unbending adherence to rules. Godly discipline is not anchored in license or legalism. It has its roots in grace.  MIMBS 4

*When our children were young, my wife and I attended a seminar led by Christian counselor Larry Crabb. He stated, “Our children need to know, ‘yes, I love you, and no, you can’t have your own way.’” In your own words, describe how that balance encourages children and gives them security to make positive choices.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 12:1-16:23, John 7:1-8:20, Psalm 108:1-110:7, Proverbs 15:4-10

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. (Proverbs 3:1-2)*

Imagine a father taking his toddler son for his first trip to the beach. The boy curls his toes in the sand, and then he takes off running toward the waves. A good father won't just sit there and say, “Well, I guess he has to learn about riptides somehow. Experience will be his fastest teacher.” Nor will he knock the kid into the sand and yell, “I didn't say you could go to the ocean, did I?” Instead, a good dad will run up behind his child, scooping him up to protect him.

When that all happens, the child probably won't look at his dad and say, “Dear father, thank you for saving me from certain doom.” In all likelihood, he'll scream bloody murder, because he was interrupted in pursuing his immediate desire. Grace in fathering means that you don't let your kids do things that will hurt them. You provide enough structure, enough restriction to keep them safe and enough freedom that they can learn and grow and become who God made them to be.

 MIMBS 4

*Describe a time when you experienced a balance of restriction and freedom from your father, or from a boss or mentor. How did that experience affect you in the long term?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:1-18:4, John 8:21-30, Psalm 111:1-10, Proverbs 15:11

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



### May 8-14


Read Hebrews 12:7: “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”

- What does this passage imply about the relationship between love and discipline.
- Where have you seen that happen in real life?

## Tuesday—May 16 • Discipline That Focuses on the Internal

*My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. (Proverbs 2:1-2, 9-11)*

Parents often react to their children's behavior based on external appearance. We can succumb to the temptation to concentrate on external issues, sometimes even worrying about how our children's behavior affects our reputations. In contrast, the entirety of Scripture cautions parents that our primary responsibility is to train our children to honor God. True and effective discipline is based on grace, and it focuses on the child's heart. It attempts to mold the child's internal compass rather than simply punishing external behaviors. Today's Scripture is an example, for it talks about a father's commands in the context of “turning your ear” and “applying your heart.”

In a similar vein in the New Testament, Paul's epistles give advice to fathers: “Do not exasperate your children” (Ephesians 6:4), “Do not embitter your children” (Colossians 3:21). Instructions like these stress the internal motivations that guide a child's external behavior. The goal is for wisdom to enter your child's heart, so that resulting discretion and understanding will have the desired effect of guarding his or her actions and reactions, even into adulthood.  MIMBS 4

*To some degree, mentors and bosses can also apply biblical parenting principles in their own arenas. Describe a relationship where you are responsible to offer instruction or discipline, and also a relationship where you receive instruction or discipline. In each of those scenarios, how can you discern whether the focus is internal or external?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 18:5-19:24, John 8:31-59, Psalm 112:1-10, Proverbs 15:12-14



*Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)*

The most effective discipline concentrates on future fulfillment more than short-term compliance. A couple of years into college, I went through a faith crisis. Dad and I planned an afternoon driving go-carts. As we sat in the parking lot, I said, “Dad, I’m pretty sure God exists, but I really don’t think He’s involved in our lives personally. That probably disappoints you, but I just don’t think I believe what you believe anymore.” I waited for him to spout Bible verses at me, but instead he related that he went through the same struggle at my age. He said, “I believe you are God’s child, and He doesn’t let His kids go. Stay on the journey and don’t just get stuck where you are. Now, let’s get on the go-carts so I can kick your butt.”

Dad’s response communicated unconditional love, and it grew from a lifetime of asking one important question: What do I need to do with my son right now to encourage his relationship with God? This becomes harder, but also more crucial, as children approach and reach adulthood.

 MIMBS 4


*Describe a scenario you faced this week with one of your children, or with someone you mentor or supervise at work. How did you handle that situation? Does your response show that you focused on short-term compliance or on future fulfillment? Explain your answer.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 20:1–21:15, John 9:1–41, Psalm 113:1–114:8, Proverbs 15:15–17

## Thursday—May 18 • Don’t Major on the Minors

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matthew 23:23–24)*

Today’s passage records Jesus’ response to teachers and leaders who ignored important expressions of faith because they were distracted by intense legalism. Jesus said they would “strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” The practice of instruction and discipline happens most effectively when it includes equal parts of grace and truth. In the context of mentoring, the apostle Paul wrote that “speaking the truth in love” is part of the process that helps us to mature in our relationship with God (see Ephesians 4:14–15).

This is true in parenting, but also in any position that includes teaching and correction. The second part of that equation is the necessity of prioritizing and knowing what is truly important. A wise parent or mentor won’t “major on the minors,” because he will be able to discern and focus on what is truly important.  MIMBS 4


*Write a prayer, asking God to help you discern what is truly important to reinforce as you train your children or mentor other people.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 22:1–23:29, John 10:1–21, Psalm 115:1–18, Proverbs 15:18–19

*News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:22–23)*

I ran a juvenile detention shelter for about 18 months. The two other juvenile detention shelters in our little group dealt with kids running away every other week or so. During the time that I worked in our shelter, only one kid ran away, and he returned after an hour because he didn’t want to be on his own after dark.

What made the difference? In those other shelters, staff members focused on catching kids in bad behaviors and punishing them. In response, the kids focused on getting away with things. They waited until staff members were busy doing other things, and then they misbehaved so they could “get one over” on the adults. Our shelter was grace based. We rewarded good behavior and celebrated it. We encouraged kids, telling them they could continue in their good habits. Certainly, we had consistent consequences for negative behaviors. For instance, sometimes we put kids on restrictions. But we also offered a way to be released from those consequences through returning to positive behavior patterns.

Do you know what our kids did? When we turned our backs on them, they tapped us on the shoulder and said, “Look at this good thing I did when you weren’t even looking.” They wanted us to catch them doing good things, so they didn’t focus on avoiding being caught doing bad things. As we strove to encourage our residents by noticing and rewarding good behaviors, our results far exceeded the detention centers that emphasized punishment for negative behaviors.  MIMBS 4

*Describe a time when you were “caught” and rewarded for doing something well. How did that affect your desire to continue that behavior?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Samuel 24:1–31:13, John 10:22–12:19, Psalm 116:1–118:18, Proverbs 15:20–26

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

### May 15–21

To some degree, mentors and bosses can apply biblical parenting principles. Think of a relationship where you give or receive instruction or discipline.


- Describe a time when you experienced the balance of freedom and restriction.
- How did that experience affect you in the long-term?



*You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance... (2 Timothy 3:10)*

Many tourists stop at a historic Key West cemetery, some to absorb the local lore, and some to read the wacky tombstones in the graveyard. One says, “I told you I was sick.” Another suggests, “If you’re reading this, you desperately need a hobby.” One of my personal favorites says, “At least I know where you’re sleeping tonight.”

Do you ever think about how you will be remembered, even after you’re gone? Some men want to be remembered for accomplishments, others for possessions, still others for relationships. Before I came into relationship with Jesus, I was a rebel. He changed me from the inside out. For 20 years, I’ve told my wife, “Until you hear otherwise from me, please put on my tombstone *conquered by grace*.”


Today’s passage, pulled from a letter written by the apostle Paul to his spiritual son Timothy, seems to summarize how this giant of the Christian faith wanted to be remembered. He aligned his message, his lifestyle, his purpose, and his character. That focus enabled him to live a life that is still significant twenty-one centuries later.  MIMBS 5

*If you were writing a letter to a son or daughter, or to someone you mentor, how would you summarize the areas that drive your choices?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 1:1–2:11, John 12:20–50, Psalm 118:19–29, Proverbs 15:27–28

*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:1–2)*

Jesus told his disciples, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you *bear much fruit*, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (see John 15:8, emphasis added). This implies that true disciples produce more disciples. Perhaps the biggest problem limiting Christians today is that we think the mission is to *become* disciples. We have so focused on the process of becoming, we’ve become spiritual overeaters and not exercisers. Spiritual obesity is the Church’s health crisis of our age.

Our cultural walls are broken down. Lots of people express their opinions related to a solution for corruption in government or business. How about a broken criminal justice system, or poverty? Or racism? How do huge problems like these get fixed? Jesus didn’t say, “Go fix this problem or that problem...” He said, “Go and make disciples.” (see Matthew 28:19). The fruitful process that produces more disciples is God’s designated means to release the power of His gospel on every problem we face. It is the systemic solution to all problems. The greatest mission to which a man can aspire is to be a disciple-making disciple.  MIMBS 5


*List three ways you are or can be involved in discipling other people.*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 4:1–6:23, John 13:31–14:14, Psalm 119:17–32, Proverbs 15:31–32

## Tuesday—May 23 • Hold to Jesus’ Teaching

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31–32)*

The Bible describes men whom I want to emulate, like Peter or John or Paul. To become like them, I need to understand the priorities and habits that fueled their significant choices. One of my starting places lies in Jesus’ words recorded above. This translation says, “If you *hold* to my teaching...” In the original Greek, that word is *meno*, which means *to remain, to abide, to continue*. Jesus says, “If you stay in my teachings, you’re my disciple.” That focus helps us align our lives with God’s purposes, and as we learn and apply biblical truth, we ultimately find freedom.

True significance grows as we learn to abide, to continue. Regular Bible study, coupled with daily application, helps us trust God. I can’t even begin to list the shackles that fall away when we learn to rest in the Lord. I’ve taught in various venues for more than three decades. One reason I learn something new every week is that I actually take time on a regular basis to pay focused attention to Scripture. That’s what it means to *abide* or *continue* in Jesus’ teachings.  MIMBS 5


*If you had a friend who recently entered into relationship with Christ, how would you explain the importance of abiding in Jesus’ teachings? What would you suggest would help him hold on to Scripture?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 2:12–3:39, John 13:1–30, Psalm 119:1–16, Proverbs 15:29–30

## Thursday—May 25 • The Attitude of a Servant

*This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:1–2)*

The apostle Paul was the ultimate disciple-making disciple. He purposed to follow Jesus, and to help others follow Jesus. He’s the one who said, “Regard us as *servants* of Christ.” A servant doesn’t begin by asking, “What will I get out of this?” A servant asks, “What does my master want?”

A fruitful disciple’s servant attitude should impact daily decisions. It may influence a response to a guy at the gym who usually is friendly, but today he’s downcast. Or a response to a single mom who works at your favorite sandwich shop and just found out that her car needs a major repair. I can’t give an exhaustive list, but you get the idea—a faithful servant builds daily decisions on the foundation of the master’s desires. Scripture clearly indicates Jesus’ primary desire is that we make disciples. God provides abundant ways to fulfill His desire, because He equips us with a variety of callings and gifts. But if your primary purpose has nothing to do with disciple-making, then you might prayerfully ask Jesus if you can better respond His desires.  MIMBS 5


*Describe someone who displays a servant attitude. What kind of fruit do you see as a result?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 7:1–8:18, John 14:15–31, Psalm 119:33–48, Proverbs 15:33



*Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. (Psalm 71:17–18)*

Kruger National Park is a huge game preserve in South Africa that hosts a variety of wildlife. Several years ago, the staff thinned the elephant herd by killing adult males. The young orphaned male elephants grew up without the influence of mature bull elephants. They went crazy. These teen elephants viciously killed 36 rhinos. Park rangers responded by bringing six fully grown bull elephants into the park and turning them loose with the delinquent teens. Not a single rhino was killed after that, because the younger bulls no longer had to guess at what mature male behavior looked like.


That situation offers an important analogy for Christian men. Let's not leave the younger generation with no male role models. Let's be intentional in our disciple-making process, reaching out to younger men as well as those in our own age category. The greatest mission to which a man can aspire is to be a disciple-making disciple. That starts at home, but it doesn't end there. Good training doesn't guarantee that a child will always make the right choices. But when a child actively pursues Jesus, it's generally because someone intentionally engaged and trained him. Let's actively pursue opportunities to declare God's power to the next generation.  MIMBS 5

*Prayerfully ask God how you can invest your gifts and calling in equipping people who aren't your age to be disciple-making disciples.*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 9:1–13:39, John 15:1–17:26, Psalm 119:49–96, Proverbs 16:1–7

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Psalm 42:1–2a)*

Several years ago I attended a luncheon to hear a presentation by Walt Meloon, founder of Correct Craft, the boat manufacturing company that makes world famous Ski Nautique boats. At the end of his message, he stood by the door. As I exited, he took my hand in both of his and shook it vigorously. He said with passion, "Isn't God good?" I was sort of shocked. I remember telling myself, "I think God is good, but obviously I don't think He's as good as Walt does." I wondered if he might be faking it, but he would have to be a world-class liar to pull that off. And then I decided that he must have found something to deeply satisfy his soul, and I had not yet found it. Frankly, it looked very attractive.


Unfortunately, most men only know enough about God to be disappointed in Him. Statistics show that men are withdrawing from places of worship. It's no wonder their souls are dry. We are thirsty for a real encounter with God. Nothing else will satisfy that craving.  MIMBS 6

*The Psalmist describes his thirst for God as a deer panting for water. How would you describe your thirst for God?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 14:1–15:22, John 18:1–24, Psalm 119:97–112, Proverbs 16:8–9

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:11)*

Our culture perpetuates the lie that men are not as spiritually oriented as women are. Through my years of ministry, I've found that men have a primal need for transcendence and awe, and they crave communion with God. I was a young believer when I first recognized that hunger. I remember looking through a *Book of Common Prayer* and experiencing a deep sense of need. I knew intuitively that only God could satisfy that craving. But no one mentored me then, so the need wasn't satisfied for a long time.

The Bible tells us the most important thing we can do is love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). That's hard to do. That's why David was downcast and disturbed in today's Scripture. We men tend to get caught in a rat race, trying to meet deadlines, keep wives happy, and take care of kids. We start leading an unexamined life. One day we wake up feeling a sense of abandonment. But God hasn't abandoned us. Rather, we've abandoned our great spiritual heritage, and we end up living like orphans.  MIMBS 6

*When did you first recognize your hunger for God?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 15:23–16:23, John 18:25–19:22, Psalm 119:113–128, Proverbs 16:10–11

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP


### May 22–28

How do you want to be remembered after you're gone?

- Does your answer show that you are pursuing God's plan or your own?

*The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.” (Jeremiah 31:3)*

Sometime in their lives, men discover a primal craving for communion with God. We tend to fill our lives with other things, yet God loves us and draws us to Himself. He makes Himself available, so that 99 percent of communion with God is just showing up.

A number of experiences can trigger that first awareness of His presence. Some men say they saw something beautiful in nature or endured some life-altering experience. My first true encounter with God happened in a Sunday School class. I was leaning back in a chair with my arms crossed, trying to determine which class members were potential real estate investors. The teacher read the Scriptural admonition for husbands to “love your wives as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25). I felt like he was calling me out. It felt like someone subjected me to 50,000 volts of electricity. I turned beet red and sweated profusely. Several moments later I finally looked up, and I found the rest of the class had moved on. Whatever occurred was completely between God and me. I had just been personally introduced to the God Who really knew me, and Who wanted me to really know Him.  MIMBS 6


*Have you ever had an experience where you felt like God was talking “just to you”? Share this experience with some brothers.*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 17:1–29, John 19:23–42, Psalm 119:129–152, Proverbs 16:12–13

## Thursday—June 1 • Leave Room for Mystery

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8–9)*

A few years ago I was reading the creation account in Genesis. I found so many interesting, unexplainable points, and I remember saying out loud, “Mystery abounds!” So I had this idea that, as I read through my Bible that year, I would mark each place that I saw something mysterious, or something that raised a question, or something that I didn’t completely understand. I marked those places with checkmarks, and then at the bottom of each page with at least one checkmark, I wrote “MA” for “mystery abounds.” At the end of the year, I went back through my Bible, and I found an “MA” at the bottom of every page.


God’s ways aren’t like ours. Don’t pursue a god that you can fully understand. If you can put your God in a box and predict His every move, then you are following the wrong God. As you seek to encounter God in a real way, leave room for the mystery of an infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent, omni-benevolent, self-existing God. Let Him surprise you—in His Word, and in your life.  MIMBS 6

*Describe something you’ve discovered about God, either through your reading or your experience, which has surprised you.*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 18:1–19:10, John 20:1–31, Psalm 119:153–176, Proverbs 16:14–15

*Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! (Isaiah 30:18)*

When I visit New York City, I love to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see the Monet paintings. A few years ago, I was there with a colleague. We caught a cab to head for the airport. As we had just about ten extra minutes in our schedule, I told him I’d like to stop and see the Monet exhibit. We asked the cab driver to pull up at the Met, and asked him to wait for us. Then we brisk-walked in, brisk-walked through the Monet collection, and brisk-walked back to the cab. I can tell you that ten minutes with Monet is not enough. You can’t treat this great artist like fast food. You have to linger and stare and absorb the views.

It’s the same with our relationship with God. Feeding our souls is not just another item to check off our “to-do” list. It takes time. The Bible tells us the most important thing we can do is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul (Matthew 22:37). Jesus asked His disciples, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:26). If we accept those statements as reality, then surely we can see that it’s worth investing time so we can know about God, and also really know Him. Today’s Scripture says He wants to be gracious to you, and He will bless anyone who is willing wait for Him. Truly, 99 percent of communing with God is just showing up and being present. He’s willing and able to do the rest.  MIMBS 6

*How would you respond to someone who says he just doesn’t have time to develop his relationship with God?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 19:11–23;23, John 21:1–25, Acts 1:1–2:47, Psalm 120:1–122:9, Proverbs 16:16–20

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

May 29–June 4

Describe one thing you’ve ardently pursued in the last year.

- Does it have eternal value, or is it merely a temporary benefit?
- Explain your answer.






*Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:9–10)*

A man went to a Bank of America and picked up a deposit slip, on which he wrote: *This iz a stickup, put all your munny in the bag.* Then he got in a long line. As he waited, he grew nervous. So he left and crossed the street to a Wells Fargo Bank. He waited in line again, and when he reached the teller, he presented the note.

The teller, deducing that he might not be all that bright, said to him, “I’m sorry sir. You’ve made your request on a Bank of America slip. You can either rewrite your note on a Wells Fargo Bank deposit slip, or go back across the street.” The man left, the teller called the police. The would-be robber was arrested, waiting in a line back over at the Bank of America.

Many of us will laugh at this silly (but true) story. But if we dare to look deeply enough, we may find that we also make choices fueled by a desire for wealth. It won’t be this obvious, but it may be just as foolish. “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,” Paul cautioned. We should all take note.  MIMBS 7


*Describe one thing you have ardently pursued in the last year. Does it have eternal value? Or is it merely a temporary benefit?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Samuel 23:24–24:25, Acts 3:1–26, Psalm 123:1–4, Proverbs 16:21–23

## Tuesday—June 6 • Rethinking Abundance

*Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? . . . I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners. (Ecclesiastes 5:10–11, 13)*

A fellow once told me, “I wanted to experience more abundance in my life, so I poured myself into my work. I thought if I could just make more money, it would satisfy the need. At the end of three years, I realized I had completely shut out all of my friends. I was making all kinds of money, but I had no life.” He added, “When I really looked at it, I realized three things: 1) The right answer was simple; 2) I already knew it; 3) I did the wrong thing anyway.” So often, we really do know the right course of action, and yet we choose the opposite.

Scripture warns repeatedly that wealth in itself does not satisfy. Rather than filling our emptiness, it usually creates a greater sense of barrenness by making us crave more. Many centuries ago, Augustine explained that God made us for Himself. Thus, he wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” We need to rethink our definition of abundance. Temporal wealth will never satisfy the innate desire for eternal, unlimited fellowship with our Creator.  MIMBS 7


*Have you been pursuing wealth in the hopes that it would make you happy? Do you believe that ultimately money will not make you happier? Discuss this with some brothers.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 1:1–53, Acts 4:1–37, Psalm 124:1–8, Proverbs 16:24

*When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:23–25)*

A moral young man asked Jesus about eternal life. Jesus told him, “Sell your stuff, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Me.” Apparently this fellow expected a different answer, and He “became very sad, because he was very wealthy.”

I can relate to this story. I had a plan for my life. Then I became a Christian and found that God had a plan for my life. I liked both plans, and somehow, I thought I could mesh them. I spent the first 20 years of my Christian life working and praying to acquire more and more real estate. In hindsight, what I was pursuing would have destroyed me.

I asked God for things I desired. When I didn’t get the answer I expected, I became sad. In hindsight, though, what I thought was a great disappointment was actually a doorway into true abundance. God’s system is perfectly designed to produce abundant life. In His grace, He often moves to keep us from destroying ourselves in pursuit of things that will never truly satisfy.  MIMBS 7


*Describe a time when God gave you an answer you did not expect. How long ago was that? How did you respond then? How do you feel about it now?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 2:1–3:2, Acts 5:1–42, Psalm 125:1–5, Proverbs 16:25

## Thursday—June 8 • God’s Plan for Abundance

*“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:29–30)*

When the rich young man came to Jesus, He told him to sell his possessions, give away the proceeds and follow Him. Apparently the man couldn’t bring himself to do that, for Jesus exclaimed, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:24). In response, Jesus’ disciple said, “We’ve left everything behind to follow you!” (see vs. 28). Jesus promised an abundant return for their investment.

Jesus isn’t requiring all of His followers to abandon homes and families. Rather, He is establishing a principle for anyone who wants to follow Him. Sacrifice and self-denial yield abundant blessings. If you are willing to obediently follow Christ, denying yourself of anything that would distract from His plan and purpose, you’ll receive blessing that outweighs your sacrifice. This is a hard perspective for us to take, especially when we can’t see the immediate benefit. Trusting God for His eventual blessing is a matter of faith.  MIMBS 7


*What things in your life are distracting you from God’s plan and purpose? What would it look like for you to deny yourself?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 3:3–4:34, Acts 6:1–15, Psalm 126:1–6, Proverbs 16:26–27

*“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29–33)*

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus, asking about eternal life. When the man couldn’t give up wealth to pursue God’s kingdom, Peter reminded Jesus that the disciples had given up everything. Jesus responded that anyone who practices self-denial for the sake of God’s kingdom will receive abundant blessings and that some persecutions will accompany the blessings.

I believe God is good. But that doesn’t mean that pain doesn’t hurt. A Christian can get cancer, just like a non-Christian can. That’s part of living in a world marred by sin’s corruption. Think of it this way: water is full of oxygen—but not just oxygen. Water also is full of hydrogen. In a similar way, the Bible tells us the earth is full of God’s glory (Isaiah 6:3), but the world also is full of pain and suffering.

Tom Skinner was one of my closest friends. For 18 years, we did all kinds of interesting things in ministry. In the 1970s, his wife decided she wanted a divorce. In the 1980s, he endured tremendous financial failure. Then in the 1990s, he died suddenly of leukemia. Many of us won’t suffer the exact things that Tom encountered, but all of us can expect some trouble mixed in with our abundant blessings. The reality, though, is that if you truly know Jesus, you can experience the blessings of joy and peace even in the midst of suffering, because you know your pain is temporary.  MIMBS 7

*Have you ever had someone ask, “If God is so good and powerful, how come terrible things happen to people?” Have you asked this question yourself? How does this devotion help you respond?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 5:1–8:66, Acts 7:1–8:13, Psalm 127:1–129:8, Proverbs 16:28–17:1

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8–9)*

Our secular culture’s view of fatherhood differs radically from the biblical view. Yet, anyone wanting to address biblical principles related to fatherhood faces a couple of dangers. First, men who haven’t been fathers, and men whose children are already grown, tend to think the topic doesn’t apply to them. Any man who leads or mentors needs to understand biblical principles of fatherhood.

The apostle Paul, for instance, noted that he dealt with the church at Thessalonica “as a father deals with his own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Second, many fathers feel guilty for their failures. Divorced men who are separated from their kids often feel the heaviest sense of guilt, but the reality is, every earthly father makes mistakes. We need to confess those, understanding that Jesus’ blood covers even our father’s sins. If you don’t think Jesus’ cross can cover your father failures, then you either have a narcissistic view of your own sin or a pagan view of Jesus. God’s son, incarnated in human flesh, shed His blood, and His sacrifice is big enough for all of our failures.

 MIMBS 8


*Have you asked God to forgive your failures as a father? Have you asked God to help you forgive your father for his failures?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 9:1–10:29, Acts 8:14–40, Psalm 130:1–8, Proverbs 17:2–3

## Tuesday—June 13 • Energized by God’s Grace

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17)*

Most true Christians understand that forgiveness for sins, even father failures, is rooted in God’s grace. But we may not take the next step, understanding that God’s grace also energizes us, enabling us to admit our failures and say, “I’m sorry, I love you, and I want to start over.” In that context, though, we do need to admit that some sins are more difficult to undo.

If I back my truck over your mailbox and knock it down, and then drive away, I can come back and say, “I’m sorry I drove away, here’s a replacement.” I can mix up concrete and install a new mailbox. It will be pretty easy for you to forgive me, and we’ll both move on. But when you and I fail our kids, that’s often harder to repair. We need to admit that some things don’t get fixed in this life. That’s why we need to understand and apply the biblical patterns that equip us to minimize our father failures and move forward with our children, or with anyone we lead or mentor.  MIMBS 8

*What conversations do you need to have for the purpose of giving or receiving forgiveness? How will that help you move forward in your relationship with those people? How can God’s grace move you forward in that commitment?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 11:1–12:19, Acts 9:1–25, Psalm 131:1–3, Proverbs 17:4–5

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

### June 5–11

What distracts you from God’s plan and purpose?


- What would it look like for you to deny yourself for the purpose of following Jesus?





*We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. (Psalm 78:4)*

Godly fathers participate in a covenant community anchored in history. God established a plan whereby each generation prepares the next to trust God through life's challenges. Fathers have the incredible privilege of helping to build lives. That happens most effectively when we build on the foundation of God's principles, in the context of unconditional love.

I have three kids. My firstborn son came into the world telling me what to do. My second born was more compliant. Then came my daughter, and I had to learn new ways to teach and communicate. Frankly, I haven't always liked my children, but I have always loved them. I've learned that unconditional love establishes a child's identity in terms of a family relationship, setting the stage for understanding who they are in God's family. That sense of clarity gives confidence when they move into adulthood. Without that foundation, most of our kids leave home and go out into college or into the workplace still struggling to discover who they are. When we allow the world to define our children's identity, we squander the privilege God gave to fathers.  MIMBS 8


*In your own words, explain how unconditional love prepares a child to accept an identity based on the internal understanding of who he is, rather than the external understanding of what he does.*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 12:20–13:34, Acts 9:26–43, Psalm 132:1–18, Proverbs 17:6

## Thursday—June 15 • Good Theology Builds Resilient Children

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. (Deuteronomy 6:1–2)*

One key to building resilient children is to teach them good theology. Help them understand that God created this world to be good, but because of Adam and Eve's sin, our world is horribly fallen, and it won't be completely set back in order till Jesus returns. As a result, some of the people we encounter are evil, and a lot of bad things happen.

This teaching can take place in a myriad of ways. Suppose your son is standing in the batter's box, and the opposing pitcher beans him with the baseball. That's a perfect opportunity to explain that sometimes people do things without considering the consequences, and we can get hurt in the process. Teaching good theology prepares your kids to understand why the world is like it is. Nobody understands the world like Christians do. Muslims don't, Buddhists don't, secularists don't. So when your children come running with tears in their eyes, please do comfort them, but also realize it's a great opportunity to teach the good theology that will prepare the next generation to deal with an imperfect world.  MIMBS 8

*Describe a difficult situation that you've had to deal with as an adult. How could good theology help you process that situation in a positive way?*


**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 14:1–15:24, Acts 10:1–23, Psalm 133:1–3, Proverbs 17:7–8

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2)*

Has your wife ever said, "Honey, when you're home you're not really here"? My wife even resorted to calling me "Pastor" to get my attention, because I sometimes didn't respond to my name. In my mind, I was still at work. Our families need our attention.

The first P of fatherhood is to be *present*. Be available.

The second P is *process*. That's a good counseling term that simply means help them understand and deal with what's going on in their lives. I suggest that you spend time with your kids on a regular basis, and then also ask questions. "What do you think you should do in this situation? What can you learn from this? How does Jesus want to build your character? What kind of person do you want to be because of what you learned here?" Their answers may open the door for you to relate a Bible story or verse that has helped you in a similar situation.

The final P of fatherhood is *prayer*. How much can you fix in your kid's life? Very little. You can be there for them, and you can help them process life's challenges. And then you can say, "We need to pray, we need to bring this to Jesus because Jesus is the only one that can fix this and help us grow through this time."  MIMBS 8

*In the context of your family or your workplace or a mentoring relationship, what would these "three Ps" look like?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 15:25–19:21, Acts 10:24–12:23, Psalm 134:1–136:26 Proverbs 17:9–15

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

### June 12–18

What conversations do you need to have for the purpose of giving or receiving forgiveness?


- List the three "P"s of fatherhood.
- Which one of these "P"s do you do well?
- Which one of them do you struggle with?



*Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.* (Colossians 3:21)

Today's Scripture warns against a certain kind of fathering that can push children towards discouragement. We can read that and say, "What's the big deal? Everybody gets discouraged?" So it might help our interpretation of this verse if we understand that the Greek word used here actually means "to lose heart."

I experienced this kind of heavy discouragement when I was a teen. I grew so angry and frustrated that I quit high school in the middle of my senior year. I could not express my frustration to my parents. But if I could have engaged in a rational, mature conversation, I would have said, "The problem we're having here, Dad, is that you're fathering for performance. You're not mentoring my heart. You're not bringing me up in the training and instruction of the Lord. As a result, I'm exasperated and discouraged. I've lost heart."


I believe my experience is duplicated in the lives of many other young men and women. Dads, we exasperate and discourage our children when we focus on their external behavior and ignore their hearts. That's what our kids would tell us.  MIMBS 9

*Did you experience this kind of discouragement when you were growing up?  
How can you avoid discouraging your children or the people you mentor?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 20:1–21:29, Acts 12:24–13:15, Psalm 137:1–9, Proverbs 17:16

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4)

Good family structure can't focus solely on external behavior. It's easy to think, *If I can just help my children understand the rules, everything will be okay.* But the Bible calls fathers to raise their children "in the training and instruction of the Lord." This goes beyond external obedience. It transfers responsibility and molds children to make wise choices.


When our son was in high school, he decided to be lazy and late to school. Since I provided transportation, we all were late. I wanted to drag him out of bed and force him into the vehicle. Instead I thought, *I can't father for performance here. What's going on in his heart?* I realized he needed to take responsibility. So we worked out an agreement with the school. In any one semester, he could be late five times. But on the sixth time, he would stay after school for two hours to clean up trash. For the rest of his school career, my son was never late six times in a semester. We transferred responsibility rather than demanding external obedience.  MIMBS 9

*How would you apply this same principle outside the context of parenting?  
How could this apply to a management position or to mentoring?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 1:1–2:25, Acts 13:42–14:7, Psalm 139:1–24, Proverbs 17:19–21

*Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. (His father had never rebuked him by asking, "Why do you behave as you do?" ...) (1 Kings 1:5–6)*

The dictionary defines *courage* as "the state of mind or spirit enabling one to face hardship or disaster with confidence and resolution." Thus, when we *discourage* our children (see Colossians 3:21), we squash their ability to face hardship or disaster with confidence and resolution.

Parents who fail to provide structure in the home also fail to prepare their children to make courageous, godly choices. David was a pretty good king, but he was a dud as a dad. David's son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar. In a fit of rage, Absalom, also David's son, murdered his brother Amnon. Later, Absalom planned a coup and for a short time took over his father's kingdom. Then Adonijah, another son, also planned a coup. Today's Scripture offers a clue into why David's family fell prey to such sin and drama. Addressing his relationship with his son Adonijah, David never corrected him. He didn't even ask his son to account for his behavior. David's failure to provide structure for his family opened the door for great dysfunction among his children.  MIMBS 9


*Permissive parenting exists in a home that lacks structure and training. Describe someone who provided loving structure and training when you were growing up. Perhaps it was a parent, or a coach, or a teacher, or a mentor. How did that person's influence affect your ability to make wise and godly choices now?*

**Daily Reading:** 1 Kings 22:1–53, Acts 13:16–41, Psalm 138:1–8, Proverbs 17:17–18

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die ... (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2)*

About 30 years ago, I attended a funeral that I still remember. It was the first time someone in our Bible study died. I knew this man pretty well, so when I arrived at the church, I decided to sit in the middle of the sanctuary. Even then I understood, there's a kind of a pecking order of relationship at funerals.

The people who really love and miss the person who died will sit on the front row. Close friends come next—maybe Saturday companions for golf or tennis, or couples who accompanied to dinner or concerts. They sit in the next few rows. Then comes guys like me, who see each other every week and chat, but we're not buddy-buddy. We sit in the middle. Mere acquaintances sit in the back. I still remember that funeral, because I noticed, the only people who were crying sat in the front row.

In hindsight, I learned an important tool for establishing my schedule. I learned to prioritize based on who will cry at my funeral.  MIMBS 9

*Imagine that you go to a doctor appointment and find out you have a month to live. How would that affect your choices for where you invest your time?*


**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 3:1–4:17, Acts 14:8–28, Psalm 140:1–13, Proverbs 17:22



*Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. Then he taught me, and he said to me, "Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live." (Proverbs 4:1–4)*

A friend named Dr. Phil Littleford took his 12-year-old son Mark on a fishing trip in Alaska. They hired guides with a seaplane and flew into a small pristine bay. They waded upstream, catching salmon all day. When they returned, they discovered the tide fluctuated by 23 feet. Their seaplane sat stranded on a gravel bed. Someone suggested, "Let's sleep in the plane. In the morning when the tide comes up, we'll be floating and we can take off."

As expected, when they awoke, they were afloat. The pilot took off. Too late they realized a pontoon had been punctured and was full of water. The tiny plane was thrown off balance, unable to overcome the additional weight. It careened into the icy black water. Everybody was okay, but they had no safety equipment. They inflated their waders and began swimming for shore, but a rip tide pulled them toward the bay's mouth. The strong swimming guides made it to shore. Then they watched Mark and Phil, son and father, swept out to sea—two disappearing dots clinging to one another. Coast guard officials reported they probably lasted about an hour before hypothermia set in and they fell asleep. Mark, with smaller body mass, would fall asleep in his father's arms. Then Phil would sleep as well.

I believe most dads are willing to die for their children. If that's true, then why are so few prepared to live for them?  MIMBS 9


*Who or what would you be willing to die for? Are you also willing to live for them?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 4:18–5:27, Acts 15:1–16:40, Psalm 141:1–143:12, Proverbs 17:23–26

*So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. (Numbers 27:18)*

Earlier this year, I did a Google search on the term "leadership crisis," and I got 69,500 hits. When I started scanning the stories, I found everything from local police scandals to political footballs being tossed around but never brought to resolution.

All across our culture we see a void of leadership. We see that men are not stepping up to act as the leaders God has called them to be. One-third of American children now live in homes without fathers. In some zip codes, more than 80 percent of the children live in fatherless households. And statistics tell us that children from fatherless homes are five times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system, to repeat a grade in school, and to live in poverty.

Even among fathers who stay with their families, many don't know how to lead in a godly way in the midst of an ungodly culture. God's Word consistently compares leaderless people to sheep who wander without a shepherd. God is seeking men who will accept the challenge of becoming godly leaders.  MIMBS 10

*What do you think is the most obvious evidence of a leadership crisis in our culture? How about in our churches?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 9:14–10:31, Acts 17:1–34, Psalm 144:1–15, Proverbs 17:27–28

## FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



### June 19–25

Suppose a doctor told you, "I expect you will live only one more month."


- Would that change how and where you invest your time?
- Explain your answer.

### Tuesday—June 27 • Leadership Has Consequences

*Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:2)*

Many men are so busy doing the things that need to be done that they've lost sight of the fact that God wove a pattern for leadership into the fabric of His world. There is a sense in which, as a leader, you represent the people God places under your influence.

Leadership is never neutral. We can't just put it on cruise control and hope it happens by osmosis. If we are not influencing people around us for good—encouraging them to trust Christ more, follow Him more, love Him more—then we are showing by our example that they can ignore Christ.


I really believe that God intends us all to be leaders. And in that context, we are either helping those around us to become the people God desires, or we are helping them ignore Him by living independently from Him. God warned of grave consequences when those who rise to leadership have evil intentions. But He also warned of serious repercussions rising from "good" leaders who don't lead. The consequences are devastating for both the leader and the people he has been called to lead.  MIMBS 10

*Today's devotional says, "If we are not influencing people around us for good—encouraging them to trust Christ more, follow Him more, love Him more—then we are showing by our example that they can ignore Christ." How would you respond to that comment if someone said it in a conversation with you?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 10:32–12:21, Acts 18:1–22, Psalm 145:1–21, Proverbs 18:1

The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” (Nehemiah 2:4–5)

Nehemiah was an exiled Jew, serving as a government official in a foreign country. Hearing that Jerusalem was in a disgraceful state, he believed God was calling him to do something about it. He started praying, and months passed with no opportunity. Then, suddenly, the king asked him why he looked so sad. With courage anchored in the calling God had given him, Nehemiah made a bold request to a pagan official, “Please send me home so I can lead my people in rebuilding our city.” He even went so far as to request the king’s help in providing supplies for the reconstruction project.

If you read the rest of the book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament, you’ll see some incredible leadership lessons. Through Nehemiah’s example, you’ll find that true leadership can best be defined as *lovingly influencing people to pursue God’s vision*. Nehemiah’s leadership ability began with a servant heart and an authentic desire to help his people be all that God wanted. That is the starting point for good, biblical leadership.  MIMBS 10

*Is “lovingly influencing people to pursue God’s vision” a good definition of leadership? Why or why not? Share your thoughts with your group.*


**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 13:1–14:29, Acts 18:23–19:12, Psalm 146:1–10, Proverbs 18:2–3

## Thursday—June 29 • Genuine Caring

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3–4)

My dad retired as a senior vice president of a major communications company. In his last decade there, he had responsibility for the company’s physical assets, including buildings, trucks, and maintenance equipment. The company owned repair facilities for their vehicles, and naturally the maintenance and repairs mainly took place at night.

Once, before my dad came to visit me, he found out one of those facilities was just a few miles from our home in Orlando. When he arrived, he phoned the manager who ran the facility and asked if he could stop in for a visit that evening. He ended up spending about 30–45 minutes with that gentleman. Near the end of the chat, the supervisor told him, “You’re the first executive from our company who has ever talked to me in person.”

Over the next several months, my dad must have heard from a dozen people throughout the organization who said, “Oh! You’re the guy who visited the maintenance facility in Orlando.” Godly leadership communicates genuine caring, because it “looks to the interests of others.”  MIMBS 10


*Describe a time when someone in leadership communicated genuine caring to you. What was the impact?*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 15:1–16:20, Acts 19:13–41, Psalm 147:1–20, Proverbs 18:4–5

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Imagine you’re getting on a gondola to see the aerial view of a large ski resort. The tram is hooked to cables which connect to gears in the structure at the bottom or top of the lift. The gondola provides a comfortable ride, but the gears do the actual work of transportation. That’s a picture of godly leadership. Jesus is like the gear house, and we are completely dependent on His work in and through us to influence lives around us. Godly leadership requires a complete reliance on Jesus. He gives power and ability to influence and help people to accomplish His purpose. We are Christ’s representatives. He wants to use us as leaders, but we accomplish His desire as we imitate Him.

Maybe God is calling you to make a real investment in your church, even if you don’t agree with everything, and even though it can be messy sometimes. He may want you to work through some relationship issues with people you’ve been trying to avoid. Maybe you’ve been beaten down at work, and you’re just putting in time at your job. Is God calling you to be a leader in a negative work environment? Or maybe you’ve assumed that “following the rules” will rescue your marriage. You’ve been doing date nights and trying to communicate with your wife. You’ve been providing. Is God calling you to invest yourself in lovingly influencing your wife and children to pursue God’s vision?

If you’re running from some area of responsibility, let me encourage you to stop. Your heart wants to make a difference. You want to be a man of influence. That’s God’s will for you. You don’t have to run away from it. You can become that man by following Christ.  MIMBS 10

*Where is God calling you to invest yourself in lovingly influencing people to pursue God’s vision? How can following Christ’s example help you to do that? Ask another man for his thoughts.*

**Daily Reading:** 2 Kings 17:1–18:12, Acts 20:1–38, Psalm 148:1–14, Proverbs 18:6–7

# FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

## June 26–30

Consider this quote: “If we are not influencing people around us for good—encouraging them to trust Christ more, follow Him more, love Him more—then we are showing by our example that they can ignore Christ.”

- Do you agree or disagree?
- Why?





therefore, has many healthy expressions. We must be careful not to communicate an unbiblically narrow view of what it means to be a man. King David was a warrior but he was also an artist, poet, musician, philosopher, reader, deep thinker, and dancer, who was able to weep as openly and strongly as he was able to issue a battle cry. An important reason why we are struggling to reach the millennial heart is that we have not made room for who they really are.

### Authenticity

Young men can pick out posers fast. It's vital that we simply be who God has designed us to be. When I was a young man I was profoundly impacted by Tom. He was a short, stocky, middle-aged, balding man, with a serious, red face. No one would have called Tom "cool."

I certainly didn't. But he encouraged me, corrected me, and simply showed interest in my life. He never sought to be anything but what God designed him to be. I respected and listened to him.

### Fear and shame

As God opens doors for deeper relationships beware the power of fear and

shame. I marveled at Sean's ability to sit there looking at me with that angelic face knowing that every word he spoke was a calculated lie. I thought I had earned his trust because he had opened up about some deep issues already. As he sat there lying to me he didn't know that I'd seen his browsing history from the night before. When I finally revealed what I knew, his face went pale and his smile disappeared beneath a look of shame. When I was

finally able to assure him that my love for him was in no way lessened by his fall and even by his deceit, he was able to tell me why he'd lied. He was afraid of disappointing me. Look for opportunities to show that your love does not need to be earned, and in doing so show him that God's love is not earned either.

### Sharing our stories

One of the important ways to overcome the hurdle of fear and shame is to tell your story. Boys respond to authentic stories of struggle and victory in a particularly deep way. When a young man can see in you someone who has in some real way shared his experience, this honesty can wash away much of his fear and can ready his heart to hear what you have to say. **MIM**



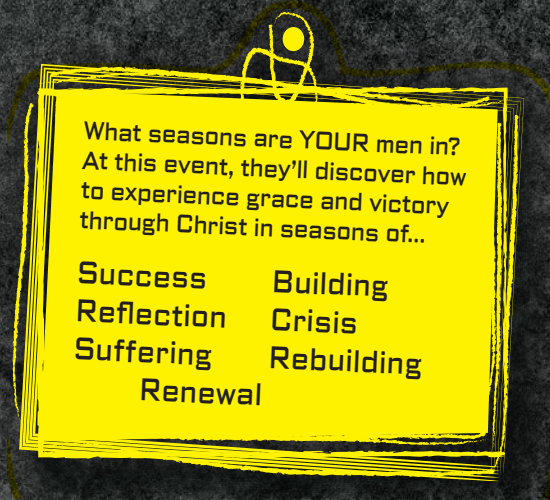
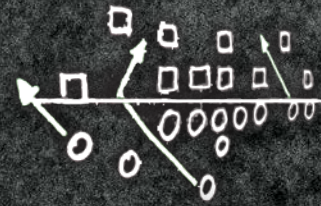
#### ■ DAVID GREGG

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## Life-on-Life Discipleship

What about you? Are you making disciples? If you are engaged in life-on-life discipleship with another man or group of men, these three characteristics should be present:

### **You're willing take risks for each other.**

It's not often today that you have to risk your life for a brother or sister in the faith. But we are still called to take risks for those we are in spiritual relationships with. That means being willing to ask the tough questions even when it makes you uncomfortable.

At a recent Man in the Mirror Bible Study, the Big Idea was that every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and tell when something's wrong. Are you willing to do that? Will you ask a man about the woman from work he keeps mentioning? Or whether he's struggling with pornography? Will you tell a man he needs to treat his wife better if he's going to love her like Christ loved the church?

If you don't have another man who you're willing to take risks for, whose wellbeing you are more concerned about than even your own, you probably aren't engaged in life-on-life discipleship.

**You're loving each other well—you have an emotional investment.** A lot of guys are good at hiding their emotions. "Fine" is their favorite word. I love the line from the movie, *The Italian Job*, when Mark Wahlberg's character is reminded that 'fine'

stands for 'freaked out, insecure, neurotic and emotional.' It's a great line, and it's true for many guys.

Don't hide your emotions behind a mask of indifference or false contentedness. And don't let the men you are supposed to be in a discipleship relationship with do it either.

If you don't have a man whose joy you celebrate and whose sorrow you weep for, you probably aren't engaged in life-on-life discipleship.



**You're regularly preaching the gospel to each other with words.** Just as Jesus took the opportunity to remind his friends and those around them who he really was, we need to take every opportunity to remind each other of the gospel.

The truth of the gospel needs to be integrated into every area of your relationships with those are in discipleship with. We all need to be reminded that the Bible is true, Jesus is real, our sins are forgiven, and we worship a living God.

If you don't have a man that you speak the truth of the gospel to as a regular part of your relationship, you probably aren't engaged in life-on-life discipleship.

These three characteristics are *all* necessary for true, life-changing discipleship to occur. Take one away and you simply have a weak imitation. So as you are intentionally making disciples, take risks, love well and speak truth. You will be amazed at what God can do through you. **ARM**

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